

## Russia seizes US vehicles

By John Matthew Hall and AP  
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Russian soldiers today held blindfolded Georgian servicemen at gunpoint and commandeered US Humvees in a dramatic sequence of events in Poti, a key Black Sea port.

White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe stated that if Russia has seized any US military equipment in Georgia, it must return it immediately.

In Poti, on the Black Sea, Russian forces blocked access to the naval and commercial ports this morning and towed the missile boat Dioskuria, one of the navy's most sophisticated vessels, out of sight of observers. A loud explosion was heard minutes later.

Several hours later, an Associated Press photographer saw Russian trucks and armored personnel carriers leaving the port with about 20 blindfolded and handcuffed men riding on them. Port spokesman Eduard Mashevoriani said the men were Georgian soldiers.

The Russians also took with them four Humvees that were at the port awaiting shipment back to the United States after taking part in earlier US-Georgian military exercises.

The deputy head of Russia's general staff, Col.-Gen. Anatoly Nogovitsyn, said in Moscow that Russian forces plan to remain in Poti until a local administration is formed, but did not give further details. He also justified previous seizures of Georgian soldiers as necessary to crack down on soldiers who were "out of any kind of control ... acting without command."

A small column of Russian tanks and armored vehicles left Gori on Tuesday, and a Russian officer said they were heading back to South Ossetia and then Russia. It was the first sign of a Russian pullback of troops from Georgia.

The column, which also apparently included a mobile rocket-launcher, passed the village of Ruisi, outside Gori on the road to South Ossetia on Tuesday afternoon.

Col. Igor Konoshenkov, a Russian military officer, told The Associated Press at the scene the unit was headed for South Ossetia and, ultimately, back to Russia. He gave no timetable for when the unit would reach Russia.



AP

*Russian soldiers in a armored personnel carrier tow away a US-built Humvee, in the Black Sea port city of Poti*

Konoshenkov said it was part of the Russian pullback mandated by a cease-fire that requires both sides to return to positions held before fighting broke out Aug. 7 in South Ossetia, a separatist Georgian province with close ties to Russia.

Elsewhere, Russia they exchanged POWs with Georgia and pulled back some troops from the strategic city of Gori.

It was a day of deeply mixed messages that left the small, war-battered country full of anxiety about whether Russia was aiming for a long-term military presence in Georgia or whether it was just trying to inflict maximum damage before adhering to a EU-brokered cease-fire and troop pullout.

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