

DIMITRI SANAKOEV: South Ossetia and Russia's war on Georgia

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Post-Soviet relations between Georgia and Russia started with trouble. As the U.S.S.R. disintegrated, Moscow exploited ethnic tensions in the South Caucasus to thwart Georgian independence, and the newly independent Georgia responded with immature actions and rhetoric. Civil war left South Ossetia a patchwork of Ossetian and Georgian villages and part of Georgia, but controlled by Russian-backed separatists. I was one of them.

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For the remainder of the '90s, the first three proceeded reasonably well, and were even helped by the Russians. Regrettably, conflict resolution languished. When in 2001 it became clear that the new Russian president regarded South Ossetia as a geopolitical tool to destabilize Georgia, a war of words ensued until war seemed inevitable.

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Although President Mikheil Saakashvili tried to negotiate, the separatists turned a deaf ear, which came to a well-orchestrated climax in August. Today there is much Moscow-inspired chatter about how the war started and what Saakashvili did or did not do on Aug. 7. Neither the international community nor the negotiators should fall into this Russian rhetorical trap.

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Georgian State Minister for Reintegration Temur Yakobashvili that Russian political representatives were unavailable and Moscow had lost control of the Kokoity regime, but it was too late.

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ABOUT THE WRITER

Dimitri Sanakoev is head of the Temporary Administrative Unit of South Ossetia, Georgia.

This essay is available to McClatchy-Tribune News Service subscribers. McClatchy-Tribune did not subsidize the writing of this column; the opinions are those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of McClatchy-Tribune or its editors.

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