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Russia Admits Fighter Jets Intentionally Violated Georgian Airspace; Georgia Condemns “Act of Aggression” as Threat to Europe

Moscow’s unprecedented admission triggers new round of international diplomacy by Tbilisi, which says Russia is trying to redefine the rules of European security

In an extraordinary admission, Russia today said that its fighter jets intentionally violated Georgian airspace on Tuesday in order “to cool hot heads in Tbilisi”. Georgia immediately condemned Moscow’s action as a grave “act of aggression” that threatened European security. Tbilisi recalled its ambassador to Moscow for consultations and began consultations with its allies.

“We will immediately take serious diplomatic measures in response to what Russia has admitted is an act of aggression against Georgia, and thus against European security,” Georgian Foreign Minister Ekaterine Tkeshelashvili said today.

“We are outraged by Russia’s dangerous, aggressive policies that undermine the sovereignty of a democratic European state,” she added. “Moscow is trying to unilaterally redefine the rules of European security by using military force to defend what it believes is its sphere of influence. But Europe can no longer tolerate any nation’s imperial ambitions.”

The Russian Foreign Ministry justified Moscow’s decision to send fighter jets over Georgia as an attempt to “cool hot heads in Tbilisi.” Tkeshelashvili said the Georgian government was astounded by the bellicose nature of Russia’s action and the flip justifications.

“Russia yesterday made a direct challenge to Europe and the entire international community—a challenge that demands a unified response,” the foreign minister said.

Tkeshelashvili said that Georgia will immediately begin consultations with the United Nations, the European Union, NATO, the OSCE, and its allies. “We will convey our concerns to our partners and seek to develop a common strategy that can ensure regional stability and European security,” she said. Georgia will seek UN Security Council censure of Russia for the airspace violations, and will ask NATO, the EU, the OSCE, and others to condemn the act.

The Georgian Foreign Minister said her country’s first priority will be to work with the international community to devise new peacekeeping and negotiation formats to resolve the separatist conflicts on its territory. “Once again, Russia has proven, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that it has become a party to the conflicts in the South Caucasus,” Tkeshelashvili said. “Its role as a peacekeeper and facilitator in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is no longer tenable—this has become a dangerous farce.”

Russian air force jets serially violate Georgian airspace. On April 20, a Russian MiG shot down a Georgian drone over Georgian airspace, an act confirmed by the UN observer Mission in Georgia and by the OSCE. Last August, another Russian MiG dropped a missile in the region of South Ossetia that failed to explode; two formal investigations by international experts confirmed Russia’s responsibility for the missile incident.

Russia routinely denies encroaching on Georgian airspace. Today marks the first time in a decade that Moscow has acknowledged an airspace violation

The Georgian Air Force said its radar had picked up the four Russian aircraft 80 kilometers deep inside the Russian Federation on the evening of July 8 and had tracked them crossing the Georgia-Russia border over the Roki Tunnel (linking Georgia’s South Ossetia region with Russia). The Air Force said that two aircraft entered Georgian airspace from the Russian Federation at about 8:11 pm on July 8; nine minutes later two others followed, the Georgian Air Force said.

The radar, according to the Georgian Air Force, shows the aircraft remaining in Georgian airspace for about 40 minutes, and flying back to the Russian Federation.