

New York Times: “everyone to blame” in Russia-Georgia war

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In an editorial Friday, titled “That Nasty Little War,” the *New York Times* attempted to portray the recent report by European Union investigators, which found the Georgian government legally responsible for initiating the Russia-Georgia conflict, as a vindication of the newspaper’s own biased coverage back in August 2008.

The EU-sponsored Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, which issued its findings September 30, was established to verify conflicting claims of responsibility for the war.

According to the *Times*’ editors, the 1,000-page report whose evidence took 10 months to compile, apparently confirmed what they “have long suspected: everyone is to blame.”

“Georgia is to blame because its blustering president, Mikheil Saakashvili, initiated a foolhardy attack into South Ossetia; Russia because it bullied and goaded Mr. Saakashvili and then used the attack as an excuse to invade Georgia; the United States because it tacitly encouraged Mr. Saakashvili for far too long; and Europe because it did nothing at all,” the *Times* states.

In fact, the report clearly stated that the Saakashvili government had launched an aggressive assault on the breakaway province of South Ossetia and the Russian forces based there—resulting in scores of civilian deaths—without any legal justification or evidence of Russian aggression.

“None of the explanations given by the Georgian authorities in order to provide some form of legal justification for the attack” are valid, the EU investigation found. “Georgian claims of a large-scale presence of Russian armed forces in South Ossetia prior to the Georgian offensive could not be substantiated...it could also not be verified that Russia was on the verge

of such a major attack.”

Russian armed forces had been stationed in South Ossetia since the end of the Soviet Union, when the province refused to accept the authority of the new regime in Tbilisi. Tensions between Tbilisi and Moscow had been rising in the run-up to the war, but this was a direct product of Washington’s maneuvers in Georgia—the US-backed “Rose Revolution” and the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The interpretation of the EU report offered by the *Times* is entirely self-serving, defending its previous position on the war and that of the US government. Back in August 2008, the newspaper published two articles—“After Mixed US Messages, a War Erupted in Georgia” and “Rejuvenated Georgian President Cites US Ties as a ‘Turning Point’ in Conflict”—that promoted claims by US State Department officials that Saakashvili acted independently and against the advice of the US.

These pieces attempted to distance the US from Tbilisi’s actions. As the WSWWS wrote at the time: “The claim that Saakashvili acted without the foreknowledge and approval of the US is simply not believable. No one could doubt that Russia, which had peacekeepers stationed in South Ossetia, would respond strongly to a Georgian attack on the region. It is inconceivable that the regime in Tbilisi would take such a momentous action on its own.

“The Georgian government is completely dependent on Washington—politically, economically and militarily. It is a creature of Washington, having come to power in the US-engineered ‘Rose Revolution’ in late 2003.” (See “The New York Times covers for US role in Georgia crisis”)

Now the US role in the “Nasty Little War” is again

reduced by the *Times* to mere tacit encouragement of Saakashvili.

“The only way to repair the damage—and head off another fight—is for both sides to clean up their acts,” the *Times* writes. “The Kremlin will have to stop looking for ways to provoke Georgia and abandon, once and for all, its imperial ambitions. Georgia’s leaders need to figure out that their best chance of recovering their lost provinces is by making the idea of a union with a democratic Georgia, one respectful of minority rights, a lot more attractive.”

The fact that the Georgian attack on South Ossetia was a direct product of the imperial ambitions of the United States is, of course, unmentioned. After its secession from the USSR, Georgia became one of the main recipients of US aid, with Washington pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into the country’s armed forces. Having been backed by the US for years, former Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze fell out of favor with Washington for attempting to balance his regime between the rival interests of the US and Russia. For this crime, US imperialism switched its backing to one of his former ministers, Saakashvili.

The “Rose Revolution” of 2003 saw Saakashvili come to power in a campaign that was organized and financed by the US State Department and various American NGOs. Since then Saakashvili has pushed Georgian membership of NATO—a move that has greatly exacerbated tensions with Russia, which sees the expansion of the US-led military alliance into the former Soviet Union as a direct threat.

In the run-up to the war US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was in Tbilisi, where she made public statements of support for Saakashvili and his stated aim of regaining control of all Georgian territory—including South Ossetia and the other pro-Russian breakaway province of Abkhazia. Following Rice’s visit, over 1,000 US military personnel took part in a three-week training mission outside Tbilisi.

The Georgian military had, and continues to have, dozens of US military advisers working within it. Georgia is of great strategic importance for the US because it is a transit country for several oil and natural gas pipelines from the oil-rich Caspian Basin to the European market.

“The United States and the European Union also need to learn that heading off conflicts before they erupt is a

lot easier than trying to pick up the pieces afterward,” the editorial concludes.

For the *Times* and for the Obama administration the repercussions of the war are damaging inasmuch as they are at odds with current US foreign policy, which seeks limited rapprochement with Moscow in order to achieve other more pressing goals. Thus Obama has offered concessions to the Kremlin in exchange for its cooperation in pressuring the government in Iran, possibly including imposing new sanctions, and Moscow’s aid of the US occupation of Afghanistan.

The war waged by Saakashvili was a product of US imperialism’s relentless drive to secure its interests at the expense of its rivals. While the *Times* sees the war and its repercussions as a mistake, and Saakashvili as a liability, this drive can only lead to new and bloodier conflicts. The *Times* will serve to justify US actions in these future conflicts as well.



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