



Russia and the West

After Georgia

After Georgia's defeat, the West struggles to deal with a newly belligerent Russia

IN LESS than two weeks—from the first heated discussion about Russia's push into Georgia that took place between President George Bush and Russia's prime minister, Vladimir Putin, at the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, to the supposed start on August 19th of the Russian army's rifle-dragging withdrawal—the geopolitical map of Europe has been redrawn. Swathes of Georgia, not just the enclave of South Ossetia, the proximate cause of the fighting, are in Russian hands (see story on next page). Surprised and shocked by the outbreak of war over a place few of their citizens had ever heard of, Western governments have scrambled to cover their divisions over how to respond. Yet for all its triumphalist taunts that "Russia is back", there is no gold medal for the Kremlin for invading a neighbour for the first time since the end of the cold war.

The immediate damage to Russia's relations with America and Europe is clear from NATO'S decision to suspend co-operation with the Kremlin until its "disproportionate" action ends and its troops are back in the positions they held before the fighting erupted on August 7th. Russia's president, Dmitry Medvedev, who is Mr Putin's hand-picked successor, now says this will be done by August 22nd. But it is Mr Putin and the generals who call the shots—and they mutter that the Georgians have "not given up on their aggressive intentions."

Mr Bush has already cancelled military exercises with Russia and withdrawn from Congress a civilian nuclear co-operation agreement that could potentially have netted Russia's atomic industry billions. High-level visits have been put on hold. There is to be a fundamental review of relations with Russia. Beyond that, Russia's hopes of getting into the World Trade Organisation this year have been dashed: Georgia, among others, would block it. Some, including John McCain, the Republican candidate in America's presidential election, talk of expelling Russia from the G8 group of rich and supposedly responsible countries; others of diluting its influence by inviting China and others to join.

Some European governments have puffed hot, some cold over all this. But Germany's Angela Merkel, often in the cautious camp when it comes to dealings with Russia because of her country's extensive business and energy ties, has spoken with increasing sharpness of Russia's obligations under the ceasefire agreement that she helped to nail down. Meanwhile the repercussions of this small war in the Caucasus will spread a lot wider.

The (dis)honours are shared. Georgia's youthful president, Mikheil Saakashvili, made a terrible mistake in ordering attacks on civilian targets in South Ossetia on August 7th. NATO has set up a special commission with Georgia to oversee recon-

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Charlemagne is on holiday

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struction and to help the country eventually fulfil its aspirations for membership, which Russia fiercely opposes. Yet Mr Saakashvili's actions have made Georgia's path longer and steeper. Once Russian troops go, the anger of ordinary Georgians at the catastrophe that has befallen their country may yet turn on the man who got them into this mess.

Mr Putin would count Mr Saakashvili's scalp as another victory. Polls suggest that Russia's leaders have popular backing at home. But Russia has also miscalculated by marching its troops into Georgia proper. That has lost it the propaganda war abroad, with the television pictures conjuring up memories of Prague in 1968 and, more recently, of Chechnya.

Russia's interests will not go unscathed. Ukraine, another NATO candidate some day, far from being cowed by Georgia's fate, promptly offered America and the Europeans access to its air-defence radars. Belarus, usually tightly allied with the Kremlin, took almost two weeks to declare its support; other neighbours have stayed stumm. Behind the cover of the Olympic celebrations, it will not have gone unnoticed in Beijing that China's ally at the United Nations in opposing "interference" in a sovereign country's affairs has just worryingly stepped over the line.

The new low in Russia's relations with the West is one of a dispiriting series. Russia's failed attempts to shape the outcome of Ukraine's presidential election in 2004, followed by the orange revolution there (after Georgia's rose revolution in 2003), hit a nerve with Mr Putin. Resentment that simmered at the continued expansion of NATO, and America's plans to site parts of its missile defences in the Czech Republic and Poland, then boiled over after the announcement at NATO'S summit in Bucha-

> rest in April that both Georgia and Ukraine could one day join the alliance, albeit only when they were ready. Both Russia and Georgia were left itching for a fight.

