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Some minor edits and original documents added by Ted Postol\_(July 2, 2023)\_

# Ukraine Timeline Tells the Story

01.07.2023

By Joe Lauria

Without historical context, buried by corporate media, it's impossible to understand Ukraine. Historians will tell the story. But the Establishment hits back at journalists, like at CN, who try to tell it now.



May 18, 2015: Remains of an Eastern Orthodox church after shelling near Donetsk International Airport. Eastern Ukraine. (Mstyslav Chernov. CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons)

The way to prevent understanding of the Ukraine war is to suppress its history.

A cartoon version says the conflict began in February 2022 when Vladimir Putin woke up one morning and decided to invade Ukraine.

There was no other cause, according to this version, other than unprovoked, Russian aggression against an innocent country.

Please use this short, historical guide to share with people who still flip through the funny pages trying to figure out what's going on in Ukraine.

The mainstream account is like opening a novel in the middle of a book to read a random chapter as though it's the beginning of the story.

Thirty years from now historians will write of the context of the Ukraine war: the coup, the attack on Donbass, NATO expansion, rejection of Russian treaty proposals — without being called Putin puppets. It will be the same way historians write of the Versailles Treaty as a cause of Nazism and WWII, but aren't called Nazi-sympathizers.

Providing context is taboo while the war continues in Ukraine, as it would have been during WWII. Journalists have to get with the program of war propaganda while the war continues. Long after the war, historians are free to sift through the facts.

Journalists are clearly not afforded the same liberties as historians.

For our efforts to provide real-time context in Ukraine, which you can find encapsulated below, we've had PropOrNot, PayPal and NewsGuard try to hinder us, and Hamilton 68 put CN's editor on its disinformation "dashboard." *Consortium News* has been undeterred, thanks to its readers' generous support.

So please consider a donation during our Spring Fund Drive to help us keep delivering.

## THE UKRAINE TIMELINE

**World War II** — Ukrainian national fascists, led by Stepan Bandera, at first allied with the German Nazis, massacre more than a hundred thousands Jews and Poles.

**1950s to 1990** – C.I.A. brought Ukrainian fascists to the U.S. and worked with them to undermine the Soviet Union in Ukraine. Ukrainian fascist leader Mykola Lebed was taken to New York where he worked with the C.I.A. through at least the 1960s and was still useful to the C.I.A. until 1991, the year of Ukraine's independence. The evidence is in a U.S. government starting from page 82.

**November 1990:** A year after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe (also known as the Paris Charter) is adopted by the U.S., Europe and the Soviet Union. The charter is based on the Helsinki Accords and is updated in the 1999 Charter for European Security (1999 Istanbul Summit). These documents are the foundation of the 1999 These documents are the foundation for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The OSCE charter says no country or bloc can preserve its own security at another country's expense.

**Dec. 25, 1991:** Soviet Union collapses. Wall Street and Washington carpetbaggers move in during ensuing decade to asset-strip the country of formerly state-owned properties, enrich themselves, help give rise to oligarchs, and impoverish the Russian, Ukrainian and other former Soviet peoples.

**1990s:** U.S. reneges on promise to last Soviet leader Gorbachev not to expand NATO to Eastern Europe in exchange for a unified Germany. George Kennan, the leading U.S. government expert on the U.S.S.R., opposes expansion. Sen. Joe Biden, who supports NATO enlargement, predicts Russia will react hostilely to it.

**1997:** Zbigniew Brzezinski, former U.S. national security adviser, in his 1997 book, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, writes:

"Ukraine, a new and important space on the Eurasian chessboard, is a geopolitical pivot because its very existence as an independent country helps to transform Russia. Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire. Russia without Ukraine can still strive for imperial status, but it would then become a predominantly Asian imperial state."

**New Year's Eve 1999:** After eight years of U.S. and Wall Street dominance, Vladimir Putin becomes president of Russia. Bill Clinton rebuffs him in 2000 when he asks to join NATO.

Putin begins closing the door on Western interlopers, restoring Russian sovereignty, ultimately angering Washington and Wall Street. This process does not occur in Ukraine, which remains subject to Western exploitation and impoverishment of Ukrainian people.

