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Medvedev Warns NATO Admission of Georgia Could Trigger 'Terrible Conflict'

By Reuters

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NATO-Georgia Commission in 2015/ NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization/ Flickr

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said on Monday that any future NATO decision to admit Georgia to its ranks could trigger "a terrible conflict" and questioned why the alliance would consider such a move.

Medvedev's comments come weeks after Russian President Vladimir Putin warned NATO against cultivating closer ties with Ukraine and Georgia, saying such a policy was irresponsible and would have unspecified consequences for the alliance.

"This [Georgia's entry to NATO] could provoke a terrible conflict. I don't understand what they are doing this for," Medvedev told Russia's Kommersant newspaper in an interview.

Georgia's NATO ambitions have been a source of anger for Russia — which shares a border with ex-Soviet republic Georgia and does not want to see it join what it regards as a hostile

military bloc — since 2008 when NATO leaders promised Georgia it would one day join the alliance.

Russian forces entered two breakaway Georgian regions in 2008, which remain garrisoned by Russian troops to this day, something Moscow says is in keeping with local people's wishes, but which the West and the Georgian government call an illegal occupation.

NATO leaders discussed ties with Georgia at their summit in Brussels in July, a move Medvedev, who was president when Russian and Georgian forces clashed in 2008, condemned.

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"As for the recent NATO decision reaffirming its commitment to eventually admit Georgia, what can I say to this? It is an absolutely irresponsible position and a threat to peace," said Medvedev.

Prominent Georgian politicians are keen for their country to join the Western military alliance, but have seen their chances of joining hampered by Russian territorial incursions into the two breakaway territories — South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Russia has recognized the two regions as independent states and Medvedev said Georgia's entry into NATO therefore raised the risk of conflict with Moscow.

Asked what would happen if Georgia joined NATO without the two regions and whether there was a risk of conflict, Medvedev said:

"Yes, clearly so, because we view Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. We understand that if any other country claims that they are part of its national territory, this may have severe consequences. Therefore, I hope that the NATO leadership will have enough sense not to take any steps in this direction."

Under NATO rules, countries with territorial conflicts cannot join the alliance.

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