**How to Conquer Georgia**

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Over the weekend, Foreign Ministry official Valery Kenyaikin cautioned Georgia against using NATO forces to resolve the territorial conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, saying Moscow would take "all possible measures to protect its citizens if fighting broke out" in these areas. It seems as though Russia is preparing for war with Georgia.  
  
A few days ago I returned from Chechnya, where I observed the swift, bloodless routing of the Vostok regiment by military groups loyal to Chechen President [Ramzan Kadyrov](http://www.themoscowtimes.com/mt_profile/ramzan_kadyrov/433775.html). Vostok is a local military unit in Khankala, Chechnya, composed of ethnic Chechens that is formally a part of the 42nd Division of the General Staff's Main Intelligence Directorate.   
  
There are several reasons why Vostok was defeated. When Kadyrov cracked down on the unit, Vostok's commander, Sulim Yamadayev, could not come to Chechnya for four days. While Kadyrov's forces were rounding up and bullying Vostok's fighters, Yamadayev was attending a meeting at the Defense Ministry.  
  
In the first Chechen war, then-Brigadier General Yamadayev was probably in the mountains leading his troops, rather than attending meetings in Moscow. How effective can an army be when, during a military flare-up, its commander is attending meetings in Moscow instead of leading its troops on sight, where the conflict is taking place?  
  
Second, while the defeated Vostok soldiers were chastised for "selling out to the Russians," Yamadayev's own division commander told the Vostok troops that their leader, Yamadayev, had been placed on a wanted list for his suspected criminal activity. I don't know who the Vostok soldiers sold out to, but it is clear who Yamadayev's division commander betrayed. Can an army wage war with a division commander like this?  
  
Third, Vostok's commanders did not pay the unit's soldiers their salary in full. Officers simply faked the signatures in the payrolls, and professional soldiers received less than what their contracts stipulated. This is common practice in the Russian armed forces, and you can imagine how this helps increase recruitment into so-called elite, professional military units. Sometimes, officers line conscripts up outside at 6:30 a.m. in temperatures of minus 30 degrees Celsius and tell them that they cannot return to their barracks until they sign contracts for professional military service. Can this type of army ever be fit for battle?  
  
With these three elements taken into account, the Foreign Ministry's declaration that Russia will wage war if NATO invades Abkhazia is just as plausible as a declaration to protect Abkhazia in the event of a Martian invasion.   
  
If Moscow is truly serious about defending Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it must send troops -- and not just additional peacekeeping forces -- there instead of merely making a lot of noise. Making empty threats like Kenyaikin's is a no-win tactic any way you look at it. By doing so, Moscow is perceived as an irresponsible and irrational state and doesn't gain any territory. In the end, Russia is neither feared nor respected.   
  
There is a simple rule that is well known even to street bandits: If you brandish your gun, be prepared to fire. But when Moscow whips out its gun, it only shouts, "We are offended," and then shoves the pistol back into its holster.   
  
But all is not lost. I have a proposal for our leaders that will help them conquer Georgia -- and it is quite simple. All the Kremlin has to do is to convince Georgian officers to attend a training course at the Defense Ministry. This would be a brilliant military tactic. We will teach the Georgian officers to attend meetings instead of battles.

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