

The 2009-11 Bombing Campaign in Georgia: Who Did It, and Why?

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SILK ROAD PAPER
March 2012



Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program

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A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center

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“The 2009-11 Bombing Campaign in Georgia: Who Did It, and Why?” is a *Silk Road Paper* published by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and the Silk Road Studies Program. The Silk Road Papers Series is the Occasional Paper series of the Joint Center, and addresses topical and timely subjects. The Joint Center is a transatlantic independent and non-profit research and policy center. It has offices in Washington and Stockholm and is affiliated with the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of Johns Hopkins University and the Stockholm-based Institute for Security and Development Policy. It is the first institution of its kind in Europe and North America, and is firmly established as a leading research and policy center, serving a large and diverse community of analysts, scholars, policy-watchers, business leaders, and journalists. The Joint Center is at the forefront of research on issues of conflict, security, and development in the region. Through its applied research, publications, research cooperation, public lectures, and seminars, it functions as a focal point for academic, policy, and public discussion regarding the region.

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ISBN: 978-91-86635-28-2

Printed in Singapore

Distributed in North America by:

The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute
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1619 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel. +1-202-663-7723; Fax. +1-202-663-7785
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Distributed in Europe by:

The Silk Road Studies Program
Institute for Security and Development Policy
V. Finnbodavägen 2, SE-13130 Stockholm-Nacka
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Executive Summary

From 2009 to 2011, Georgia was rocked by a number of bombing attacks against various targets around the country, including the perimeter of the U.S. Embassy building in Tbilisi. The bombing attacks constituted serious crimes with damaging implications for both Georgia itself and for Western interests of stability and development in the region. However, Western governments have largely failed to publicly acknowledge the seriousness of the incidents.

This study addresses three central questions that flow from the bombing campaign in Georgia. Simply put, these are: who did it; why did they; and what, if anything, should Western governments do about it?

With regard to the first question, Georgian investigators have implicated Russian intelligence services in the bombings. While many observers cast doubt on these serious accusations, the notion is not as controversial as it may appear. In fact, Russian special services have been implicated in a number of criminal acts abroad in the last decade, including the 2006 assassination of Alexandr Litvinenko in London. As it emerged that American investigators agreed with the conclusions of the Georgian investigation, skeptics have argued that if Russian intelligence services were involved, this was likely ‘rogue units’ acting on their own initiative, not on orders from Moscow.

This study finds that the evidence of Russian involvement in the 2009-11 bombings in Georgia is compelling, and moreover, that the notion of ‘rogue units’ being responsible lacks credibility. The evidence produced by Georgian investigators, self-incriminating behavior of Russian officials in Abkhazia, and not least the credible accounts provided by five detainees interviewed by the authors of this paper all point to this conclusion. Moreover, several factors make it highly unlikely that ‘rogue units’ could have been responsible. First, the evidence implicates a number of different Russian security officers, notably representing both military intelligence (GRU) and the civilian

security service (FSB). Furthermore, the 'rogue' theory is inconsistent with the organizational structure of the Russian security services. Over the last decade, Russian security agencies have come under firm central command. Experts on Russian intelligence consulted for this study unanimously agreed that it is highly unlikely that Russian intelligence officers in Abkhazia or South Ossetia could operate independently from their superiors in Moscow. This makes it plausible that the bombing campaign was in fact sanctioned at the highest levels in Moscow and, as such, is part and parcel of Russian policy toward Georgia.

Why, then, would Russian authorities order such actions? This study concludes that it flows from Moscow's continuing quest for controlling its 'near abroad,' which leads to a consistent drive to undermine the political and economic development of an increasingly independent and democratic Georgia. Neither the recent bombing campaign, nor the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, can be viewed as isolated incidents: together with other measures including a Russian trade embargo, they form part of a broader conflict between Russia and Georgia that dates to the early 1990s, and that continues to cause instability throughout the region. Thus, while the 2009-11 events alone do not pose a mortal threat to Georgia, they should be viewed in conjunction with Russia's continuous military pressure and economic warfare against Georgia.

What implications do these findings have for Western policy-makers? First and foremost, they underline that the conflict between Russia and Georgia is not over, and that there is a continuous need for greater Western engagement in the region, especially in the security sphere. The study recommends the following concrete steps for Western governments:

- First, Western governments need to be more forthcoming on what they know concerning the bombing campaign. U.S. officials have sought to downplay the controversy, while European officials have kept silence on the issue. Washington reportedly raised its concerns at the highest levels with the Russian leadership; and while its quiet diplomacy probably contributed to halting this specific bombing campaign, it almost certainly did nothing to change Russia's broader policies. Only a more robust and public exposure of Russian covert

actions in Georgia could lead to a fundamental rethink of the policy environment that permitted the use of such measures in the first place.

- Second, the U.S. and Europe should upgrade their defense cooperation with Georgia, focusing on two key areas: broadened intelligence cooperation to boost Georgia's ability to withstand Russian covert actions; and support in terms of both procurement and training to support Georgia's territorial defense.
- In this vein, the Obama Administration should embrace the principles of the section on Georgia in the Defense Authorization Act of 2012. While its reservations to the provision on constitutional grounds is understandable, the administration has no reason not to embrace the spirit of the bill, which seeks to improve the Georgian government's ability to defend its sovereignty, population and territory. Implementing the measures agreed upon during President Saakashvili's February 2012 visit to Washington will be a good beginning.
- European governments should raise their concerns over Russian covert action in Georgia with Moscow, and redouble their efforts to secure Russian compliance with the EU-brokered six-point cease-fire agreement concluded between Tbilisi and Moscow in August 2008 – most notably, seeking to reverse Moscow's refusal to allow the EU Monitoring Mission into Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
- Finally, American and European governments should facilitate Georgian integration with NATO and the EU, on the basis solely of Georgia's merits. Moscow's destabilizing policies appear devised with the assumption that they delay or undermine Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. If Russian leaders are convinced that each step to destabilize Georgia will be met by ever more determined Western openness to Georgia's integration with European institutions, the logic of its destabilizing policies will be turned on its head.

Introduction

From 2009 to 2011, a wave of attacks was carried out against various targets around Georgia. One of the most significant took place on September 22, 2010, when a bomb exploded just outside the perimeter of the U.S. embassy in Tbilisi. In total, eight actual bombings, and what appears to be more than 20 planned bombing attacks, resulted in two deaths, two injuries, and material damage at various targets around Georgia, as well as contributing to insecurity in Georgian society.

A number of individuals originating predominantly in Georgia's occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, have since been detained by Georgian authorities for these crimes. The detainees testified that they were acting under the direction of different representatives of the Russian security services GRU and FSB, who used various means to compel them to carry out the attacks - including threats against their families, often combined with promises of cash payments. These accounts are backed up by information provided by Georgian police intelligence, including telephone interceptions that show mobile phone communication between several of the detainees and Russian intelligence officers or officials of the *de facto* governments, whose security structures have long been under strong Russian influence.

The accusations leveled by Georgian officials are indeed grave, suggesting that Moscow has been engaged in what effectively amounts to terrorist attacks on Georgian territory. Perhaps exactly because of their gravity, these accusations have been met with skepticism by Western officials and analysts. Thus, writing in *The Atlantic*, Joshua Foust subtitled a piece "it's possible that the Georgian government is intentionally misleading journalists."¹ Samuel Charap wrote in *Foreign Policy* of an "improbable story

¹ Joshua Foust, "Did a Russian Terrorist Really Blow Up the American Embassy in Tbilisi?", *The Atlantic*, 22 July 2011. (<http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/07/did-a-russian-terrorist-really-blow-up-the-american-embassy-in-tblisi/242362/>)

about Moscow's complicity in a string of bombings last year in Georgia,” and that “there isn't adequate information to prove much of anything conclusively about this disturbing case, and certainly not a Kremlin-hatched bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi.”²

Indeed, reactions to the allegations have broken down along similar lines as reactions to the 2008 war in Georgia. Those that tended to chiefly blame Georgian leaders for the war have been more skeptical, while those that assigned the lion share of the blame for the war on Russia take the allegations seriously, occasionally drawing far-reaching conclusions. Thus, Senator Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) offered that if true, this incident “would constitute the most serious crisis in U.S.-Russian relations since the Cold War and put to lie any ‘reset’ in bilateral relations.” the *Weekly Standard* headlined an article “Russia bombed U.S. Embassy,” although the bomb actually exploded outside the perimeter of the Embassy compound.

