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Apply Kosovo's model to South Ossetia?

By Walid Phares, Counter-terrorism blog
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The conflict over South Ossetia -and possibly over Abkhazia's- regions is dangerous development in international stability and particularly for the efforts deployed worldwide in the campaign against Terror forces. For this local ethnic and territorial confrontation, involving now Georgia and the Russian Federation has the potential of absorbing energies and resources, otherwise needed and applied elsewhere in resisting Jihadi offensives and networks.

Georgia is an important ally in the US-led coalition overseeing the stabilization of Iraq and the containing of Khomeinist offensive in that country. An escalation over South Ossetia and Abkhazia will lead (and has already significantly) to a full withdrawal of Georgia from Iraq and eventually drawing US and other Western diplomatic efforts and resources for the defense of Georgia in the Caucasus. This will weaken the position in Iraq, in the Middle East and open an unnecessary front in a different region against a superpower, also drawn into the conflict because of local conflicts.

Russia and the West have a series of disagreement on the "War on Terror" so far. Moscow and Washington didn't see eye to eye in Iraq and are not at ease on the issue of anti-missiles systems in central Europe. It is not wise, strategically to open a military front -via proxies- against the Russian Federation in the Caucasus. While many in Washington and Brussels are still in Cold War mood, we need to realize that present day Russia is also at war with the Jihadi-Wahabi networks. Beyond and above the Chechen crisis, al Qaeda and the Salafi combat movement -chief enemy of the West (US and Western Europe combined) wants Russia down as much as they wish to see liberal democracies defeated. Thus, it is not in the interest of the US-led efforts against worldwide Jihadi forces to engage in a strategic confrontation with Russia, despite all the latter's negative behavior on many issues worldwide. The West needs to rationalize fully at this stage where the so-called "War on terror" is not going extremely well.

Thus it is suggested to move forward and quickly with two main parameters: On the one hand stand by Georgia as a staunch ally of the West and make sure its sovereignty and security are protected. On the other hand stop any potential conflict with Russia in the Caucasus and find a solution which would bring justice to the local parties and encourage Moscow to divert its resources from borders crisis to a world campaign against what is more dangerous to all democracies -old ones and transitional ones. This last effort may not be easy but is crucial if we wish to keep the focus on the greater conflict against Jihadist totalitarianism. Hence, it is suggested to quickly apply



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in South Ossetia what Americans and Europeans have applied in Kosovo so that local wounds are healed and regional stability is reaffirmed. Here is the model based on the Balkans resolution process.

1. South Ossetia and Abkhazia are provinces (self declared Republics) within a sovereign country, Georgia. The populations of these two entities rose to obtain separation based on their own perception of cultural identity. They are the equivalent of Kosovo. An initial confrontation in the early 1990s (1992-1994) led to agreements allowing for local autonomy and deployment of Russian (CIS) Peacekeepers.
2. Tensions related to the will of these provinces to move forward to self determination led to a move by Georgia to assert what it called "constitutional order." In other words, a military initiative to seize back South Ossetia. This in turn triggered a Russian military counter attack to block and reverse the Georgian move. Both parties claim they intervened as a response to a perceived opposing field move. But reality is that Georgian and Russian forces battled over South Ossetia.
3. A Kosovo-like model would be to bring the situation to pre August 6 status quo and move rapidly from there on to apply international law. This means practically that:
 - a. Georgian forces should withdraw from South Ossetia (equivalent of the Serbian pull-out from Kosovo). A pull out they say they accomplished already.
 - b. Russian forces should withdraw the forces they brought to South Ossetia after August 6.
 - c. Russian (and CIS) Peace keepers should stay in their positions and -if the UN Security Council offers- should be reinforced by UN Peace keepers.
 - d. A process leading to referendum in South Ossetia and Abkhazia should be established by the United Nations. If these provinces wish to stay as autonomous regions inside Georgia, an international mechanism to oversee these negotiations should be established. And if these local "republics" wish to separate -like Kosovo- they too should be granted that wish and helped to achieve independence.

As in the former Yugoslav conflict no final solution would satisfy the emotional, historical and geopolitical feelings and aspirations of all parties with the same degree, but this is the current state of our international law. As Pope Benedict XVI has often remarked, the strongest pillar in international relations must be reciprocity. Therefore as we planted in Kosovo, we need to harvest in South Ossetia, and perhaps elsewhere.

For the international community -and the free world in particular- are facing off with a global, advancing and lethal enemy to all. We're dealing for the next decades with forces that see South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Georgia, Russia, Europe, America and all other democracies as "Kuffars" (infidels) with no distinctions. "Indifels" should see



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beyond local conflicts and solve ethnic struggles as fast as they can; for the Salafists and the Khomeinists, terror powers of the world, count on kuffar wars to survive and prolong their assault on world Peace. We should be smarter, strategically.

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