**Feb. 10, 2007:** Putin gives his Munich Security Conference speech in which he condemns U.S. aggressive unilateralism, including its illegal 2003 invasion of Iraq and its NATO expansion eastward.

He said: "We have the right to ask: against whom is this [NATO] expansion intended? And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? No one even remembers them."

Putin speaks three years after the Baltic States, former Soviet republics bordering on Russia, joined the Western Alliance. The West humiliates Putin and Russia by ignoring its legitimate concerns. A year after his speech, NATO says Ukraine and Georgia will become members. Four former Warsaw Pact states join in 2009.

Munich Speech, subtitles in English

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQ58Yv6kP44&t=14s>



**2004-5:** Orange Revolution. Election results are overturned giving the presidency in a run-off to U.S.-aligned Viktor Yuschenko over Viktor Yanukovich. Yuschenko makes fascist leader Bandera a “hero of Ukraine.”

**April 3, 2008:** At a NATO conference in Bucharest, a summit declaration (Bucharest Summit Declaration [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm)) “welcomes Ukraine’s and Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO”. Russia harshly objects. William Burns, then U.S. ambassador to Russia, and presently C.I.A. director, warns in cable a [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08MOSCOW265\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08MOSCOW265_a.html) to Washington, revealed by WikiLeaks, that,

*“Foreign Minister Lavrov and other senior officials have reiterated strong opposition, stressing that Russia would view further eastward expansion as a potential military threat. NATO enlargement, particularly to Ukraine, remains ‘an emotional and neuralgic’ issue for Russia, but strategic policy considerations also underlie strong opposition to NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia. In Ukraine, these include fears that the issue could potentially split the country in two, leading to violence or even, some claim, civil war, which would force Russia to decide whether to intervene. ... Lavrov stressed that Russia had to view continued eastward expansion of NATO, particularly to Ukraine and Georgia, as a potential military threat.”*

A crisis in Georgia erupts four months later leading to a brief war with Russia, which the European Union blames (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-russia-report-idUSTRE58T4MO20090930>) on provocation from Georgia.

**November 2009:** Russia seeks new security arrangement in Europe. Moscow releases a draft of a proposal for a new European security architecture that the Kremlin says should replace outdated institutions such as NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

The text, posted on the Kremlin’s website on Nov. 29, comes more than a year after President Dmitry Medvedev first formally raised the issue. Speaking in Berlin in June 2008, Medvedev said the new pact was necessary to finally update Cold War-era arrangements.

“I’m convinced that Europe’s problems won’t be solved until its unity is established, an organic wholeness of all its integral parts, including Russia,” Medvedev said.

**2010:** Viktor Yanukovich is elected president of Ukraine in a free and fair election, according to the OSCE.



**2013:** Yanukovich chooses an economic package from Russia rather than an association agreement with the EU. This threatens Western exploiters in Ukraine and Ukrainian comprador political leaders and oligarchs.

**February 2014:** Yanukovich is overthrown in a violent, U.S.-backed coup (presaged by the Nuland-Pyatt intercept), with Ukrainian fascist groups, like Right Sector, playing a lead role. Ukrainian fascists parade through cities in torch-lit parades with portraits of Bandera.



Protesters clash with police in Kiev, Ukraine, February 2014. (Wikimedia Commons)

**March 16, 2014:** In a rejection of the coup and the unconstitutional installation of an anti-Russian government in Kiev, Crimeans vote by 97 percent to join Russia in a referendum with 89 percent turn out. The Wagner private military organization is created to support Crimea. Virtually no shots are fired and no one was killed in what Western media wrongly portrays as a “Russian invasion of Crimea.”

**May 4, 2014:** Dozens of ethnic Russian protestors are burnt alive in a building in Odessa by neo-Nazi thugs. Five days later, Luhansk and Donetsk declare independence and vote to leave Ukraine.