Thanks to the reporting of Eli Lake of the *Washington Times*, it is now known that following that bombing U.S. Intelligence officials launched a formal investigation into the incident, including interviews with the detainees. The investigation resulted in a report which has remained classified. However, as information about the content of the report leaked to the *Washington Times*, a series of July 2011 articles reported that the investigation confirmed Tbilisi's account of the events, more precisely that several of the attacks, including the September 2010 attack near the U.S. Embassy, had been designed by Major Egveny Semyonovich Borisov, a Russian GRU officer based in the Gali region of occupied Abkhazia.³ Reporters of the *New York Times* subsequently confirmed this intelligence community assessment through their own sources.⁴

² Samuel Charap, “Reset This”, *Foreign Policy*, 12 August 2011.

(http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/08/12/reset_this?page=full)

³ Eli Lake, “Russian agent linked to U.S. Embassy blast: Allegations could disable ‘reset’ button with Moscow”, *Washington Times*, 21 July 2011; “Classified Report: Russia Tied To Blast at U.S. Embassy”, *The Washington Times*, 26 July 2011; “Clinton raised issue of a Russian link to bombing in Georgia”, *The Washington Times*, 28 July 2011.

⁴ Ellen Barry and Mark Mazzetti, “U.S. Ties a Russian to Bombings in Georgia,” *New York Times*, 28 July 2011.

(http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/29/world/europe/29georgia.html?_r=1)

Following these revelations, a number of erstwhile skeptics now accept that the evidence of the involvement of Russian security officers appears incontrovertible. This led the discussion to shift: analysts have continued to maintain that the sheer illogical nature of such a plot suggests that top decision-makers in Moscow were unlikely to have been behind them, and that the blame must therefore lie with ‘rogue’ Russian agents in Abkhazia and South Ossetia acting on their own behalf and not according to orders from their superiors in Moscow. Thus, Thomas De Waal draws a parallel to Turkey’s “deep state” – loosely connected and partly criminalized groups with various levels of connection with official state institutions but acting autonomously and on their own behalf – suggesting Russia is suffering from a similar affliction. While acknowledging that “the evidence for Russian culpability in the incidents [is] compelling”, De Waal nevertheless concludes that it is “unlikely that President Dmitry Medvedev or Prime Minister Vladimir Putin would be so stupid as to order these small, nasty and counterproductive operations.” Instead, he argues, there is “a culture of impunity in which illegal activity and assassinations are possible, even if they are not directly ordered from the top.”⁵

This question is far from trivial. If ‘rogue’ units of the Russian security services are responsible for bombing campaigns abroad, that would constitute an aberration – but one that is very troublesome, since such campaigns could then occur most anywhere depending on the whims of such rogue units. If they are not, they would constitute government policy – with entirely different implications for Western perceptions of Russia’s international role, and presumably for Western policies toward Russia and the independent states in what used to be the Soviet Union.

This study suggests that deeper research into the string of bombings leaves little doubt that these attacks and attempted attacks against various targets around Georgia were in fact planned and ordered by individuals associated with the Russian military intelligence service, the GRU, or the foreign security service, the FSB. Further, it concludes that these were highly unlikely to be ‘rogue’ operations. In other words, the argument that the

⁵ Tomas de Waal, “Russia’s Toxic Deep State”, in *National Interest*, 30 August 2011 (<http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/russias-toxic-deep-state-5819>).

attacks do not necessarily implicate Russian decision-making structures ignores two key facts. First, these are not isolated incidents linked to a single individual, but recurring events linked to Russian officials in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Secondly, these organizations, particularly the GRU, a military body with a strong chain of command, are strongly hierarchical organizations. Indeed, experts on Russia's security agencies consulted for this study stress the extremely unlikely nature of the proposition that these individuals or groups could operate outside the chain of command. At the very least, the attacks could certainly have been halted at an early stage in Moscow. At most, they constitute policies designed by the very high echelons of Russian power.

Timeline of Events

The chronology in this section is based on multiple sources, including personal observations and notes by the authors; news reporting; interviews with several of the individuals who are currently detained or convicted for carrying out or attempting to carry out the bombings in Georgia in 2009-2011, and with officials in Tbilisi and Washington, D.C.

February 2005

A car bomb in the city of Gori, near South Ossetia, kills three policemen and injures 25 people. Three men are arrested for the crime in July. In August, Georgian Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili, citing confessions by the detainees, accuses South Ossetia-based GRU Colonel Anatolii Sysoev for masterminding the plot.

January 2006

Explosions on the Russian side of the Georgian-Russian border destroy the main natural gas pipeline supplying Georgia and Armenia with gas, as well as the Caucasus high voltage transmission line which provides electricity to Georgia. Russia blames unidentified terrorists. The explosions deprive Georgia of its major source of electricity and gas for several weeks. In March, Russia imposes an import ban on Georgian wine and mineral water.

September-October 2006

Georgia deports six Russian intelligence agents accused of espionage against Georgia. Russia responds through escalating its trade embargo on Georgia, including halting all transportation and communication links. In Moscow, Russian law enforcement agencies raid Georgian businesses and begin deporting Georgian citizens.

March 11, 2007

Unidentified helicopters attack government buildings in the Kodori Gorge, the only part of the breakaway region of Abkhazia that had remained under Georgian control. A report by the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) investigating the incident did not officially accuse Russia for the incident, but its conclusions left no other possible explanation, as the helicopters are identified as having come from the North, that is Russian territory.⁶ However, Western leaders fail to react.

August 6, 2007

An unidentified aircraft drops a missile near a Georgian radar station in the village of Tsitelubani, in close proximity of the now occupied region of South Ossetia. Teams of European and American experts conclude that the attack was likely performed by the Russian Air Force.⁷

April 21, 2008

An unarmed Georgian UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) is downed over Abkhazia. Radar recordings and footage from the UAV's own camera shows that the UAV is shot down by a MiG-29 aircraft, which after the incident departs into Russian airspace. Subsequently, a UNOMIG (United Nation Observer Mission in Georgia) investigation concludes that the aircraft was Russian. The incident causes a diplomatic standoff between Tbilisi and Moscow. Russia denies responsibility for the incident, claiming the plane

⁶ See e.g. "UNOMIG on Russian Involvement in Kodori", *NIS Observed*, 26 July 2007, at <http://www.bu.edu/phpbin/news-cms/news/?dept=732&id=46076>.

⁷ For more information see Svante E. Cornell, David J. Smith, and S. Frederick Starr "The August 6 Bombing Incident in Georgia: Implications for the Euro-Atlantic Region", *Silk Road Paper*, October 2007.

was shot down by the Abkhaz air defense troops, which at the time did not possess MiG-29 aircraft.

August 2008

Russia invades Georgia, following skirmishes in late July that begin in South Ossetia and which escalate into hostilities. The invasion almost immediately spills into Abkhazia as well as Georgia proper. The immediate hostilities end through a EU-brokered ceasefire agreement concluded on August 12. However, Russia fails to live up to its obligations under the agreement as it refuses to withdraw its troops to their original positions. Russia thus remains on Georgian territory as an occupying power, effectively controlling approximately 20% of Georgian territory.

