

GEORGIA UPDATE

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TOP STORIES

- President Saakashvili Joins President Obama, World Leaders, at Nuclear Security Summit in Washington
- Georgians Grieve for Polish President Kaczynski, a Champion of Georgia's Independence, Sovereignty
- MPs Appeal for Abkhazia, S.Ossetia to Be Declared "Occupied"; Moscow, Tskhinvali Sign Base Treaty
- Georgian Troops Leave for Afghanistan to Fight Alongside US Counterparts in Dangerous Helmand



President Saakashvili in Washington for Nuclear Security Summit

President Saakashvili this week met with President Obama during the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, with the US leader saying that he "welcomed President Saakashvili's continuing commitment to democratic reform" and conveying "the strong support of the US for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity." Saakashvili also met with Vice President Biden, who underscored America's commitment to Georgia's independence and sovereignty. On Capitol Hill, the President held back-to-back meetings yesterday with a series of Senate and Congressional leaders. Today, the President was featured at events held by the Brookings Institution and the Atlantic Council. The Rose Revolution, he told an audience of several hundred at the Council, "was an attempt to change the very relationships between our citizens and their state, and among our people," adding: "It was, simply, the start of an audacious process to create a new Georgian society."

[ATLANTIC COUNCIL: Transforming Georgia](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

LA CROIX: Georgia makes its case in Paris

ASSOCIATED PRESS: Russia, France in courtship with no room for US

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: US envoy hails Georgia's Afghan deployment

BBC: Why the US is fielding a cyber army

TORONTO STAR: 2014 Olympics in Sochi face terror, environmental concerns

ASSOCIATED PRESS: No prime cause found in luge death

BBC: Georgian convicts swap cells for monastery

JAMESTOWN: A new Russian invasion of Georgia—is it so unrealistic?

EURASIANET: Georgian Winemaking Hub Uses Grapes to Increase Milk Supplies

CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS: Assessing the "Reset"

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"The President reaffirmed the United States' support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and welcomed President Saakashvili's continuing commitment to democratic reform."

"The President expressed his appreciation for Georgia's significant contribution to Afghanistan and the two leaders discussed their shared commitment to securing nuclear materials to reduce the threat of proliferation."

—White House statement after President Barack Obama met April 13 with President Saakashvili in Washington

"I think ultimately, what he achieved, the legacy he leaves behind in terms of emotions, politics, human relations, the warmth of his heart... will outlast everything else and that will be something, that will stay for generations and generations."

—President Saakashvili on the late Polish President Lech Kaczynski

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Apr. 15-16: Parliament Speaker Bakradze visits Afghanistan

Apr. 15-17: FM Vashadze visits New York

Apr. 19-22: President Saakashvili visits New York and Boston

Apr. 19-20: Parliament Speaker Bakradze visits Rome

May 3-5: Parliament Speaker Bakradze visits Sweden

May 20-21: FM Vashadze visits Malta

May 30: Tbilisi's local elections, marking first direct election of the capital's mayor

TOP STORIES

President Saakashvili Joins President Obama, World Leaders, at Nuclear Security Summit in Washington

President Saakashvili cut a broad path through official Washington this week, attending the high-profile Nuclear Security Summit, discussing Georgia's democratic progress with President Obama, meeting at length with Vice President Biden, and seeing several dozen members of the Senate and House of Representatives in meetings on Capitol Hill. "The President reaffirmed the United States' support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and welcomed President Saakashvili's continuing commitment to democratic reform," the White House said in a statement after the two presidents spoke. "The President expressed his appreciation for Georgia's significant contribution to Afghanistan and the two leaders discussed their shared commitment to securing nuclear materials to reduce the threat of proliferation."

On Capitol Hill, the President met with Senators and Congressmen to discuss Georgia's strategic partnership with the US, regional and international security issues, and Georgia's democratic and economic progress. "I enjoyed the opportunity to have a candid discussion with President Saakashvili about democratization and human rights issues in Georgia," said Senator Ben Cardin, who chairs the US Helsinki Commission. "We also discussed US-Georgia relations and I assured him that the US Congress supports Georgia's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. The United States will not recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia."

The president also was featured at events hosted by the Brookings Institution and the Atlantic Council. In a public speech at the Council, the President spoke about the challenges of building democracy in the shadow of Russia and of the importance to international security of having functioning democracies replace authoritarian or failed states. "Just a decade ago, Georgia could not seriously speak of playing any constructive role in the world. We were, to be perfectly frank and accurate, a failed state," he said. "

On Thursday, the President was scheduled to travel to New York City and then—after attending the late Polish President Lech Kaczynski's funeral in Poland this weekend—to go to Boston where he will speak at Harvard on Monday.

[AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Georgia's President and US Affirm Ties](#)
[WHITE HOUSE: President Obama's discussion with President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia](#)

Georgians Grieve for Polish President, Lech Kaczynski, a Champion of Georgia's Independence, Sovereignty

Georgians this week grieved the tragic death of Polish President Lech Kaczynski, a champion of Georgia's independence and sovereignty. President Saakashvili expressed the country's condolences to the Polish people. "President Kaczynski will always be remembered as an absolutely outstanding figure of Polish history, of European history and certainly of the history of my region," he said, adding that the Kaczynski was a courageous leader and an unwavering advocate of Georgia. "If I had to name someone who played an amazing role in terms of fighting for Georgia's freedom, for Georgia's future, I would put President Kaczynski very high in that gallery—that's not an exaggeration." The Polish President, the first lady, and a cadre of high-ranking Polish officials were traveling to Russia to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Soviet massacre of Polish prisoners of war when their plane crashed, killing everyone on board. The Georgian government declared April 10 a national day of mourning, and posthumously honored the former Polish president with Georgia's National Hero Award for "showing heroism in defending Georgia's interests."

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Saakashvili: 'Kaczynski Played Amazing Role in Fight for Georgia's freedom'](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Georgia Expresses Condolences over Kaczynski's Death](#)

MPs Make International Appeal for Abkhazia, S. Ossetia to Be Declared "Occupied"; Moscow, Tskhinvali Sign Base Treaty

Georgia's Parliament last week issued an appeal to more than 50 countries urging them to recognize Russia as an occupying force in Georgia's territories of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia. In a letter sent to 20 EU member states, the US, and a host of other countries, MPs also urged international lawmakers to acknowledge the mass ethnic cleansing crimes committed by the occupier: "Russian policy continues to pursue the systematic undermining of Georgian sovereignty, the increased militarization of the territories Moscow has occupied, and the justification of ethnic cleansing campaigns used against Georgians in those territories." The letter further reads: "All components of this policy seek to derail Georgia's progress and ongoing efforts at reform, as well as Georgia's Euro-Atlantic foreign policy alignment." Officially declaring Russia as occupier of Georgia's territories will make Moscow legally and formally responsible for preventing crimes—including trafficking of humans, arms, and illicit nuclear material—committed there.

The appeal comes on the heels of Moscow's newly signed defense treaty with Russian proxies in Tskhinvali, permitting the Russian occupier to operate a military base in the region for 49 years. According to the agreement, the base will protect the "sovereignty and security of S. Ossetia and counter acts of armed attacks by international terrorist formations." Georgia's Foreign Ministry denounced the treaty's validity: "Instead of carrying out its international obligations, Russia strengthens its military presence on the occupied territories of Georgia and tries to place the process of creation of military bases for its occupation troops within 'quasi legitimate' frames." The Ministry added: "This document has no legal effect and is invalid." A similar agreement for Abkhazia was signed between Moscow and Sokhumi in February of this year.

[RFE: Parliament Urges Countries to Recognize Russia as Occupier](#)

Georgian Troops Leave for Afghanistan to Fight Alongside US Counterparts in Dangerous Helmand Province

Georgia last week sent the 31st infantry battalion to serve alongside US Marines in Afghanistan's dangerous Helmand Province, making Georgia the second-largest per-capita contributor of troops (after the US) to NATO's Afghan operation. The Georgian government held a departure ceremony (below) for 750 Georgian soldiers at the Vaziani military base, located outside of Tbilisi. Defense Minister Bacho Akhalaia, US ambassador in Georgia John Bass, and a host of senior US and Georgian military officials attended the ceremony. President Obama last week called President Saakashvili, thanking him for Georgia's "significant contribution" to the Alliance's mission. The US Marines trained the battalion for six months prior to their departure, calling the Georgian soldiers "among the best troops we've ever seen."

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Georgian Battalion Departs for Afghanistan](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Obama Thanks Georgia for Afghan Deployment](#)



INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

LA CROIX: Georgia makes its case in Paris

Georgia's Parliament Speaker Bakradze met last week in Paris with French counterparts to rally Western support in denouncing Moscow's disregard for the Sarkozy-mediated ceasefire agreement and Russia's continued occupation of Georgia. "I discussed Russia's non-compliance of the ceasefire agreement concluded under the auspices of France in August 2008," Bakradze said. "We are grateful to President Sarkozy for having declared recently that Russia should respect her commitments and put into effect the conditions of this agreement," he said, adding that Franco-Russo relations should not be improved at the expense of national sovereignty principles.

francois-d-alancon.blogs.la-croix.com

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: US envoy hails Georgia's Afghan deployment

A top US envoy, Richard Holbrooke, hailed Georgia's troop contribution to NATO's Afghanistan mission, adding that Washington was especially appreciative of the fact that unlike some European countries Georgia is not barring its troops from combat operations in Afghanistan. "We appreciate the fact that like the American troops, like the British and Canadian troops, the Georgians go to Afghanistan... without any national caveats," Holbrooke said. "Georgian troops are going to play a vital role in the effort to combat terrorism around the world."