That it came to one only makes difficult things harder. One is the effort to keep Europe, America, Russia and China united in the face of Iran's defiance of UN calls for a suspension of its suspected nuclear activity. Another is the bid to resurrect an amended Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty. Russia stopped co-operating with CFE limits on troop movements last year. Shortly before the Georgia crisis, it came up with suggested troop limits that it could live with. The new chill will also kill

Mr Medvedev's proposed Treaty on European Security, an idea that a British official says now looks "slightly absurd".

Efforts to overcome Russia's objections to missile defences in eastern Europe will also suffer. It has slammed America's new agreement with Poland and frozen its own links with NATO. It might have done this anyway, but the shape of a deal to address some of Russia's fears about the system was in sight, argues Rose Gottemoeller of the Carnegie Moscow Centre. Now the next American president will find it harder to make the compromises needed to get Russia involved.

Indeed, in the run-up to the inaugura-

tion of a new American president in January, scores of think-tanks, commissions and working groups have been beavering away on advice for the next incumbent of the White House. Democrats in particular have been looking for ways for an Obama presidency to broaden relations with Russia, which they argue have been neglected, except in narrow nuclear matters, by the Bush administration. There is much nuclear work still to be done, including agreeing upon a new round of cuts in strategic arsenals. But they are now scratching their heads. How to take account of Russia's interests, when its idea of respect from the outside world is based on fear? •

The European Union and Georgia

Treaty gamesmanship

Not even the Lisbon treaty could create European unity over Russia

NICOLAS SARKOZY, the French president, has certainly had a busy war. Since France has the rotating European Union presidency, he and his foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, quickly zoomed off to Moscow and Tbilisi, where they brokered a six-point ceasefire plan signed by Georgia's Mikheil Saakashvili and Russia's Dmitry Medvedev. It was unfortunate that the Russians then ignored the requirement to pull their troops out of Georgia proper, but Mr Sarkozy had a response to this too: he threatened to call an EU summit.

Mr Sarkozy's activism may be admirable, but not all the lessons he is drawing from the crisis are convincing. In an article in *Le Figaro* newspaper on August 18th, he proclaimed, first, that the EU had risen to the occasion, showing just how much it could do with enough political will. Second, he argued that it could have done better still if only the Lisbon treaty had been ratified, since it would create

both a permanent president of the European Council and a beefed-up high representative for foreign policy.

Institutions matter, and there are good arguments for the Lisbon reforms to the EU's foreign-policy machinery. But the notion that they would magically transform a deeply divided club into a single powerful force is belied not just by recent history (think of the wars in former Yugoslavia and Iraq) but by the Georgian crisis itself. Mr Sarkozy may have popped up in Tbilisi (as did Germany's Angela Merkel, who earlier met Mr Medvedev in Sochi), but other EU leaders such as Britain's Gordon Brown and Italy's Silvio Berlusconi have been near-invisible.

Worse, the policy response from France, Germany and Italy has been diametrically opposite to that of Britain, Sweden and the east Europeans. The French and Germans, eager to preserve their links to Moscow, have tried to be neutral, while the Italians have blamed the entire war on Mr Saakashvili. The British, Swedes and most east Europeans have loudly condemned Russia's aggression. So long as EU members hold such divergent views, no amount of institutional tinkering can ever create a forceful common foreign policy.

In any case, the chances of Lisbon taking effect soon are slim, since a looming recession makes it unlikely that the Irish will reverse the no vote they cast in June. In the meantime, the best response from the EU to a resurgent Russia would be to forge a common energy policy that liberalises the market, reduces dependence on gas imports and does away with cosy bilateral deals (see page 45). And the biggest obstacles to such a policy? None other than Mr Sarkozy's France and Ms Merkel's Germany.



