



Georgia Crisis Prompts U.S. to Cancel Russian Deal

And Western governments are vowing to force Moscow to yield to Georgia's demands. Saakashvili, let it be remembered, started a war to retake South Ossetia, a non-Georgian ethnic enclave that tried to secede from Georgia shortly after the latter's independence from the Soviet Union. But somehow the standard that Georgia (which had been part of the Russian Empire for roughly 200 years) has applied to itself — the right of self-determination — is not to apply to the Ossetians. The U.S.-supplied and -trained Georgian military bombed Tskhinvali, the South Ossetian capital, and killed a number of Russian peacekeeping troops in the bargain. When Russia retaliated, Georgia cried foul, and has been agitating to drag the rest of the world, especially the United States, into a sordid grudge match that is none of America's affair.



Since the conclusion of the five-day war, Russia has unilaterally recognized the independence of two Georgian breakaway regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, to the consternation of the West. Russian troops remain in both regions as well as in a Georgian "buffer zone," and the Kremlin leadership has shown little sign of budging.

Yet France's pro-Bush president Sarkozy has announced that the Russians have agreed to withdraw all troops from Georgia proper within a month's time. Moreover, the Bush administration, wishing to punish Moscow, has apparently decided to cancel a deal inked in May for civilian nuclear cooperation between the United States and Russia, under the terms of which the United States would gain access to Russian nuclear technology and Russia would become a center for the storage of spent nuclear fuel from nuclear plants in the United States and elsewhere.

The cancellation of the Russian-U.S. nuclear pact may turn out to be an unintended benefit, since the shipment of vast amounts of nuclear fuel to Russia — a regime openly abetting Iran's nuclear program, lax about controls on nuclear materials, and with ties to international terrorism — could lead to calamitous consequences.



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