June 2009

On June 2, an explosion occurs on the Khobi-Inguri Railway bridge in the Samegrelo region, two hours before the scheduled crossing of the bridge by a passenger train. On June 22, a second attack is carried out near a 500-kilowatt electricity transmission tower close to the village of Mujava, in the Samegrelo region. One person, Merab Kolbaia, is later detained for the attacks. Kolbaia states to the Georgian authorities that the attacks were ordered by Russian Major Evgeny Borisov, a GRU-officer serving at the Russian military base in Gali, Abkhazia. According to the Georgian Ministry of Interior, Borisov is believed at the time of writing to serve in the Gali district of Abkhazia. Prior to the August 2008 war, he served at the Southern headquarters of the Russian Peacekeeping Forces in Urta, Zugdidi district in Samegrelo. He was then deputy chief of staff, responsible for public relations – although suspected by the Georgian authorities of acting undercover for the Russian GRU. Since 2008, he is serving with the Russian military contingent in Abkhazia. Between September 2009 and October 2010, he was the main contact point for the Incident Prevention and Response hotline in Abkhazia.

May 5, 2010

Dimitri Kordzadze, Head of the Adjara Division of the Georgian MIA's Emergency Situations Management Department, is killed in an explosion occurring when driving his car in central Batumi. His fellow passenger, Badri Laparadze, is badly injured in the attack. Georgian police later detains four persons – Temur Butbaia, Otar Rogava, David Rokva and Levan Kartskhava – for the attack.⁸ The detainees testify to having been ordered to carry out the attack by Russian GRU officers Evgeny Marenko and Aleksei Nalivkin, both based at the Russian 7th military base in Abkhazia.⁹ Temur Butbaia confirms this to the authors in an interview on September 2 2011.

September 22, 2010

An explosion occurs at approximately 01:20 AM in the outskirts of Tbilisi, just outside the perimeter of the U.S. Embassy. At the site, the Georgian police discover a second explosive device, which is destroyed with water cannons.¹⁰ Two individuals, Gogita Arkania and Merab Kolbaia, are later convicted for the attack. The convicts assert that the attacks were ordered and directed by Borisov. The same day, Georgian President Saakashvili meets with U.S. billionaire Donald Trump in New York to discuss the latter's potential investments in Georgia.¹¹

October 3, 2010

The EUMM receives a call from Lt. Col. Aleksander Berchenko, chief of the Incident Prevention and Rescue Hotline (IPRH) in Abkhazia, who inquires whether there has been a train accident between Senaki and Poti, involving casualties.¹² Berchenko claims to have been informed about the accident by persons crossing the Administrative Boundary Line into Abkhazia. The EUMM inquires to the Ministry of Interior in Tbilisi but neither organization finds any information about such an incident. Four days later,

⁸ The arrests took place in February-March of 2011.

⁹ Reporting about the incident, as well as Temur Butbaia's testimony, is available at: <http://www.itv.ge/News-View.aspx?Location=19488&LangID=2>.

¹⁰ "Blast in Tbilisi", *Civil Georgia*, 22 September 2010.

¹¹ "Saakashvili meets Trump in New York", *Civil Georgia*, 22 September 2010.

¹² Confirmed to the author's by the EUMM on 29 October 2011.

on October 7, locals in the village of Chaladidi in the Samegrelo district discover an undetonated bomb close to the Chaladidi railway bridge, located between the Georgian cities of Senaki and Poti. A Georgian special Police force team defuses the bomb. Gogita Arkania and Merab Kolbaia later testify to having placed explosives on the said location on October 2, but without detonating the devices. Notably, Arkania described to the author how he lied to Borisov about not detonating the bomb, insisting that the attack was carried out according to plan.¹³

October – November 2010

On October 21, two explosions occur at the Tbilisi Central Railway Station, not causing any injuries. A month later, on November 28, a bomb explodes at approximately 10:20 PM outside the Labor Party headquarters in central Tbilisi. A 65-year-old woman who is sleeping in the building is killed as a result of the explosion. Shortly thereafter, a second bomb explodes outside a supermarket in the Mukhiani suburb of Tbilisi.¹⁴ Gogita Arkania and Merab Kolbaia later confess to having carried out both sets of attacks, which they state were ordered by Borisov. Days later, Georgian authorities break up a spy network associated with the GRU. Thirteen individuals (9 Georgian and 4 Russian citizens) are arrested for espionage activities and involvement with the GRU.¹⁵

December 2010

Georgia arrests and formally charges six Georgian citizens, including Gogita Arkania, for their involvement in the bombings over the fall of 2010. The evidence put forward includes confessions by several of the detainees, as well as explosives seized in connection with the arrests. In Arkania's case, this includes 13 explosive devices found in an apartment belonging to one of his accomplices. The bombs were to be used in upcoming attacks. Four of the

¹³ Author's interview with Gogita Arkania, Gldani prison 8, Tbilisi, 30 August 2011.

¹⁴ "One Dies in Two Blasts in Tbilisi", *Civil Georgia*, 28 November 2010.

¹⁵ "9 Georgian, 4 Russian Citizens among Arrested 'Spies'", *Civil Georgia*, 5 November 2010.

bombs contained nails, which suggest that they were designed to cause human injury. In addition to the detainees, Borisov and his deputy, GRU official Mukhran Tskhadaia, are sentenced to prison in absentia. Evidence of their involvement includes testimonies by several of the detainees, as well as a series of phone interceptions between Arkania and Borisov or Tskhadaia in connection with the attacks.

December 15-16, 2010

The Georgian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, through the Swiss Embassy in Tbilisi (which handles Russian interests in Georgia in the absence of diplomatic relations between the two states) submits a formal request to the Russian authorities of cooperation in investigating the bombing incidents in the fall of 2010. The Georgian MFA specifically asks the Russian authorities to question Evgeny Borisov in the presence of Georgian authorities, and to hand over two persons that are suspected to be involved in the case, both Georgian citizens residing in the occupied region of Abkhazia.¹⁶ To date, the Russian authorities have failed to reply to the request.¹⁷

March 31, 2011

Five persons are detained for attempted bombings of three administrative buildings (Including the House of Justice and the Labor Party office) in the city of Kutaisi in the Samegrelo region. Georgian police seize explosives from the main suspect, Manuchar Dzadzua, in Zugdidi. Dzadzua describes in his testimony that he was approached and ordered by a Russian officer going by the name of Volodya to carry out the attack. The Georgian authorities link the incident to GRU officer Aleksey Sergevich Ushakov, serving since 2009 for the Russian FSB border unit in Gali, Abkhazia.¹⁸

¹⁶ “Georgia Formally Requests Russia’s Cooperation in Bombings Investigation, Transfers Case File via Swiss”, *Media release by the Georgian Foreign Ministry*, 16 December 2010.

¹⁷ Author’s interviews with Georgian government officials in Tbilisi, October 2011.

¹⁸ Author’s interview with Georgian MoI officials, Tbilisi, October 2011.

April 3, 2011

Two Gali-based Georgian citizens, Koba Matkava¹⁹ and Eldar Kolbaia, are detained for attempted bombings of the central boulevard in Zugdidi. Matkava states in his testimony that he was offered US\$3,000 to carry out the attacks by a Russian officer, claiming to be working for Borisov, in March 2011.

June 2, 2011

Two Gali-based Georgian citizens, Tamila Benia and Abesalom Chkhetia are detained in the vicinity of Zugdidi for carrying a bag containing 4 kilograms of hexogen to Senaki. The bomb is neutralized by the demining unit of the Georgian Ministry of Internal affairs.²⁰ Benia describes in her testimony that she was offered US\$ 5,000 by Russian officers Igor Vlasov and Sergei Kuzmin, both serving for the FSB border unit in Gali, Abkhazia, to place and detonate the explosives in the center of Senaki. The incident coincided with Georgian President Saakashvili's meeting with US vice President Biden in Rome, and Russian Prime Minister Putin's visit to Abkhazia.²¹

June 6, 2011

The Georgian Ministry of Interior detains Georgian citizen Badri Bagiashvili, a resident of the Akhgori district in South Ossetia, for attempting to transport an explosive device to Tbilisi. Bagiashvili states in his testimony that he was acting under instructions from the chief of the Russian FSB border unit in Akhgori, Aleksey Nikolaevich Sokolov, who

¹⁹ Nephew of Mukhran Tskhadaia, wanted for co-organizing the series of bombings in Tbilisi and Samegrelo in the fall of 2010.

