

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Europe, Great Britain > South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Karabakh) > Georgia > **Reject imperialist interference in Georgia!**

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British socialists support self-determination

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Already a political myth has been constructed about the plucky Georgians fighting for their national rights against the bullying power of Russia.

Truth they say is the first casualty of war. Only a few years ago the world was subjected to the lies about Iraq's so called weapons of mass destruction used to justify the invasion of the country in 2003. The events giving rise to the military conflict between Russia and Georgia are no different.

The truth is somewhat different. The Caucasus has become strategically important to US imperialism both because of its oil reserves and also its geopolitical location, with Russia to the north and Iran to the south. Since President Saakashvili came to power in 2003 Georgia has increasingly become the key ally for the US in the region. The US and Israel have made substantial arms sales to Georgia and have trained Georgian troops in order to build up its armed forces. The payback from this in part at least has come in Iraq. After the US and Britain, Georgia has more troops in Iraq than any other country, even though it has a population of only five million! Not surprisingly the US has been keen to propose Georgian alongside Ukrainian membership of NATO as part of a strategy to militarily surround Russia on its western flank. The anti ballistics missile agreements of the US with the Czech Republic and more recently Poland are an integral part of this strategy.

In all probability Georgia attacked South Ossetia in early August with the prior knowledge and consent of the US. In any event speeches by George W. Bush as well as our own David Milliband in support of the "territorial integrity of Georgia" have made clear that the US and Britain at least are 100% behind Georgia. The Ossetes though formed a distinct national minority within the former Soviet Republic of Georgia and though not internationally recognised South Ossetia had functioned as a de facto independent state for the last sixteen years. Georgia started its invasion of South Ossetia by bombing its capital city Tskhinvali. Given that Tskhinvali has no military installations the deliberate bombing by Georgia of a civilian centre was both an act of state terrorism and a war crime. As a terrorist act it was in part successful as many Ossetes fled over the border into Russia. We can only speculate but Georgia might well have been using state terror as a tool to ethnically cleanse South Ossetia of its native population. All this forms the background to Russia's decision to send its troops into Georgia, it was a response to the Georgian bombardment and subsequent invasion of South Ossetia.

At the time of writing the Russian Parliament has called on President Medvedev to recognise the independence of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the other disputed region in Georgia. Whether such recognition will be given or whether the threat of recognition will be used as a bargaining chip by Russia is unclear. Although we support self determination for South Ossetia and Abkhazia and therefore their recognition as independent states we give absolutely no support to Russia against Georgia in this conflict. One that clearly forms part of an inter imperialist struggle between Russian and US imperialism where Georgia functions as the proxy of the US.

Russia's ostensible championing of the rights of national minorities within Georgia is merely a cynical and opportunist attempt to extend its power and influence in the Caucasus. In much the same way as the US and Western European imperialists used the national oppression of Kosova by Serbia as a means to extend their power and influence in the Balkans. Furthermore by its past actions Russia has shown itself to be no respecter of the rights of national minorities within its own borders as shown by the near genocidal war against the Chechen people. Our position is clear. We are both for Georgia out of South Ossetia and for Russia out of Georgia. The total rejection of external imperialist interference by the peoples of the Caucasus is a precondition for any democratic and socialist resolution to the national conflicts and the social and economic problems of the region.

P.S.

* Socialist Resistance's editorial board published this statement on August 26th. Socialist Resistance is a socialist newspaper produced by British supporters of the Fourth International in conjunction with other marxists.