

# Attackers Ambush Abkhaz President

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February 23, 2012



Ankvab

Officers from the Federal Security Service are in Abkhazia to investigate an assassination attempt on the leader of the Georgian breakaway region, authorities said Thursday.

President Alexander Ankvab escaped unhurt after his motorcade was ambushed Wednesday on the highway between Gudauta and Sukhumi, the region's capital.

In the ensuing gun battle, one of his bodyguards was killed and two others were injured. One of the injured bodyguards remained in critical condition Thursday, the state-run Apsnypress news agency reported.

The assailants first set off a roadside bomb before opening fire with grenade launchers, a machine gun and Kalashnikov rifles, Abkhazia Prosecutor General Safarbei Mikanba told reporters, Interfax reported.

He did not say how many attackers there were, just that they had been hiding in trenches.

President Dmitry Medvedev called Ankvab the same day and offered assistance in investigating the crime.

Abkhaz authorities offered no clear leads on who was responsible, and Ankvab [said](#) only that the attackers' aim was to destabilize the country.

Speculation quickly focused on Georgia, which has severed all ties with Sukhumi since the region broke away after a vicious war in the early 1990s.

But Sukhumi officials quickly denied this. Presidential spokesman Kristian Bzhania told Itar-Tass that "we do not tend to attribute [assassination attempts] to Georgia."

Bzhania also said Ankvab has already survived five attempts on his life since 2005. This and the timing of the attack led analysts to search for clues inside the tiny region of less than 250,000 inhabitants.

Ankvab, who was elected Abkhaz president in a heated contest last summer, has been waging a bitter anti-corruption campaign against the region's Interior Ministry and Migration Service, and the region is set to elect a new parliament March 10.

The assassination attempt poses another headache for the Kremlin, which is already facing a fragile situation in Georgia's other separatist region, South Ossetia.

A tense standoff between rival presidential candidates has gripped South Ossetia since a contested election last fall.

Moscow recognized both territories after a brief war with Georgia over South Ossetia in 2008.

But only a handful of states have followed suit, leaving both territories isolated and deeply dependent on Russian economic aid and military protection.

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