²⁰ The demining work was taped and broadcasted at <http://police.ge/index.php?m=8&newsid=2519&lng=eng>.

²¹ "Biden meets Saakashvili in Rome", "Putin meets Ankvab, Shamba in Sukhumi", *Civil Georgia*, 2 June 2011.

promised Bagiashvili US\$2,000 to place and detonate the bomb outside the NATO Liaison office building in Tbilisi.²²

July 2011

Georgian authorities arrest and detain three photographers, including Georgian President Saakashvili's personal photographer Irakli Gedenidze, for espionage activities for Russia. On July 22 the photographers' sentences are suspended following a plea bargain agreement with the prosecutors.²³

July 21-29 2011

Washington Times reporter Eli Lake breaks the story of the existence of an investigative report conducted by the American FBI, which confirms the Georgian account of circumstances surrounding the September 22, 2010 attack against the U.S. Embassy.²⁴ This includes the involvement of Borisov in the attack. The story is downplayed by U.S. administration officials, who stated that there was "no consensus on responsibility for the Tbilisi blast".²⁵

²² Author's interview with Badri Bagiashvili Tbilisi, August 30 2011. Bagiashvili's official testimony is available at <http://www.police.ge/index.php?m=8&newsid=2521&lng=geo>.

²³ "Georgia Frees Three Photojournalists in Spy Case", BBC News Europe, 22 July 2011, 15:35 GMT.

²⁴ Eli Lake, "Russian Agent Linked to U.S. Embassy Blast" and "Classified Report: Russia Tied To Blast at U.S. Embassy", *The Washington Times*, 21 July 2011 and 26 July 2011.

²⁵ Eli Lake, "Clinton Raised Issue of a Russian Link to Bombing in Georgia", *The Washington Times*, 29 July 2011.

Understanding the Bombings and their Implications

The bombing campaign in Georgia poses several questions. First, who was responsible for these bombings? Second, why were these attacks designed and implemented, and what does this imply for the security of Georgia and in the South Caucasus more broadly? And finally, what are the implications for Western policy-makers?

Who Did It?

Assessing responsibility for the bombing campaign requires answering two separate but related questions. First, were the Russian security services behind the campaign? And second, if they were, at what level was such a campaign likely ordered?

As observed earlier, the allegation that Russia was behind the bombing campaign is a serious one. But in the context of former Soviet politics, it is not as outrageous an accusation as it may appear at first sight. Throughout the post-Soviet period, Russian security services have been implicated in a number of high-profile and controversial cases. The most publicized is undoubtedly the murder of KGB defector Alexandr Litvinenko by polonium poisoning in London in 2006, which British investigators conclusively tied to former KGB and GRU officers. Equally brazen was the murder of Chechen exiled leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev in Doha in 2004. Qatari authorities detained and convicted two Russian GRU officers for the murder, and concluded that the assassination had been ordered by Russian defense minister Sergey Ivanov.²⁶ Closer to home, Russian security services have maintained active networks in all former Soviet states, and their involvement has been alleged in a long series of incidents. An example is the dioxin poisoning of Ukrainain presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko in

²⁶ “Sergei Ivanov Tied to the Case of the Russian ins Qatar”, *Kommersant*, 14 April 2004 (http://www.kommersant.com/p466o8o/r_1/Sergei_Ivanov_Tied_to_the_Case/).

2004.²⁷ In Georgia, the timeline provided in this paper includes a number of instances of violent incidents implicating the Russian security services. Wikileaks documents have revealed that the U.S. Government has long suspected a Russian hand behind a variety of incidents in Georgia over the past decade. In 2007, then U.S. Ambassador John Tefft wrote a cable detailing alleged Russian covert actions including military attacks, murders, sabotage, espionage, support for separatists and minority extremists, and disinformation. He concluded that “the cumulative weight of the evidence of the last few years suggests that the Russians are aggressively playing a high-stakes, covert game, and they consider few if any holds barred.”²⁸

This background in no way constitutes proof that Russian security services were involved in the bombing spree of 2009-II. Nevertheless, it suggests that a Russian link is not outside the domain of the possible, that it may even be plausible if put in broader context. Specific evidence of Russian involvement is, however, compelling.

- The strongest evidence is indisputably the testimonies by the individuals charged or sentenced for their involvement in the different incidents. Their statements have been made public in part by Georgian authorities. The authors of this study were given permission to interview the detainees, and found that the accounts by the detainees interviewed overall appear credible both in general terms and concerning specific details that match the confessions they had previously made to Georgian prosecutors, as well as available evidence. The possibility that these confessions could have been made under duress can never be entirely excluded, yet it is highly unlikely given the internal consistency of the detainees’ stories and the accompanying

²⁷ Ukrainian investigators have concluded that the enhanced form of dioxin used in the poisoning could only have been produced at a small number of laboratories in the U.S., Russia, or a few other countries, and have traced the dioxin to Russian state-controlled laboratories, suggesting official Russian involvement. See Taras Kuzio, “Yushchenko Poisoning Investigation Nearing Climax”, *Eurasia Daily Monitoring*, 17 February 2005. (http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=27564); “Ukraina Zayavlyayet o prichastnosti k otrovleniyu Yushchenko generala FSB Rossii”, *Kommersant*, 30 November 2009 (<http://www.kommersant.ru/news/1284245>).

²⁸ U.S. Embassy Tbilisi, “Russian Active Measures in Georgia”, 20 July 2007, at <http://www.wikileaks.de/cable/2007/07/07TBILIS1732.html>.

evidence. Four of the detainees interviewed were consistent and credible; one, Manuchar Dzadzua, nevertheless appeared more incoherent than the others (see appendix A). One detainee, Merab Kolbaia, declined an interview.

- A second major indication of Russian responsibility is the telephone interceptions (appendix B) – that allegedly have been confirmed by the FBI.²⁹ These records show frequent communication between two of the main perpetrators of the attacks, Gogita Arkania and Merab Kolbaia, and a Russian registered mobile phone which the Georgian authorities have linked to the Russian defense ministry and Borisov's former deputy, Andrei Goriachev; as well as between Temur Butbaia and Russian GRU officers Aleksei Nalivkin and Evgeny Marenko.³⁰
- A third indication is the phone call by Lt. Col Aleksander Berchenko to the EUMM on October 3, 2010. The phone call suggests that the Russian military unit in Abkhazia had prior knowledge of the planned attack. Only several days after this telephone call, on October 7, did Georgian police discover the undetonated explosives at the railway bridge.
- Fourth, the similarities of the bombs used in the different attacks suggest that they came from the same source. Importantly, this is true for all the explosives, i.e. both the ones that were transported by agents from Abkhazia and those that came from Akhagori, South Ossetia. Moreover, several of the testimonies (especially Arkania's and Bagiashvili's) suggest that the bombs were brought to them from

²⁹ Authors' interviews with Georgian MOI officials, Tbilisi, August-September 2011.

³⁰ The Russian officers were identified from photographs by detainees.

northern locations, and that the responsible officers appeared to be acting under instructions from higher levels of a chain of command.³¹

Thus, it seems beyond reasonable doubt that Russian intelligence officials in Abkhazia and South Ossetia were implicated in the bombing spree. This leaves the issue whether the attacks were ordered or sanctioned by authorities in Moscow or even the Kremlin, or if the incidents were the work of separate ‘rogue’ individuals or sub-cells of the Russian security services.³² The research conducted for the present study suggests that the ‘rogue’ theory is untenable.