The peace slipped through my hands

The war in Georgia

A Caucasian journey

GORI, TSKHINVALI AND VLADIKAVKAZ

Our correspondent travels the route north from Tbilisi to Beslan

THE road from Tbilisi to Vladikavkaz (see map, next page) told several stories this week: of Russia's advance into Georgia, of Georgia's economic success and its disastrous foray into South Ossetia, of the biggest confrontation between Russia and the West since the cold war. In Tbilisi, Georgia's capital, cafes and business hotels overflowed with foreign journalists and diplomats, mulling over the war. The drive to Tskhinvali, the ruined capital of South Ossetia, along a modern, almost empty highway then stopped abruptly after 26 miles (40km) at the village of Iguchi, where about a dozen Russian armoured personnel carriers blocked Georgia's main artery.

Russian armour had advanced to the edge of Tbilisi on August 15th, the day that Condoleezza Rice, America's secretary of state, demanded an immediate withdrawal of Russian troops. The clear message was: "Nobody will tell us what to do here." More than a week after agreeing to a ceasefire, the Russian army still occupied swathes of Georgian territory, including the town of Gori. On August 19th Russia and Georgia exchanged prisoners-of-war, but soon afterwards the Russians bound and blindfolded another 21 Georgian soldiers in the port of Poti. The Georgians, said Shota Utiashvili, a spokesman, were there to protect the port from looting.

The road from Tbilisi is repeatedly signposted to Sukhumi, as a pointer of the political aim of Georgia's president, Mikheil Saakashvili. Sukhumi is the capital of Abkhazia which, with South Ossetia, Mr Saakashvili had promised to reintegrate into Georgia. The Tbilisi-Sukhumi highway was part of this plan. It was this kind of stunt that made the Abkhaz so suspicious

> of Georgia. And, even as Russian soldiers sat by the unfinished flyover, the Abkhaz were raising their flag in the upper Kodori gorge, previously held by the Georgians. Neither of the two separatist regions is likely to rejoin Georgia for many years.

The Russian advance towards Tbilisi was unchallenged, as the Georgian army had withdrawn from the conflict. Russian soldiers chatted with Georgian police armed with handguns and automatic rifles. The soldiers said they were paid about \$1,000 a month, complained about lack of work, high inflation and corrupt officials "who steal from us", and envied the Georgian police uniforms. "We have to buy our own kit and boots, because what they give us is rubbish," said one. This may explain the looting of Georgian military bases. "They are taking everything, old shoes, even the lavatories. Why do they need those?" asked Mr Utiashvili.

The Russian soldiers in Igueti came from the 71st motorised rifle regiment stationed in Chechnya. Many were recruited from nearby Dagestan and Ingushetia. "I respect the Georgians. They are proud people and they helped our Imam Shamil. We really should not be here," says a soldier from Dagestan. Few Russian soldiers could say why they were in Georgia. The Georgian police were generally calm. "I have never been to Tbilisi," said one Russian soldier. "I will take you and show you good time if you take off your uniform," replied a Georgian policeman. Mr Saakashvili's anti-Russian rhetoric has never been that popular in Georgia. But whatever goodwill Georgians had for Russians has been destroyed by the war.

Past Igueti on the way to Gori, Georgian fields and woods were burning. The fertile land was turning into smoke and black earth, a sight even more depressing than the ruined houses. The Georgians accuse the Russians of burning the ancient forests of Borjomi, admired by the old Russian aristocracy. Gori has been largely empty except for Russian troops. Russia bombed Gori a few times; it dropped a cluster bomb, outlawed by many countries, killing several civilians and a foreign journalist. Cluster bombs kill people but cause lit-



Is it time to pull out yet?

tle other damage, so the town's statue of Stalin was undamaged.

The entry into South Ossetia proper is now marked by Russian and South Ossetian flags. Here the smell of smoke was, overpowered by the smell of death, with rotting corpses still strewn around Tskhinvali. Parts of this town of some 10,000 people look like Grozny, in Chechnya, after the Russians flattened it. The residents wandered through the rubble and shattered glass that marked their old homes.

