

Russia's lunge into Georgia was an attempt to gain regional leverage.

Moscow's Pipeline Pressure Points

By Adam J. Hebert, Executive Editor



Time Line of the Georgian-Russian War

- Aug. 7.** Georgian forces and separatists battle in South Ossetia.
- Aug. 7/Aug. 8.** Georgian troops reinforce South Ossetia.
- Aug. 8.** Russian President Dmitry Medvedev vows to punish Georgia.
- Aug. 8-Aug. 10.** Russian troops and warplanes strike Georgia.
- Aug. 9.** President Bush backs Georgia's "territorial integrity."
- Aug. 10.** USAF airlifts a Georgian brigade of nearly 2,000 troops home from Iraq.
- Aug. 12.** Russia and Georgia agree to a cease-fire; Russian forces remain on Georgian territory.
- Aug. 13.** USAF begins humanitarian airlift flights to Georgia.
- Aug. 26.** Russia recognizes independence of breakaway areas.
- Aug. 27.** US and six allies condemn Moscow, call for full Russian withdrawal of forces.
- Sept. 5.** USS *Mount Whitney* begins unloading relief supplies at Georgian port of Poti, still partially occupied by Russian forces.

Russia on Aug. 8 struck tiny Georgia with an air and ground invasion. The assault was ostensibly to protect autonomous pro-Russian lands of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the wake of fighting between South Ossetian and national Georgian forces.

It was an epic mismatch (see "The Adversaries in Brief," p. 58). Russia overwhelmed Georgian forces in the territories, moved into other parts of Georgia, and attacked garrisons, airfields, and ports. Russian warplanes bombed Georgian cities. They tried—but failed—to bomb a key pipeline.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil line runs from Baku on the Caspian Sea, through Azerbaijan and Georgia, and on to a Turkish port on the Mediterranean. It is the only functioning oil line between Central Asia and the West that is free of Russian control.

As can be seen, it offers a fragile economic link between former Soviet Central Asia and the West. The attack is widely regarded as an attempt by Russia to intimidate its smaller, West-leaning neighbors and reassert its dominance and control—or at least hold hostage—Central Asian energy supplies. ■



Russian troops take aim at Georgian troops on the outskirts of Gori, an area northwest of the Georgian capital Tbilisi, on Aug. 14.



AP photo by Darko Bandic