

Georgia — Let's not start Wo



By Mike Jackson

Putin is determined to rebuild Russia's stature, and he is being much helped in this by the surge in energy prices

WHEN the Cold War ended, there was a great sense of euphoria in the West and in the non-Russian republics of the Soviet Union. The nuclear sword of Damocles had been lifted, democracy had prevailed, peace dividends could be taken.

The non-Russian republics of the erstwhile union seized the opportunity to obtain their independence from Russia: the political map of eastern Europe, the Baltic, central Asia and - particularly - the Caucasus changed radically.

The end of the Cold War exposed the futility and pretence of the ideology which had underpinned the Soviet Empire - and also the falsity and pretence of the allegedly unified political construct that was the Soviet Union.

In the West, there was an element of triumphalism, which could only have

caused resentment in Russia.

Inevitably, the euphoria in the West was not shared by Russia itself, which then went through a difficult and uncertain transition from Communist authoritarianism to a fledgling democracy and market economy - against a background of a sense of humiliation, loss and having been worsted.

Was the West as generous towards its former opponent as it might have been?

I believe more could have been done to welcome the new Russia into the

When their boundaries became the borders of new sovereign states, the Russian nationals overnight found themselves minorities in a foreign country - a situation to which Moscow is extremely sensitive.

These Russian minorities are but one dimension of the Russian perception that what it calls the "Near Abroad" - the countries bordering Russia - are strategically vital to its security.

Moscow does not forget the searing

The post-Cold War history of the Balkans and the break-up of Yugoslavia have a lot to do with these perceptions and attitudes.

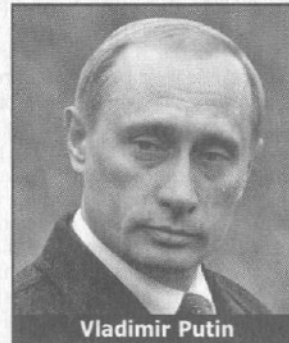
NATO took military action, over Kosovo for example, against Slobodan Milosevic's Serbian regime without the authority of a UN Security Council resolution, in Russian eyes riding roughshod over Russian concerns for its Slav and Orthodox links with the Serbs.

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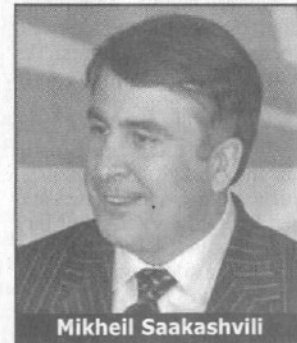
just before KFOR's advance into Kosovo in June 1999 was fundamentally a political act rather than a military one. In my judgment it was not an act designed to threaten KFOR, but rather to provide a political signal to the West that Russia should not be ignored, but be taken fully into account as a major power.

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Vladimir Putin



Mikheil Saakashvili

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international fold, to reassure Russia that it still maintained its very important standing as a permanent member of the Security Council and as a major actor on the world stage.

The break-up of the Soviet Union was anything but a simple matter - not least because large numbers of Russian nationals had made their homes and livelihoods in the old constituent republics of the Union.

experiences of being invaded over centuries through the Near Abroad. The outcome is grave Russian concern that many of these Near Abroad countries have become, or wish to become, members of NATO and the EU.

Rightly or wrongly, Russia sees this as a zero-sum game: Putin has criticised Western leaders for being still locked into a Cold War mentality, but the reverse also seems to be true - at least in part.

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The unscripted arrival of a relatively small Russian force at Pristina airport

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The politics of it seemed to me to be particularly important when it is remembered that only a few days before it had been Viktor Chernomyrdin, the former prime minister of Russia and Moscow's special envoy to Belgrade, who - togeth-

Part World War III

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er with president of Finland Martti Ahtisaari - made it clear to Milosevic that the game was up.

Georgia is a sovereign democratic state that, like many others, gained its independence in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse.

Strongly supported by the West, it aspires to NATO and EU membership. It also has to contend with two regions - Abkhazia and South Ossetia, both with Russian minorities - that did not, and do

ing Russia with a *casus belli*? Did Georgian forces use excessive force in South Ossetia? Did Georgia wrongly calculate that in the face of Western support for Georgia, Russia would not react?

I do not know the answers, but I am clear that the problems arising from minority enclaves in such circumstances are fundamentally political, rather than purely military.

I write not to excuse the Russian actions and behaviour, but rather to explain them. For the West, the challenge is to find the right answer to Lenin's question: "What is to be done"?

Putin is determined to rebuild Russia's stature, and he is being much helped in this by the surge in energy prices. There is also evidence that after a decade and more of decline, the Russian armed forces are starting to rebuild and modernise.

For me, the right course for the West - without compromising its own position and values - is to show a greater understanding of why Russia behaves as it does, to accept more willingly Russia's concerns for its Near Abroad.

While there are actions that we cannot condone, Russian perceptions exist and will take time to change.

This is the challenge for politicians and diplomats: strategic military hostility and confrontation must remain a thing of the past. COURTESY DAILY TELEGRAPH

The writer is former UK Chief of the General Staff

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not, wish to be part of Georgia.

South Ossetia, in particular, has an independence movement not averse to the use of illegal violence; it is worth bearing in mind that by agreement with Georgia, Russia had deployed so-called peace-keeping forces in south Ossetia long before the current crisis.

Did Russia encourage the South Ossetian rebels to provoke the recent Georgian military action, thereby provid-



Kashvili