- First, evidence implicates not one, but eight Russian intelligence officers as responsible for ordering the attacks. Notably, these persons do not exclusively represent the GRU branch in Abkhazia: at least one of the attacks appears to have been ordered by an FSB officer based in South Ossetia, Aleksey Sokolov. This suggests that the incidents cannot be the result of one person, or an isolated group of individuals, who acted independently within the Russian security services.
- Second, the size of the payments offered and often delivered to the detainees are inconsistent with the ‘rogue’ theory. Some of the sums were significant, such as the US\$ 50,000 to Butbaia and Rokava after the assassination of MOI officer Kodzadze in May 2010. This suggests that the attacks were ordered from higher in the chain of command.
- Third, the ‘rogue’ theory is inconsistent with the organizational structure of the Russian security services. Such a scenario could well have been possible in the early 1990s, when the chain of command had collapsed following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. At that time,

³¹ Analysis carried out by the demining division of the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs of explosives used in eight of the incidents concluded that while the size, shape and packaging of the bombs would vary, the composition of the explosive substances was identical in all the cases: all of the bombs contained 79,7% Hexogen³¹, 13,4% oil and 6,9% unidentified calcium substance. All the devices were equipped with MD-5M type fuses – in all cases the detonating cords were attached to the bodies of the fuses with insulating tape. From early 2011, the bombs got notably more complicated (constructed in a way to detonate automatically if moved – thus more sensitive). This was possibly a result of Georgian TV showing de-mining techniques.

³² See e.g. De Waal, “Russia’s Toxic Deep State”.

different groupings within the Russian state are known to have acted on their own behalf. But since the coming to power of Vladimir Putin in 1999, the agencies of the Russian state have again come under central control – and none more so than the security services. Indeed, experts on the Russian security services consulted by the authors of this study, including former employees, are unanimous in dismissing the possibility that agents in Abkhazia or South Ossetia could plan and execute such plots independently. Thus, Konstantin Preobrazhensky, a former KGB official and author who received political asylum in the United States in 2006, found it ‘inconceivable’ that such a plot would have been conducted by officials in Abkhazia or South Ossetia independently of their superiors in Moscow. He argued, furthermore, that such a plot would necessarily have been approved at very high levels of the Russian state hierarchy. Similarly, Historian Amy Knight, a leading Western scholar on Russian intelligence services, wrote to the authors that “it looks like Evgeny Borisov is indeed an officer from the GRU, as the Russians have not denied that. It cannot be said with certainty that he was responsible for the bombing, since we have been offered no proof by the Georgians or the CIA. But if Borisov was the one who orchestrated the bombing, there can be no doubt that he was directed to do so by his superiors in Moscow and they would never have embarked on such an operation without the sanction of the highest levels in the Kremlin.”³³

Thus, it is highly unlikely that the bombing spree in Georgia was conducted by ‘rogue’ units of the Russian security services. As such, they appear to have been part and parcel of broader Russian policy toward Georgia. This leads to the obvious and often posed question, why Russian authorities would order such actions.

Why Were the Attacks Ordered?

If the Russian security services were indeed implicated in the bombings, and if these were not ‘rogue’ operations, why would Russian leaders engage in what may appear as amateur or small-scale activities of this sort, with rather

³³ Email correspondence to author, October 2011.

limited impact? Or in De Waal's words, "if [Russian leaders] wanted to hurt Georgia, there are much more effective ways of doing so. These acts caused mercifully little damage in Georgia and a lot of political damage to Russia in Washington."³⁴

Any answer to this question must begin with assessing the nature of Russian-Georgian relations, and Russian designs on Georgia. Russian policy toward Georgia does not exist in a vacuum: it is only the most pronounced example of Russia's continued quest for an exclusive sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space. Russian policies toward the West changed considerably for the better since the onset of the 'Reset' – only to deteriorate recently as the Kremlin's domestic position deteriorated, necessitating an external enemy. However, Russian policies toward what it considers its 'near abroad' never changed.³⁵ In fact, from 2009 to 2011, Russia capitalized on the reduction of Western engagement with the region to expand its military presence in Ukraine and Armenia, and contributed directly to overthrowing the government of Kyrgyzstan in Spring 2010 for reneging on its promise to evict the United States from its air base in the country. It has continued to manipulate the unresolved conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, in Moldova, as well as in Georgia to maximize its influence on the countries involved. And, as Thomas Ambrosio has showed, Russian foreign policy is, at least in part, an 'authoritarian backlash': it explicitly targets democratization in the countries along its rim, for fear that democracy would make these states less malleable to its influence, and that it would set a precedent for pro-democracy forces in Russia itself.³⁶

In spite of having a considerable road yet to travel in its democratic development, Georgia stands out in the post-Soviet space: it remains the only surviving example of the 'color revolutions' that spread across Eurasia in 2003-05. It is, furthermore, the most obvious example of a state that defied Moscow's onslaught, and while paying a heavy price for doing so, continues

³⁴ De Waal, "Russia's Toxic Deep State".

³⁵ For a detailed overview of the issue, see Svante E. Cornell, "No Reset in the Post-Soviet Space", *Journal of International Security Affairs*, No. 20, Summer 2011. (http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/publications/2011-Cornell_JISA.pdf)

³⁶ Thomas Ambrosio, *Authoritarian Backlash: Russian Resistance to Democratization in the Former Soviet Union*, London: Ashgate, 2009.

to develop along its path of democratization and Euro-Atlantic integration. Therefore, it represents the most visible and vocal thorn in the eye both to the political designs of Russian leaders, and to their authoritarian model of government. Russian policies toward Georgia, thus, flow from Moscow's failure to achieve one of the stated aims of the 2008 invasion: the downfall of Georgia's democratically elected government.³⁷ Instead, Russian policies have focused on isolating Georgia and undermining its fragile political and economic stability.

Russia continues to violate the 2008 cease-fire agreement negotiated by the European Union, and to overtly seek regime change. It has rapidly expanded its military presence in the territories that it effectively occupies. In Abkhazia, this has entailed significantly rearming the Russian "7th military base" in the region, nearly doubling its number of military personnel and expelling the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), the only international monitoring mission in the region. Since 2008, Moscow has deployed approximately 1,500 Federal Security Service (FSB) troops as border guards along the administrative boundary lines currently separating the occupied territories from Georgia proper,³⁸ and is building a naval base in the Ochamchire region, which is expected to host up to 10 FSB border guard warships. In South Ossetia, Russia has undertaken equally assertive actions, including the deployment in December 2010 of a multiple-launch *Smerch* (Tornado) rocket systems with a range of 90 km – thus sufficient to hit Tbilisi as well as key military facilities in Gori.³⁹ In addition, Russia's

³⁷ In her memoir *No Higher Honor*, former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice details the demand made by Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov that Russia sought the ouster of Saakashvili. Further, French officials leaked to the press Vladimir Putin's statement to Nicolas Sarkozy that he would "hang [Saakashvili] by his balls." See e.g. "Vladimir Putin Wanted to Hang Georgia Leader 'By the Balls'", *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 November 2008.

(<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/3454154/Vladimir-Putin-threatened-to-hang-Georgia-leader-by-the-balls.html>) Ever since the war, Russian officials have considered Saakashvili a "political corpse".

³⁸ For details see e.g. Pavel Felgenhauer, "Russia Struggles to Establish a Viable Military Base in Abkhazia", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, February 18, 2010, and Johanna Popjanevski, "International Law and the Post-2008 Status Quo in Georgia", *Silk Road Paper*, May 2011.