**April 12, 2014:** Coup government in Kiev launches war against anti-coup, pro-democracy separatists in Donbass. Openly neo-Nazi Azov Battalion plays a key role in the fighting for Kiev. Wagner forces arrive to support Donbass militias. U.S. again exaggerates this as a Russian “invasion” of Ukraine. “You just don’t in the 21st century behave in 19th century fashion by invading another country on completely trumped up pre-text,” U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, who voted as a Senator in favor of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 on a completely trumped up pre-text.

**Sept. 5, 2014:** First Minsk agreement is signed in Minsk, Belarus by Russia, Ukraine, the OSCE, and the leaders of the breakaway Donbass republics, with mediation by Germany and France in a Normandy Format. It fails to resolve the conflict.

**Feb. 12, 2015:** Minsk II is signed in Belarus, which would end the fighting and grant the republics autonomy while they remain part of Ukraine. The accord was unanimously endorsed by the U.N. Security Council on Feb. 15. In December 2022 (<https://press.un.org/en/2015/sc11785.doc.htm>) former German Chancellor Angela Merkel admits West never had intention of pushing for Minsk implementation and essentially used it as a ruse to give time for NATO to arm and train the Ukraine armed forces.

**2016:** The hoax known as Russiagate grips the Democratic Party and its allied media in the United States, in which it is falsely alleged that Russia interfered in the 2016 U.S. presidential election to get Donald Trump elected. The phony scandal serves to further demonize Russia in the U.S. and raise tensions between the nuclear-armed powers, conditioning the public for war against Russia.

**May 12, 2016:** U.S. : missile system in Romania, angering Russia. U.S. claims it is purely defensive, but Moscow says the system could also be used offensively and would cut the time to deliver a strike on the Russian capital to within 10 to 12 minutes.

**June 6, 2016:** **Symbolically on the anniversary of Normandy invasion (and during Obama's presidency), NATO launches aggressive exercises against Russia. It begins with 31,000 troops near Russia's borders, the largest exercise in Eastern Europe since the Cold War ended. For the first time in 75 years, German troops retrace the steps of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union across Poland.**

German Foreign Minister Frank Walter-Steinmeier objects. "What we shouldn't do now is inflame the situation further through saber-rattling and warmongering," Steinmeier stunningly tells *Bild am Sonntag* newspaper. "Whoever believes that a symbolic tank parade on the alliance's eastern border will bring security is mistaken."

Instead Steinmeier calls for dialogue with Moscow. "We are well-advised to not create pretexts to renew an old confrontation," he says, adding it would be "fatal to search only for military solutions and a policy of deterrence."

**December 2021:** Russia offers draft treaty proposals to the United States and NATO proposing a new security architecture in Europe, reviving the failed Russian attempt to do so in 2009. The treaties propose the removal of the Romanian missile system, the withdrawal of NATO troop deployments from Eastern Europe. Russia says there will be a "technical-military" response if there are not serious negotiations on the treaties. The U.S. and NATO reject them essentially out of hand.

**February 2022:** Russia begins its military intervention into Donbass in the still ongoing Ukrainian civil war after first recognizing the independence of Luhansk and Donetsk.

Before the intervention, OSCE maps show a significant uptick of shelling from Ukraine into the separatist republics, where more than 10,000 people have been killed since 2014.



Ukrainian troops in the Donbass region, March 2015. (OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, CC BY 2.0, Wikimedia Commons)



**March 2022:** Russia and Ukraine agree on a framework that would end the war, including Ukraine pledging not to join NATO. The U.S. and U.K. Object. Prime Minister Boris Johnson flies to Kiev to tell Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to stop negotiating with Russia. The war continues with Russian seizing much of the Donbass.

**March 26, 2022:** Biden

Biden admits in a speech in Warsaw (<https://consortiumnews.com/2022/03/27/can-russia-escape-the-us-trap/>) that the U.S. is seeking through its proxy war against Russia to overthrow the Putin government.

**September 2022:** Donbass republics vote to join Russian Federation, as well as two other regions: Kherson and Zaporizhzhia.

**May 2023:** Ukraine begins counter-offensive to try to take back territory controlled by Russia. As seen in leaked documents earlier in the year, U.S. intelligence concludes the offensive will fail before it begins.

