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Three killed as conflict erupts in South Ossetia

KosovoCompromise Staff

Three people were shot dead and 11 injured after Georgian forces attacked the capital of South Ossetia late on Thursday leading to full mobilisation of Ossetian forces.

The incident is the most serious since South Ossetia – using the Kosovo precedent – decided to move away further from Georgia.

"According to preliminary reports, three people were killed and around 11 people injured in an escalation [of the situation] and a special Georgian military operation," the South Ossetia government said.

Georgia fired in three directions "using mortar, grenade launchers and fire arms." The villages of Ubiat and Dmenis were also attacked, alongside Tskhinvali, South Ossetia said.

The joint peacekeeping forces deployed in the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict zone have been put on high alert.

Tbilisi and Russian-led peacekeepers are currently deployed in the region.

South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity has warned that military hardware will be moved into the conflict zone if the incident is repeated.

South Ossetian units "will open fire only as a last resort and on my personal instruction. All of the enemy's firing positions have been located and will be eliminated at any moment," Kokoity said.

Although the Georgian Interior Ministry has so far failed to comment on the incident, military observers from the Joint Peacekeeping Forces and officers from the OSCE mission have already confirmed reports of the attack.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed grave concern over the clash and urged Georgia to sign a non-aggression pact.

"We are seriously concerned by the latest events in South Ossetia.... We must persuade Tbilisi to sign a legally binding document guaranteeing non-aggression," Lavrov was quoted as saying on the sidelines of a visit to Turkmenistan.



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The OSCE, which monitors a ceasefire in South Ossetia, expressed "profound concern" over the fighting and a series of explosions earlier this week in another separatist Georgian region, Abkhazia.

The incidents "are worrying signs of growing tension," the OSCE's chairman in office, Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb, said in a statement.

"I call on all parties to use all necessary tools at their disposal to restore dialogue, a pre-condition for building confidence. The OSCE continues to follow the situation carefully and stands ready to assist the parties to defuse tension," he said.

South Ossetia declared its independence from Georgia following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. A bloody conflict that followed killed hundreds of people. The Georgian leadership has said it is determined to bring the breakaway region, along with the rebel region of Abkhazia, back under central control.