³⁹ "Tbilisi condemns Russia's Smerch Rocket Systems in S.Ossetia", *Civil Georgia*, 7 December 2010.

wholesale economic embargo on Georgia essentially remains in place. Moscow is also distorting the reality in the conflict zones, arguing that it is not a party to the conflicts – that the conflicts are between Georgia on the one hand and the “independent states” of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on the other.⁴⁰

Since the 2008 war, opinions have diverged on whether that war should be seen as an isolated episode or as the most direct confrontation in a Russian-Georgian conflict that has raged for a number of years, perhaps since the independence of Georgia. The present authors have repeatedly argued the latter point, asserting that the conflict between Russia and Georgia did not begin in August 2008, nor did it end with the cease-fire that ended the overt hostilities. A closer analysis of the relationship suggests that Moscow has made it a priority since Georgia’s independence to assert control over that country’s foreign and domestic policies; and for that purpose, has used a variety of instruments ranging from diplomacy and economic sanctions to subversion and, on several occasions, direct use of military force.⁴¹

Viewed in this light, the bombing campaign is understandable as another instrument in the Russian-Georgian conflict. While it does not by itself constitute a mortal threat to Georgia, it serves in combination with Russia’s diplomatic and economic warfare to undermine the stability of the country, contributes to a siege mentality among Georgians leaders that prevents them from focusing on more mundane issues, and helps sustain a perception of instability that contributes to preventing a return of foreign investors to Georgia.

What Should Western Policy-Makers Do?

The 2009-2011 bombing spree has serious implications not only for Georgian-Russian relations, but for Western policy-making as well. It suggests that

⁴⁰ “We Don’t See Conflict Between Russia and Georgia—Lavrov,” News.az, December 3 2010, <http://news.az/articles/georgia/27708>; “Russia Warns of ‘Confrontational’ UN Document on Refugees,” *Russia Today*, August 26, 2009, <http://rt.com/politics/russia-warns-confrontational-document/>.

⁴¹ Svante E. Cornell, *Georgia After the Rose Revolution: Geopolitical Predicament and Implications for U.S. Policy*, Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2007.

many of the assumptions about Georgia's security and relations with Russia are mistaken; and calls for greater Western involvement to secure key Western interests.

To begin with, the bombing spree makes it clear that contrary to the assumptions of many, the conflict between Russia and Georgia is far from over, and that the post-2008 status quo is unsustainable. It suggests that the Russian leadership continues to view the South Caucasus in zero-sum terms, as an area within its exclusive sphere of influence. And it suggests that Russia is actively working to undermine the political and economic development of Georgia.

Second, it suggests that Russia has failed to reciprocate the goodwill that the Obama-administration demonstrated through the 'Reset' policy. In fact, Russia exploited America's goodwill, interpreting it as American disengagement from the post-Soviet space and as a green light to consolidate its sphere of influence.

Third, it exposes the danger of the absence of a Western strategy in Georgia and the South Caucasus. The region is becoming an ever more important transit zone for energy supplies from the Caspian Sea to Europe; transit between NATO and Afghanistan; as well as an ever-expanding trade route linking Europe with Central Asia. Georgia, as the only state of the South Caucasus or Central Asia having an outlet to the sea, is a key logistical hub, on whose security broader Western access to the Caspian region and Central Asia hinges. Yet the bombing campaign suggests that Western leaders have not taken the challenges to Georgia's security seriously enough; and the concomitant lack of attention to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict suggests the problem goes beyond Georgia. While the EUMM has had a stabilizing influence, and the U.S. Government reportedly raised security concerns, including the bombing campaign, at the highest levels with the Russian government, these measures are not a replacement for a strategy.

While the issue of a Western strategy toward the South Caucasus is beyond the scope of this paper, such a strategy is direly needed. As far as Georgia is concerned, however, several items appear called for.

- First, Western governments need to be more forthcoming on what they know concerning the bombing campaign. So far, U.S. officials have sought to downplay the controversy, while the absence of a denial of the relevant press reports suggest that these are, indeed, correct. European officials, for their part, have not commented on the issue. The U.S. Administration has reportedly raised its concerns at the highest levels with the Russian leadership, and its quiet diplomacy may have contributed to halting the bombing campaign. It has almost certainly done nothing to change Russian policies, however. Only a more robust and public exposure of Russian covert actions in Georgia would be likely to lead to a fundamental rethink of the policy environment that permitted the use of such measures in the first place.
- Second, the U.S. and Europe should normalize and upgrade their defense cooperation with Georgia. Put on hold following the August 2008 war as a result of a reluctance to upset Moscow, such defense cooperation should be redoubled and focused on two key areas: first, broadened intelligence cooperation to further boost Georgia's ability to withstand Russian covert actions; and second, support in terms of both procurement and training to support Georgia's territorial defense. Such measures are important in and of themselves in improving Georgia's security; moreover, they would hold an important deterrent function to the apparent adventurist policies of the Kremlin. The U.S. seems on track to follow this path following President Saakashvili's February 2012 visit to Washington DC. The U.S. Government should implement the issues agreed upon during that meeting, while European governments should follow suit.
- In this vein, the Obama Administration should embrace the principles of the section on Georgia in the Defense Authorization Act of 2012. While the Obama Administration's reservations to the provision on constitutional grounds is understandable – affecting as it does the prerogative of the Executive in foreign and defense policy – there is no reason for the Administration not to embrace the spirit of the bill, which seeks to improve the Georgian government's ability to defend its sovereignty, population and territory.

- The EU and European governments, for their part, should raise their concerns with Russia on the subject of Moscow's covert actions in Georgia, and redouble their efforts to secure Russian compliance with the EU-brokered six-point cease-fire agreement concluded between Tbilisi and Moscow in August 2008. Europe has largely refrained from putting pressure on Moscow on this issue; most notably, the EU Monitoring Mission continues to be kept out of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russian and secessionist troops. Reversing this policy should be made into a priority issue in EU-Russian relations.
- Finally, Moscow's destabilizing policies are devised with the assumption that they delay or undermine Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. If Russian leaders are convinced that each step to destabilize Georgia will be met by ever more determined Western openness to Georgia's integration with European institutions, the logic of its destabilizing policies will be turned on its head. Thus, American and European governments should facilitate Georgian integration with NATO and the EU, on the basis of Georgia's merits alone.

Appendix A: Summary of Interviews with Detainees

Interviews with five of the individuals convicted or detained for the attacks took place between August 30 and September 2 2011 at prison and detention facilities in Tbilisi and Rustavi. Their stories are summarized below. The Georgian Ministry of Interior, as well as the Georgian National Security Council, facilitated these meetings. While the authors had requested to be alone with the detainees in the interviews this was not in all cases possible due to security concerns. Thus, in the interview with Gogita Arkania and Tamila Benia a Georgian MOI representative was present in the room, and in the case of Badri Bagishvili: instead a police representative. Two of the interviews, with Manuchar Dzadzua and Temur Butbaia, were conducted alone with only an independent translator present in the room.

Out of the interviewees, Gogita Arkania and Temur Butbaia were most inclined to share their stories. Tamila Benia was more reluctant than the others, quoting health concerns as an obstacle to giving a lengthy interview. Merab Kolbaia, who was scheduled to meet with the authors on August 30 (in connection with Arkania's interview) refused to meet with the authors.

Gogita Arkania

The interview with Gogita Arkania took place in the Gldani prison 8 in Tbilisi on August 30, 2011.

Arkania is serving a 30 year prison sentence for his involvement in several of the attacks, including the U.S. Embassy bombing; the explosion at the Labor Party office in Tbilisi that killed one elderly woman; and the attempted bombing of the Chaladidi railway bridge in Western Georgia. He was born in 1979, in the Gali district of Abkhazia. He was enlisted in the Georgian army in 2005 and went through his military training at the Ktsianisi center in Rustavi. In September 2006 he served seven months in Iraq. In 2007, he

participated in the Georgian army's special operation in Svaneti and received the Mazniashvili bravery award. During the 2008 war he served as a sniper at the front line in Tskhinvali. Following his break from the army Arkania spent time in Tbilisi with his brother.