**June 2023:** A 36-hour rebellion by the Wagner group fails, when its leader Yevgeny Prigoshzin takes a deal to go into exile in Belarus. The Wagner private army, which was funded and armed by the Russian Ministry of Defense, is absorbed into the Russian army.

**The historical timeline outlined above clearly chronicles the aggressive Western actions towards Russia, and how the tragedy could have been avoided if NATO would not allow Ukraine to join; if the Minsk accords had been implemented; and if the U.S. and NATO negotiated a new security arrangement in Europe, taking Russian security concerns into account.**

Joe Lauria is editor-in-chief of *Consortium News* and a former U.N. correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, and numerous other newspapers, including *The Montreal Gazette* and *The Star* of Johannesburg. He was an investigative reporter for the *Sunday Times* of London, a financial reporter for *Bloomberg News* and began his professional work as a 19-year old stringer for *The New York Times*. He can be reached at and followed on Twitter

[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08MOSCOW265\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08MOSCOW265_a.html)

## NYET MEANS NYET: RUSSIA'S NATO ENLARGEMENT REDLINES

<b>Date:</b> 2008 February 1, 14:25 (Friday)	Canonical ID: 08MOSCOW265_a
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL	Current Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Handling Restrictions -- Not Assigned --	Character Count: 9713
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## **B. MOSCOW 182**

**Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).**

1. (C) Summary. Following a muted first reaction to Ukraine's intent to seek a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the Bucharest summit (ref A), Foreign Minister Lavrov and other senior officials have reiterated strong opposition, stressing that Russia would view further eastward expansion as a potential military threat. NATO enlargement, particularly to Ukraine, remains "an emotional and neuralgic" issue for Russia, but strategic policy considerations also underlie strong opposition to NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia. In Ukraine, these include fears that the issue could potentially split the country in two, leading to violence or even, some claim, civil war, which would force Russia to decide whether to intervene. Additionally, the GOR and experts continue to claim that Ukrainian NATO membership would have a major impact on Russia's defense industry, Russian-Ukrainian family connections, and bilateral relations generally. In Georgia, the GOR fears continued instability and "provocative acts" in the separatist regions.  
**End summary.**

### **MFA: NATO Enlargement "Potential Military Threat to Russia"**

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2. (U) During his annual review of Russia's foreign policy January 22-23 (ref B), Foreign Minister Lavrov stressed that Russia had to view continued eastward expansion of NATO, particularly to Ukraine and Georgia, as a potential military threat. While Russia might believe statements from the West that NATO was not directed against Russia, when one looked at recent military activities in NATO countries (establishment of U.S. forward operating locations, etc. they had to be evaluated not by stated intentions but by potential. Lavrov stressed that maintaining Russia's "sphere of influence" in the neighborhood was anachronistic, and acknowledged that the U.S. and Europe had "legitimate interests" in the region. But, he argued, while countries were free to make their own decisions about their security and which political-military structures to join, they needed to keep in mind the impact on their neighbors.

3. (U) Lavrov emphasized that Russia was convinced that enlargement was not based on security reasons, but was a legacy of the Cold War. He disputed arguments that NATO was an appropriate mechanism for helping to strengthen democratic governments. He said that Russia understood that NATO was in search of a new mission, but there was a growing tendency for new members to do and say whatever they wanted simply because they were under the NATO umbrella (e.g. attempts of some new member countries to "rewrite history and glorify fascists").

4. (U) During a press briefing January 22 in response to a question about Ukraine's request for a MAP, the MFA said "a radical new expansion of NATO may bring about a serious political-military shift that will inevitably affect the security interests of Russia." The spokesman went on to stress that Russia was bound with Ukraine by bilateral obligations set forth in the 1997 Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership in which both parties undertook to "refrain from participation in or support of any actions capable of prejudicing the security of the other Side." The spokesman noted that Ukraine's "likely integration into NATO would seriously complicate the many-sided Russian-Ukrainian relations," and that Russia would "have to take appropriate measures." The spokesman added that "one has the impression that the present Ukrainian leadership regards rapprochement with NATO largely as an alternative to good-neighborly ties with the Russian Federation."

