

Georgia says threat of war with Russia remains

President Mikhail Saakashvili said Thursday that Georgia had come 'very close' to war with Russia and the 'threat remained' for a breakout over its breakaway region of Abkhazia.

'If anyone wants to annex a part of Georgia, there will inevitably be consequences,' Saakashvili told Russian journalists, though he stressed a desire to return to diplomacy.

Russia's military announced early Thursday that it would increase its troops in Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia to counter Georgia's accumulating military forces in the contested region.

'All this is done for the sake of only one thing: preserving peace and avoiding bloodshed,' read a statement by the defence ministry.

Frayed Georgian-Russian relations have long led to sparks in Abkhazia, the autonomy of which has been defended by Russian peacekeepers since a ceasefire ended a civil war in 1994.

But Moscow and Tbilisi's growing inclination to resort to action over their differences have ignited concerns in the European Union and the United States that the standoff is 'close to war.'

Russia's peacekeepers in Abkhazia will increase to 2,542 troops, under the maximum permitted of 3,000 as provided for by the UN ceasefire.

But Georgia's defence minister on Thursday denied his side had moved more troops to the border of the region.

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