

U.S. and NATO Urge Russia to Dismantle Georgia Border Fences

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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WASHINGTON — The United States and its allies have called on Moscow to dismantle barriers erected by Russian border control guards between Georgia and its de-facto independent republic of South Ossetia, saying the so-called "borderization" violates Tbilisi's sovereignty.

"We note with concern the continued and increasing activities by Russian security forces to erect fences and other physical barriers along the administrative boundary lines of the occupied territories in Georgia," U.S. State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf said Wednesday.

Georgian officials and citizens living on the border with South Ossetia have sounded the alarm since Russian border guards last month started installing barbed-wire fencing near Georgia's border with the breakaway republic.

South Ossetia delegated the protection of its borders to Russia in a 2009 deal, citing

the absence of its own border patrol. Russia and a handful of other countries have recognized South Ossetia and another de-facto independent region, Abkhazia, as sovereign governments, but most other countries continue to consider them as part of Georgia.

The dispute over the two regions has been a sticking point in relations between Russia and Western countries, which criticized Moscow's decision to recognize the two republics in 2008 after Russia and Georgia fought a brief war over South Ossetia.

Tbilisi accused Russia earlier this year of executing a land grab by erecting fencing between South Ossetia and Georgia, though Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin said in June that Moscow was merely acting under the terms of its 2009 deal with South Ossetia.

In a statement nearly identical to the one read by Harf on Wednesday, North Atlantic Treaty Organization Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said the fence-building "does not contribute to a peaceful resolution of the conflict."

"It has a negative impact on the situation on the ground, and it affects the lives of those citizens of Georgia who live on either side of the administrative boundary lines," Rasmussen said Wednesday. "I call for the removal of these barriers."

The NATO chief also called on Russia "to reverse its recognition of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia as independent states."

The statements from NATO and the State Department came a day after Catherine Ashton, the EU's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, called on the barriers to be removed and expressed "profound concern" over "the continued and increasing activities by Russian security forces to erect fences and other obstacles along administrative boundary lines in Georgia."

Karasin said in June that South Ossetia and Abkhazia have an unassailable right to take such measures because "any country must move to control its territory and ensure the security of its borders and its citizens."

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