### **Russian Opposition Neuralgic and Concrete**

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5. (C) Ukraine and Georgia's NATO aspirations not only touch a raw nerve in Russia, they engender serious concerns about the consequences for stability in the region. Not only does Russia perceive encirclement, and efforts to undermine Russia's influence in the region, but it also fears unpredictable and uncontrolled consequences which would seriously affect Russian security interests. Experts tell us that Russia is particularly worried that the strong divisions in Ukraine over NATO membership, with much of the ethnic-Russian community against membership, could lead to a major split, involving violence or at worst, civil war. In that eventuality, Russia would have to decide whether to intervene; a decision Russia does not want to have to face.

## **intervene; a decision Russia does not want to have to face.**

6. (C) Dmitry Trenin, Deputy Director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, expressed concern that Ukraine was, in the long-term, the most potentially destabilizing factor in U.S.-Russian relations, given the level of emotion and neuralgia triggered by its quest for NATO membership. The letter requesting MAP consideration had come as a "bad surprise" to Russian officials, who calculated that Ukraine's NATO aspirations were safely on the backburner. With its public letter, the issue had been "sharpened." Because membership remained divisive in Ukrainian domestic politics, it created an opening for Russian intervention. Trenin expressed concern that elements within the Russian establishment would be encouraged to meddle, stimulating U.S. overt encouragement of opposing political forces, and leaving the U.S. and Russia in a classic confrontational posture. The irony, Trenin professed, was that Ukraine's membership would defang NATO, but neither the Russian public nor elite opinion was ready for that argument. Ukraine's gradual shift towards the West was one thing, its preemptive status as a de jure U.S. military ally another. Trenin cautioned strongly against letting an internal Ukrainian fight for power, where MAP was merely a lever in domestic politics, further complicate U.S.-Russian relations now.

7. (C) Another issue driving Russian opposition to Ukrainian membership is the significant defense industry cooperation the two countries share, including a number of plants where Russian weapons are made. While efforts are underway to shut down or move most of these plants to Russia, and to move the Black Sea fleet from Sevastopol to Novorossiysk earlier than the 2017 deadline, the GOR has made clear that Ukraine's joining NATO would require Russia to make major (costly) changes to its defense industrial cooperation.

8. (C) Similarly, the GOR and experts note that there would also be a significant impact on Russian-Ukrainian economic and labor relations, including the effect on thousands of Ukrainians living and working in Russia and vice versa, due to the necessity of imposing a new visa regime. This, Aleksandr Konovalov, Director of the Institute for Strategic Assessment, argued, would become a boiling cauldron of anger and resentment among the local population.

9. (C) With respect to Georgia, most experts said that while not as neuralgic to Russia as Ukraine, the GOR viewed the situation there as too unstable to withstand the divisiveness NATO membership could cause. Aleksey Arbatov, Deputy Director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, argued that Georgia's NATO aspirations were simply a way to solve its problems in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and warned that Russia would be put in a difficult situation were that to ensue.

## **Russia's Response**

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10. (C) The GOR has made it clear that it would have to "seriously review" its entire relationship with Ukraine and Georgia in the event of NATO inviting them to join. This could include major impacts on energy, economic, and political-military engagement, with possible repercussions throughout the region and into Central and Western Europe. Russia would also likely revisit its own relationship with the Alliance and activities in the NATO-Russia Council, and consider further actions in the arms control arena, including the possibility of complete withdrawal from the CFE and INF Treaties, and more direct threats against U.S. missile defense plans.

11. (C) Isabelle Francois, Director of the NATO Information Office in Moscow (protect), said she believed that Russia had accepted that Ukraine and Georgia would eventually join NATO and was engaged in long-term planning to reconfigure its relations with both countries, and with the Alliance. However, Russia was not yet ready to deal with the consequences of further NATO enlargement to its south. She added that while Russia liked the cooperation with NATO in the NATO-Russia Council, Russia would feel it necessary to insist on recasting the NATO-Russia relationship, if not withdraw completely from the NRC, in the event of Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO.

