

“NO ONE COULD HAVE PREDICTED,” REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA EDITION

Since Condi's gone somewhere (probably buying shoes in NYC), let me anticipate what she'll say when she ever gets back to work: "No one could have predicted that the Georgians would incite the Russians to pursue regime change in Georgia."

At least that's the story the Administration has been feeding Jonathan Landay.

Bush administration officials, worried by what they saw as a series of provocative Russian actions, repeatedly warned Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili to avoid giving the Kremlin an excuse to intervene in his country militarily, U.S. officials said Monday.

But in the end, the warnings failed to stop the Georgian president – a Bush favorite – from launching an attack last week that on Monday seemed likely to end not only in his country's military humiliation but complete occupation by Russian forces.

[snip]

Pentagon officials said that despite having 130 trainers assigned to Georgia, they had no advance notice of Georgia's sudden move last Thursday to send thousands of Georgian troops into South Ossetia to capture that province's capital, Tskhinvali.

Me, I agree with Jeff Stein, this is spin, presumably designed to excuse American impotence in the face of Russia's aggression.

A "surprise." My, oh, my. Except I don't believe it. As easy as it is to believe

that the CIA, etc., blew another huge event, I find it impossible to accept that not one of the 127 Pentagon advisors in Georgia, including Special Forces and intelligence contractors, were clueless about Tblisi's intent – and preparations – to move into South Ossetia. That just doesn't pass the laugh test. On July 15, for starters, amid rising tension between Moscow and Tblisi over South Ossetia, some 1,200 U.S. troops launched a three-week long joint military exercise with Georgian troops. Three weeks later, on the night of Aug. 7, "coinciding with the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, Georgian President Saakashvili ordered an all-out military attack on Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia." It is simply inconceivable that the Pentagon wasn't wired to the helmets of Georgian troops, despite the denials of U.S. military officials.

See also this quote one of those military trainers gave Danger Room:

One of the U.S. military trainers put it to me a bit more bluntly. "We're giving them the knife," he said. "Will they use it?"

As I said, I think the presumed spin is designed to excuse US inaction in the face of an utter lack of means to respond to Russia. But I do think there was an element of true surprise on the part of the US. From Landay:

At the same time, U.S. officials said that they believed they had an understanding with Russia that any response to Georgian military action would be limited to South Ossetia.

"We knew they were going to go crack heads. We told them again and again not

to do this," the State Department official said. "We thought we had an understanding with the Russians that any response would be South Ossetia-focused. Clearly it's not."

Oops. Someone in the Administration got caught believing that whole "looked him in the eye ... [and got] a sense of his soul" bullshit, I guess.

Sounds to me that, whatever the US role in encouraging Georgia to do something rash, the real surprise here was that Russia responded in the way it did—basically pursuing regime change rather than just a response within South Ossetia.

You know it's funny. Condi, and a bunch of other top aides in this Administration, actually do have expertise on Russia, even on military relations between Russia and its satellite states. Yet even in a sphere where, unlike the Middle East, they've got some expertise, they're still astoundingly incompetent.

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