Much of the damage was done by the Georgians, says Human Rights Watch (HRW), a monitoring group. Shortly before midnight on August 7th Mr Saakashvili ordered a bomb barrage using Grad multiple-rocket launchers. This lasted through the night. Even his supporters agree that the use of indiscriminate Grad rockets, which killed civilians, was disproportionate and merciless. Mr Saakashvili said he was restoring "constitutional order". But then so did Russia when it bombed Grozny in 1994. That Russia provoked Mr Saakashvili consistently is clear, but it is equally clear that Mr Saakashvili allowed himself to be provoked. "He wanted to fight," says one of his allies.

Perhaps Mr Saakashvili did not count on Russia's response; perhaps he banked on America's support. If so, say some observers in Georgia and Russia, America bears some responsibility for allowing Mr Saakashvili to interpret its backing as a security guarantee and for failing to restrain him. That Mr Saakashvili could make such a decision by himself also testifies to the excessive concentration of power in his hands, and to the weakness of proper democratic institutions that can hold him accountable for his actions.

When Russian troops pull out of Georgia, as President Dmitry Medvedev has promised they will by the end of this

week, Mr Saakashvili will face tough questions from his one-time supporters, including Nino Burdjanadze, a former speaker of parliament. "When this is over, we will have to build a different country here with proper institutions," says one of his own supporters. Ironically, what is now keeping Mr Saakashvili in power is the presence of the Russian army on the ground.

It is hard to imagine either Vladimir Putin, the Russian prime minister, or Mr Medvedev facing similar questions about Russia's disproportionate use of force in Georgia. If Georgian democratic institutions are weak, Russian ones are feebler. When Mr Medvedev, Russia's commander-in-chief, held an emergency meeting of security chiefs on August 8th, Russian jets were already bombing Georgia's positions in South Ossetia and beyond. Only an hour after Mr Medvedev pledged to protect his citizens (Russia has long been distributing its passports among South Ossetians) Russian news agencies reported that Russian tanks had arrived in Tskhinvali. (The journey from the Russian border takes more than two hours by car.)

Russia first claimed that 2,000 people were killed as a result of what it calls Georgia's "genocide" in South Ossetia. HRW says these figures are wildly inflated (Tskhinvali's city hospital registered just 44 dead and 273 wounded). Now even the Russians are talking of only 133 civilian deaths. HRW also cannot confirm many other atrocities ascribed by the Kremlin to the Georgians. Most residents in Tskhinvali who hid in basements tell identical stories of Georgian horrors, stoked by the Russian media, but few witnessed them at first hand. Although the Russian army is keen to show the damage inflicted by the Georgians, it is less keen for foreign journalists to see Georgian villages torched and looted by the South Ossetian militia and



>Russian irregulars.

Yet the evidence of ethnic cleansing of Georgians is obvious. In the neighbourhood of Tskhinvali, many Georgian villages have been burnt and most homes destroyed. "Forward to Tbilisi," says a sign in Russian painted on the gates of one ruin. As one South Ossetian intelligence officer told an HRW representative, "we burned these houses. We want to make sure that they [the Georgians] can't come back, because if they do come back, this will be a Georgian enclave again and this should not happen."

As a group of foreign journalists made its way up to the Roki tunnel, a long convoy of armoured vehicles, tanks and lorries rumbled back towards Tskhinvali. Shortly before the journalists arrived at the

tunnel, the Russian media said the Georgians were preparing a provocation there. "Rubbish," said the Russian military intelligence officer guarding the entrance to the tunnel. "There are so many lies here." Days later Russia's security services gave warning of a possible Georgian terrorist attack (which might justify a new invasion).