## **Comment**

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12. (C) Russia's opposition to NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia is both emotional and based on perceived strategic concerns about the impact on Russia's interests in the region. It is also politically



popular to paint the U.S. and NATO as Russia's adversaries and to use NATO's outreach to Ukraine and Georgia as a means of generating support from Russian nationalists. While Russian opposition to the first round of NATO enlargement in the mid-1990's was strong, Russia now feels itself able to respond more forcefully to what it perceives as actions contrary to its national interests.

WILLIAM BURNS, AMBASSADOR

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-russia-report-idUSTRE58T4MO20090930>

[World News](#)

September 30, 2009 10:45 AM Updated 14 years ago

## Georgia started war with Russia: EU-backed report

By [Timothy Heritage](#)

4 Min Read

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - An independent report blamed Georgia on Wednesday for starting last year's five-day war with Russia, but said Moscow's military response went beyond reasonable limits and violated international law.

The report commissioned by the European Union said both sides had broken international humanitarian laws and found evidence of ethnic cleansing against ethnic Georgians during Russia's intervention in the rebel province of South Ossetia.

Each side said the report backed up its interpretation of the war. But the findings were particularly critical of U.S. ally Georgia's conduct under President Mikheil Saakashvili and are likely to further damage his political standing.

They could also deepen Western concerns about his leadership and the stability of the former Soviet republic which have set back its hopes of joining NATO and the EU and shaken confidence in oil and gas routes running through the South Caucasus.

"In the Mission's view, it was Georgia which triggered off the war when it attacked Tskhinvali (in South Ossetia) with heavy artillery on the night of 7 to 8 August 2008," said Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini, who led the investigation.

The report said the war followed tensions and provocations by Russia, but Tagliavini said: "None of the explanations given by the Georgian authorities in order to provide some form of legal justification for the attack lend it a valid explanation."

Saakashvili had said Georgia was responding to an invasion by Russian forces when it attacked breakaway South Ossetia, but the report found no evidence of this.

It said Russia's counter-strike was initially legal, but its military response violated international law when Russian forces pushed into Georgia proper.

"Although it should be admitted that it is not easy to decide where the line must be drawn, it seems, however, that much of the Russian military action went far beyond the reasonable limits of defense," the report said.

# RUSSIAN PUSH

Russian forces pushed deep into Georgia, taking control of the main east-west highway, the Black Sea port of Poti and the strategic garrison town Gori. Russia has recognized South Ossetia and the other rebel province, Abkhazia, as independent states.

Russian jets bombed army bases and the military airport, and more than 100,000 civilians on both sides were displaced at the height of the conflict. Some have been unable to return.

"It confirms what we've known all along -- who started the war and who bears responsibility," Vladimir Chizhov, Russia's ambassador to the EU, said of the report.

In an apparent reference to the United States, which has strong links with Tbilisi, he said: "I expect those countries and leaders that have been vocal in supporting Mr Saakashvili will now think twice."

Georgia said the report proved Moscow had been preparing for conflict all along.

"The report proves that Russia was all the time preparing this war and August 7 and 8 were the culmination," Georgian State Minister for Re-integration Temur Iakobashvili said.

But Saakashvili is likely to be privately concerned by the report. He could now face more political problems in Georgia, although he has survived months of protests and is unlikely to face a new leadership challenge.

Georgia also looks isolated, with Washington intent on setting aside some of its disagreements with Moscow in order to improve relations with its former Cold War foe.

Tbilisi says 228 Georgian civilians were killed in the war and 184 Georgian servicemen are dead or missing. Russia says 64 of its servicemen and 162 South Ossetian civilians were killed, but also says the figure for civilian deaths could be higher.

The report found no evidence to support Russian allegations that Georgia was carrying out genocide against the South Ossetian population.

But it said there were "serious indications" of ethnic cleaning against ethnic Georgians in South Ossetia and found Russian forces "would not or could not" stop atrocities by armed groups in areas they controlled.

Additional reporting by Pete Harrison in Brussels, Michael Stott and Matt Robinson in Moscow and Margarita Antidze in Tbilisi; editing by Tim Pearce

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