Arkania describes how he was first introduced to Russian GRU officer Evgeny Borisov through his friend and accomplice Merab Kolbaia in September 2010. Borisov expressed that Arkania's family would be in danger unless he agreed to carry two bombs to Tbilisi and place them at the U.S. Embassy building in Tbilisi. Arkania and Kolbaia were shown a hand-written sketch of the Embassy area and instructed to place a bomb on each side of the Embassy wall. Arkania recalls that one of the bombs was packed in a juice box, and the other one was a round-shaped device. They were told that the detonation time was approximately 15 minutes.

After completing this first task Arkania, described how Borisov paid them US\$ 4,000, which he urged them to accept as the money "came from above". Borisov also revealed to that he was working for the FSB, and that there were several more jobs to be done. If they refused to cooperate, Borisov threatened to hand them over to the Georgian police.

The second assignment was to bomb a cargo train scheduled to pass a railway bridge close to Poti. Arkania and Kolbaia were provided with two bombs, each consisting of two taped-together juice boxes. The bombs were to be placed on the rails and connected to a detonator which would lead the bombs to explode as the train passed. However, Arkania and Kolbaia left the site without connecting the detonator to the explosives. Instead, Arkania describes how he took a picture of a nearby construction site, which he later showed to Borisov, claiming that it was the bomb site. When Borisov asked him why the incident had not hit the TV-news, Arkania convinced him that the incident was played down because of a high-level NATO visit to Tbilisi.

Shortly thereafter Borisov asked Arkania and Kolbaia to carry out two more assignments: to place two bombs at the main Tbilisi railway station, and three bombs either at the Imedi or Rustavi TV stations in Tbilisi. He stated that Borisov provided them with five bombs, two of which were shaped like round cans, two like Chocolate bars, and one was of a smaller size than the

others. They were paid US\$3,000-4,000 for the attack against the railway station – the second job was not completed.

The next mission was to bomb three different targets in Tbilisi, including the Labor party headquarters; a supermarket and a transmission tower. He claims they were provided with three set of bombs, the one for the Labor party office was in a juice box, the one for the supermarket was in a taped parcel, and the one for the transmission tower consisted of 7 beer bottles. The latter mission was never completed. When Arkania and Kolbaia heard the news about the death of an elderly woman in the Labor party bombing they decided to leave for Abkhazia, leaving the remaining explosives in an apartment in Tbilisi belonging to Arkania's army friend and his wife. Shortly thereafter, on December 4 2010, Arkania was arrested.

According to Arkania, Borisov never spoke about the purpose of the attacks, however, Arkania assumed that they were aimed at causing unrest in Georgia. He also describes how Borisov would always travel away for a few days to collect the bombs, which made Arkania assume that the bombs were brought from somewhere in the North.

Badri Bagiashvili

The interview with Badri Bagiashvili took place at a detention center in Tbilisi on August 30, 2011.

Bagiashvili is detained for carrying explosives from Akhagori into Georgia proper with the intention of placing a bomb at the NATO Liaison office in Tbilisi.

Bagiashvili describes how he was approached by Aleksey Sokolov, the deputy head of the Russian FSB border unit in South Ossetia, in April 2011. As a first assignment, Sokolov asked Bagiashvili to take pictures of different sites, including an IDP camp in Tserobani, and of the Ministry of Interior building in Tbilisi.

After completing these initial tasks Bagiashvili was approached by a man by the name of Pukhaev, an ethnic Ossetian who is Chief of the local police in Akhagori. Pukhaev promised Bagiashvili US\$ 2,000 if he would carry a

bomb to Tbilisi and place it at a building flying UN or EU flags. Bagiashvili was told that he would not experience any problems passing the Russian FSB troops with the explosives, as, according to Pukhaev, they were “all one”.

After the meeting with Pukhaev, Bagiashvili was instructed to wait for a few days as the bomb was to be brought from a different location. According to Bagiashvili, Pukhaev and his deputies seemed to be waiting for instructions. A week later Bagiashvili was presented with the explosive device, which was rectangular shaped, approximately 70-80 centimeter long and wrapped in a sheet. He was told that the bomb was designed to explode six hours after being triggered. He was also told to be careful with the bomb during transportation, as it risked exploding if not handled carefully.

Bagiashvili was never informed about the purpose of the bombings, although he assumed that the attack was aimed at causing material destruction rather than human casualties. Bagiashvili moreover assumed that the purpose of the first two assignments, involving taking pictures of the Tserobani IDP camp and the Ministry of Interior, constituted a test to see if he was reliable enough to carry out the main attack.

Tamila Benia

The interview with Tamila Benia took place at a women’s prison facility in Rustavi on August 30, 2011.

Benia is the only female among the detainees. She was born in 1961 in the Gali district of Abkhazia. She studied financial economy at the University in Ural, Russia. She is married with two children.

Tamila Benia was arrested on June 2, 2011 for carrying explosives from Gali across the Administrative Boundary Line to Senaki, and was at the time of writing awaiting trial in the Rustavi women’s prison. Benia describes how she up until a few years ago owned a diner/home restaurant, where members of the Gali-based Russian peacekeeping contingent would come to eat. Through the diner she got to know two FSB officers, Sergei Kuzmin and Igor Vlasov. In 2008, Benia was forced to close the diner due to illness.

In May 2011, Benia was contacted by her friend and local crime leader Valmer Butba, who requested a meeting with her, as well as Kuzmin and Vlasov. At

the meeting Benia was offered US\$ 5,000 to carry a bomb to Senaki, and detonate it in a trash can or similar somewhere in the town center. Benia stated that she was not told about the purpose of the bombings, but she was instructed to detonate the bombs late at night (12-1am), which made her assume that the purpose was mainly to provoke rather than to cause human casualties.

Benia was provided with a black bag with the explosives – the bomb itself was wrapped in a black plastic bag and it had two detonators – connected with a thin wire. Along with her friend Abesalom Chketia, she travelled to Zugdidi with the bomb, and was arrested when leaving Zugdidi for Senaki on a Marshrutka on June 2, 2011.

Manuchar Dzadzua

The interview with Manuchar Dzadzua took place at a prison facility in Rustavi on September 1, 2011.

Dzadzua was arrested along with four other individuals in March 2011 for carrying explosives from Gali to Kutaisi, where he was to place the bombs at various buildings, including the regional Labor Party office building and a Ministry of Justice building. Dzadzua describes how he was introduced to a Russian officer, who he refers to as Volodya,⁴² through local crime leader Valmer Butba in March 2011 at his work on a farm in Ochamchire. Butba and Volodya offered him US\$ 3,000 to place bombs at three different administrative buildings in Kutaisi. Volodya promised him that he would have no future problems in Abkhazia if he completed the mission.

Dzadzua, who prior to his involvement in the planned Kutaisi-bombings were involved in criminal activity with debts to local criminal groups, accepted the offer.

⁴² Here a discrepancy should be noted. Material provided by the Georgian MoI establishes the identity of the Russian officer as Aleksey Sergeevich Ushakov, and includes a picture of Ushakov. When the author met with Dzadzua in Rustavi prison 8 in September 2011, Dzadzua denied that the officer that approached him was the same as the person in the picture. Volodya, he claims, was 40-50 years old with grey/blond hair. The authors have been unable to verify the identity of the officer referred to as Volodya. Volodya is a common Russian nickname for Vladimir.

According to Dzadzua, Volodya then told him that he was going to Russia for 7-10 days to collect the explosives. When Volodya arrived back, he presented him with three identical looking bombs. Dzadzua described them as rectangular shaped, packed in grey colored plastic boxes and delivered in a square shaped sports bag. Each of the bombs was wrapped in a black plastic bag. In the middle there were cut out sections covered with an unidentified fabric. He was told that the bombs weighed 3 kilograms each. On each bomb there were three rings, with the numbers 1, 2, 3 written on them. They were to be pulled in that order. Once put down the bombs were not to be moved, or they would explode. Detonation time was two hours.