This journey ends not in Vladikavkaz but in nearby Beslan, where four years ago some 330 Russians, mostly children, were killed by Chechen terrorists when the Russian security services stormed the school. In a way, it also started there. Beslan prompted Mr Putin to take more powers into his own hands and to accuse foreigners of scheming to weaken Russia. The war in Georgia is best understood as part of the chain of events that followed. •

missile) battery in Poland.

Iran strengthened America's case by boasting (apparently falsely) this week that it had tested a missile capable of launching satellites. Previously Iran claimed its missiles could reach targets as far away as Ukraine and the Balkans. But if it ever put objects into orbit, that would allow it to fire warheads a lot farther. The Kremlin still plays down the Iranian threat, and says America's real objective is to neutralise Russia's nuclear forces. America has invited the Russians to join in, to no avail.

Missile defences do not just pose a geopolitical risk that could worsen the West's poor relations with Russia. They are also a technological gamble. The system is not fully proven. The two-stage interceptors that will be deployed in Europe have not been built yet, and the geometry of using ground interceptors against a future Iranian threat has still to be tested.

The Pentagon's independent office to evaluate new equipment said last October that it was far from being able to certify "a high probability of [the system] working in an operationally effective manner once deployed". It said intercepts of Iranian weapons were "very distinct" from past tests against simulated North Korean missiles over the Pacific, since shorter distances require a quicker response. The European system must also be able to deal with two kinds of missiles, intercontinental-range missiles fired at America and intermediate-range weapons fired at Europe, with different trajectories and speeds.

General Trey Obering, director of the Missile Defence Agency (MDA), calls Pentagon evaluators "very pessimistic". He says the two-stage interceptor is a simplified version of the three-stage version used above the Pacific. The principles of missile defence differ little regardless of range. Yet critics insist that America is wasting a fortune for an impossible technological fix. It has spent more than \$110 billion on missile defences since Ronald Reagan launched his "star wars" Strategic Defence Initiative 25 years ago, evoking an impossibly ambitious "shield that could protect us from nuclear missiles just as a roof protects a family from rain". The new system is less ambitious, designed to fend off only a small number of missiles—but it will still cost as much as \$10 billion a year.

The MDA is developing some 16 overlapping systems, designed to hit missiles in different phases of flight on the philosophy of "shoot early, shoot often". The European system will try to intercept missiles in mid-course in space, where warheads separate. In several tests, the MDA has shown that it can "hit a bullet with a bullet" or even, in the words of General Obering, "hit a spot on a bullet". In February an American ship shot down a spy satellite that had spun out of control.

But can the system be fooled by coun-

Missile defence in Europe

Behind America's shield

A deal on missile defences angers Russia even though they may not work

THE east Europeans have little reason to fear a strike from Iran. So why are they eagerly signing up to America's system to intercept Iranian missiles? Because they are scared of Russia. Within days of Russia's invasion of Georgia, Poland had agreed to host ten American interceptors. Ukraine offered to link up its early-warning radars and contribute to surveillance in space. The Czech Republic had already agreed to host the missile-tracking radar.

"We have crossed the Rubicon," said the Polish prime minister, Donald Tusk, as the deal was done. Russia said any country involved in America's missile defences made itself a legitimate target for nuclear

attack. Condoleezza Rice, the American secretary of state, who went to Poland to sign the deal this week, retorted that such threatening language "isn't tolerable".

Missile defences cannot fend off Russia's huge arsenal, but countries hosting them place themselves under America's umbrella, in effect becoming part of the defence of its homeland. American officials said the war in Georgia could have made further delay seem like surrender to Russia. But Mr Tusk offered another view: after Russia's invasion, America at last accepted Polish demands for help in modernising its armed forces, and for the deployment of an American Patriot anti-aircraft (and anti-

How it would work:

1. Iran fires missile
2. Rocket heat detected by early warning satellites
3. Threat missile tracked by forward-based radar
4. Threat missile tracked by European mid-course radar (Czech Republic)
5. Interceptor missile fired (Poland)
6. Kill vehicle distinguishes decoys and destroys warhead