www.agencefrancepresse.org

BBC NEWS: Why the US is fielding a cyber army

As the world settled down to watch the Beijing Olympic Games in the summer of 2008, war erupted deep in the Caucasus Mountains. Georgian rockets flew, Russian tanks rolled—and Russian hackers stormed Georgian websites. Some experts regard this as the first cyber war. "We saw a military mobilization by Moscow into S. Ossetia accompanied by clearly orchestrated cyber attacks against the Georgian government's communication systems and the banking system," says Nigel Inkster, director of transnational threats and political risk at a London think tank.

news.bbc.co.uk

ASSOCIATED PRESS: Russia, France in courtship with no room for US

Russian President Medvedev, in visiting France last month, carried an unspoken message to Washington: We don't really need you. The two presidents discussed the exclusive sale of four French warships, the Mistral-class tank and helicopter carrier. Such an arms sale would be the biggest ever by a NATO country to Russia. The ship, which could carry up to 16 attack helicopters, would allow Russia to land hundreds of troops quickly on foreign soil. The possibility has alarmed Georgia as well as the three Baltic countries in NATO --Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. The sale would amount to "a symbol of trust between our countries," Medvedev said, as Russia seeks to modernize its over-stretched and outdated military machine.

www.newsday.com

TORONTO STAR: 2014 Olympics in Sochi face terror and environmental concerns

Just to the right of Sochi, Russia—the site for the 2014 Winter Olympics—is Georgia, where tensions still run high in the wake of Russia's recent invasion of Georgia. And barely 15 minutes to the south is Georgia's Russian-occupied territory of Abkhazia, another flashpoint of international dispute, beholden to Moscow but recognized by almost no one else. It is rough out there. Very rough. Never before have the Olympics come to such a hostile neighborhood.

olympics.thestar.com

ASSOCIATED PRESS: No prime cause found in luge death

An official investigation into the death of Nodar Kumaritashvili at the Vancouver Olympics will find no single cause for his fatal luge accident. "You will see when it comes out that what happened was a one-off," secretary general of the International Luge Federation Svein Romstad said. "The final moment of impact was something that was unforeseen. Clearly the track was faster than it was supposed to be," he said, adding that it was still within the Federation's parameters.

www.theglobeandmail.com

BBC NEWS: Georgian convicts swap cells for monastery

Well-behaved prisoners in Georgia are being offered the chance to spend time in a monastery to serve out their sentences, as part of a plan to reduce prison overcrowding. "With the support of God we are able to welcome criminals who are eager to become better people," Father Saba, head of the Ambrosi Khelaila monastery, said. Having spent four years behind bars and barbed wire, prisoners such as Tariel Maizeradze are now allowed to roam the calm surroundings of a pine forest on the outskirts of the city, as one of the first candidates in a government-led rehabilitation program. "This is a better place for me," Maizeradze said. "I suppose God had something to do with my coming here."

news.bbc.co.uk

JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION: A new Russian invasion of Georgia—is it so unrealistic?

The bogus newscast aired by Georgia's private broadcaster Imedi could be seen as a warning by the TV channel, whose producers might have some additional and highly confidential knowledge with which ordinary citizens of Georgia are not familiar. Admittedly, the Georgian television's show was awkwardly presented and the sequence in the scenario it subscribed to could just be a vague imagination. Yet, there was a real Russian invasion two years ago and given its failure to produce regime change in Georgia and thwart the country's pro-Western orientation, any new invasion to "finish the job" is highly probable if permissible international and domestic conditions are created by Moscow.

jamestownfoundation.blogspot.com

EURASIANET: Georgian winemaking hub uses grapes to increase milk supplies

In Georgia, even the cows thrive on grapes. A new grape-derived cow feed appears to have boosted milk production in Georgia's central winemaking region, Kakheti, in a project with potential implications for elsewhere in the developing world. Funded by the Swedish International Development Agency, the project used winemaking waste—known as grape pomace, or chacha in Georgian—to make a protein-rich cow feed that increases milk output. If shown to be "highly digestible," noted Dr. Peter Robinson, a dairy cattle research specialist, the grape-pomace feed could have "worldwide importance and application."

www.eurasianet.org

THINK TANKS/NGOs

CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS: Assessing the "Reset" and the Next Steps for U.S. Russia Policy

The Obama Administration should develop an action plan for Russian compliance with the August 2008 cease-fire agreement with Georgia. The administration should continue holding Russia to its international commitments vis-à-vis the situation in Georgia, several of which it is now violating. But a more creative approach to the impasse in Georgia is necessary to achieve progress—and to avoid a second conflict in the future. The United States should outline concrete steps that could create positive momentum and build confidence.

www.americanprogress.org