

Russian Army Moves Into West Georgia

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Despite Georgian ceasefire offer, Moscow steps up military intervention.

The SMS messages and phone calls started coming in after five in the afternoon of August 11 from western Georgia, near the border with the breakaway region of Abkhazia.

“They are coming, there are a lot of tanks”; “Their tanks are passing our house”; “I don’t believe it, I must be dreaming. Where are they going?”

By the time these messages were sent, Russian soldiers – some of them members of the peacekeeping force deployed in Abkhazia, others regular army troops – had rolled through the Zugdidi and Khobi regions of western Georgia and were heading for the town of Senaki.

Eyewitnesses said the Russians took no action other than driving along the road deeper and deeper into western Georgia.

By six in the evening, Georgian media reported, the troops had occupied all the administrative buildings in the town of Zugdidi.

The Russian defence ministry has acknowledged that its forces are now in western Georgia.

Military officials said peacekeepers were conducting an operation near Senaki, and a defence ministry spokesman told Interfax news agency that the action was designed to prevent Georgia’s military from shelling South Ossetia and stopping its troops and reservists regrouping.

This explanation was hard to take at face value, as Senaki is 230 kilometres from Tskhinvali.

IWPR reporters in Senaki say that at 7.15 pm the Georgian military base there was subjected to a bombardment.

“The town is being patrolled by Russian peacekeepers,” said Ketil Berdzenishvili, a journalist in Senaki, said, “With my own eyes I saw several cars and armoured vehicles bearing the letters MS [Mirotvorcheskie Sily, or Peacekeepers]. Their headquarters is at the security service building in Senaki.”

“The Senaki base has been burning, but the police are not letting journalists get close to it. We asked about the Russian peacekeepers’ intentions at the police posts on the main road. Police officers are denying rumours that the peacekeepers intend to move out of Senaki towards Tbilisi, at least today.”

The Russian assault is also continuing in northern Georgia. As of seven in the evening, three Russian attack planes had dropped three bombs in the village of Tkviavi in the Gori region near South Ossetia.

The damage done in this raid was shown on Rustavi-2 television. Zviad Kareli, a villager from Tkviavi, said, "Fortunately no one died, but several houses have been destroyed."

Hopes that a European mediation mission might be successful looked faint. On August 10, Georgia announced that its forces had left South Ossetian territory, and that it was ready to sign a European Union-sponsored ceasefire agreement. Two European mediators, French foreign minister Bernard Kouchner and OSCE chairman-in-office Alexander Stubb, visited Gori and Tbilisi and then flew on to Moscow.

Council of Europe general secretary Terry Davis also arrived in Tbilisi, where he said human rights were being violated on a mass scale and called for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Russian attacks intensified throughout the day.

On the morning of August 11, Georgian television channels reported that Russian aircraft had attacked Tbilisi. Just after 4.30 in the morning, Russian warplanes attacked a radar station on top of Mount Makhata hill central Tbilisi, waking up the whole city.

Other targets in Georgia, including three villages in the Black Sea region of Ajaria in the southwest and Dedoplistskaro in the eastern region of Kakheti, were bombed in the course of the day. There was also an attack on the upper Kodori Gorge, the only part of Abkhazia under Georgian control.

Saakashvili described Russia's action as a military intervention whose aim was "at minimum, the occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, or else the occupation and enslavement of the whole of Georgia".

"If yesterday they were saying they were responding to our operation in South Ossetia, today they are saying that the aim of the operation is to change the regime in Georgia and end our independence," he said.

"We must get out of this situation and in future have good relations even with Russia, which attacked us. I want to say that we are not fighting with the Russian people. We will have good relations with them in the future, but we will defend our independence with our teeth, to the last drop of blood."

Location: [Stavropol](#)
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