Like the other detainees, Dzadzua was not informed about the purpose of the bombings, but he assumed that the bombing of the Labor party office was likely to be blamed on the ruling elite in Georgia. He states that he was instructed to place the bombs in corners to cause only material destruction.

Dzadzua was arrested on March 31 2011 in Zugdidi, where he had stopped for a few nights before continuing to Kutaisi to complete the mission.

Temur Butbaia

The interview with Temur Butbaia took place at a prison facility in Rustavi on September 2, 2011.

Butbaia was arrested in February 2011 for his participation in the May 2010 assassination of Dmitri Kordzadze, Head of the MoI Emergency Unit in Adjara. Butbaia was born in 1981 in the Gali district of Abkhazia. When the war broke out in Abkhazia in the early 1990s his family fled to Zugdidi, where he stayed until 2001. Between 2001 and 2010 Butbaia regularly went back and forth between Gali and Zugdidi. He did not have a formal employment but made a living through trade in cigarettes and nuts. He first got introduced to Valmer Butba at his father's funeral in 2002. They were distant relatives. Butba helped him financially, and came to serve as Temur's protector in Abkhazia.

Butbaia describes how he was contacted by Butba in December 2007, who said that there were people who were interested in doing business with him. In a meeting ten days later, Butba introduced him to two Russian

individuals, whose names he was told was Stas and Roma (the officer referred to by Butbaia as Stas has later been identified as Aleksei Nalivkin, and Roma as Evgeny Marenko – both working since 2008 for the 7th Russian military contingent in Abkhazia. Prior to 2008, both officers served in the Russian peacekeeping force in Abkhazia).⁴³ Both were dressed in civilian clothes, but arrived to the meeting site in a Russian military jeep.

As a first step, the two Russians asked Butbaia and Rogava to travel to Batumi to locate a man, Dmitri Kordzadze, who worked for the regional MOI division. They were told that Kordzadze “owed” the Russians.

Over the following two years, Butbaia, along with his childhood friend Otar Rogava,⁴⁴ travelled to Batumi several times, but were unable to locate Kordzadze. The two met with the Russian on several occasions over this period, but the meetings were always facilitated by Butba. Butbaia described that as time went by, the Russian was getting increasingly impatient with the lack of progress with the mission. In February 2009, Butbaia met with Butba alone in Gali. Butba then warned them that the Russians were not to be underestimated, as they were not “regular criminals”, but instead linked to the Russian government.

In early 2010, Butbaia and Rogava managed to locate Kordzadze in Batumi. Shortly thereafter, Navlikin and Marenko revealed to them that the next assignment was to assassinate Kordzadze, or else their families would be in danger. They would also be paid US\$ 42,000, in addition to US\$ 8,000 they had already received in advance payments, for the job. Navlikin and Marenko provided them with the bomb, equipped with magnets and a remote control, along with basic instructions on how to detonate it.

On May 5 2010, Butbaia and Rogava placed the bomb in Kordzadze’s car, which resulted in the latter’s death. On February 4, 2011, Butbaia was arrested in Zugdidi.

⁴³ Unpublished material provided by the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs, June 2011.

⁴⁴ Shortly after his arrest Otar Rogava committed suicide in the preliminary detention center of the Gldani prison 8 in Tbilisi.

Appendix B: Telephone Intercepts

In connection with the attacks over the fall of 2010, Georgian intelligence registered a number of phone calls between Arkania and Kolbaia (using Georgian cell number +995 58 218094) and a Russian mobile phone number (+79407147883). According to the Georgian MoI this number is registered to a Russian Ministry of Defense Officer, Andrei Goriachev, who prior to 2008 served as Evgeny Borisov's deputy in the Russian Peacekeeping Force Unit in Abkhazia. Arkania confirmed to the authors that there were telephone communication between them and Borisov, although Kolbaia handled most of this communication (Kolbaia refused to meet with the authors, and could therefore not confirm this information).

The Georgian Ministry of Interior points at the following records in support of its conclusions:⁴⁵

Record from the Abkhazian mobile communications company A-Mobile, a subsidiary of the Russian mobile communications company Megafon.

А-мобайл -2010				
MSISDN	NAME	ADDR_CITY	ADDR_STREET	PASPORT
7147883	Горячев Андрей Александрович	Воронеж	Карла Маркса	0869795 Воронеж Мин обороны 16,01,2007
7756440	Горячев Андрей Александрович	Москва	Королева	АА 0869795 ЦМПР МОРФ 10,10,2005

⁴⁵ Source: Georgian Ministry of Interior, unpublished information provided to the authors in September 2011.

Record in connection with the explosion near the US Embassy in Tbilisi on September 22, 2010.

Date and Time	Call Initiator	Call Recipient
18.09.2010 23:25:48	79407147883	858218094
18.09.2010 23:26:41	79407147883	858218094
19.09.2010 08:16:05	79407147883	858218094
22.09.2010 10:28:05	79407147883	858218094
24.09.2010 12:20:00	79407147883	858218094
25.09.2010 09:54:39	79407147883	858218094

Record in connection with the attempted bombing of the Chaladidi railway bridge on October 2-3, 2010.

Date and Time	Call Initiator	Call Recipient
03.10.2010 11:14:09	79407147883	858218094
03.10.2010 11:18:80	79407147883	858218094
03.10.2010 14:19:26	79407147883	858218094
03.10.2010 17:17:80	79407147883	858218094
03.10.2010 17:30:06	79407147883	858218094
08.10.2010 07:26:10	79407147883	858218094
08.10.2010 08:56:43	79407147883	858218094

Record in connection with the explosions at the Tbilisi central railway station on October 21, 2010.

Date and Time	Call Initiator	Call Recipient
19.10.2010 20:32:07	79407147883	858218094
20.10.2010 07:56:28	79407147883	858218094
22.10.2010 19:26:37	79407147883	858218094
23.10.2010 08:36:15	79407147883	858218094
23.10.2010 13:55:05	79407147883	858218094

Record in connection with the explosion at the Labor Party head quarters in Tbilisi on November 28, 2010.

Date and Time	Call Initiator	Call Recipient
08.11.2010 19:36:35	79407147883	858218094
08.11.2010 20:11:20	79407147883	858218094
08.11.2010 20:20:50	79407147883	858218094
15.11.2010 21:59:25	79407137616	858218094
17.11.2010 18:10:48	79407147883	858218094
22.11.2010 20:37:36	79407137616	858218094

Similarly, Georgian intelligence claims to have records of telephone communication between Temur Butbaia, the main perpetrator in the assassination of Georgian MOI officer Kordzadze in Batumi in May 2010, and a Russian mobile telephone number +79163063875, registered with the Russian mobile communications company Megafon. According to the Georgian authorities this number was provided to Butbaia by Russian GRU officers Nalivkin and Marenko, who, according to Butbaia's testimony, ordered him to carry out the attack.

Appendix C: Explosive Devices

IED seized on Balanchini street, Tbilisi, near US Embassy, 22 September 2010



IED seized in village Chaladidi, Khobi district, 07 January 2010



Author Bio

Johanna Popjanevski is Deputy Director of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, Joint Center. Her specialization is in development and security issues in the South Caucasus, primarily in Georgia. In 2005–6, she was a visiting researcher at the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies in Tbilisi. Popjanevski holds an LL.M. degree from Lund University, specialized in Public International Law. She is the author and co-author of several publications on Georgian affairs, including the Silk Road Paper *International Law and the Post-2008 Status Quo in Georgia: Implications for Western Policies*, published in May 2011, and the chapter *From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia* in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (M.E. Sharpe, 2009).

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