

Why Was Cheney's Guy in Georgia Just Before the War

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What was a top national security aide to Vice President Dick Cheney doing in Georgia shortly before Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's troops engaged in what became a disastrous fight with South Ossetian rebels — and then Russian troops?

Not, according to the vice president's office, what you might think — if your thinking takes you into the realm of Cheney giving his blessing to the Georgian's military operation.

To be sure, Cheney has been a leader of the hardliners in the administration when it comes to standing up to Russia — to the point that the man who ran the Pentagon as the Cold War came to an end during the administration of the first President Bush has been seen as ready to renew that face-off with Moscow.

It was Cheney who visited the Georgian embassy in Washington last week to sign a remembrance book as a demonstration of the administration's support.

And yes, Joseph R. Wood, Cheney's deputy assistant for national security affairs, was in Georgia shortly before the war began.

But, the vice president's office says, he was there as part of a team setting up the vice president's just-announced visit to Georgia . (It is common for the White House to send security, policy, communications and press aides to each site the president and vice president will visit ahead of the trip, to begin making arrangements and planning the agenda.)

The White House disclosed on Monday that Cheney would hurry over to Azerbaijan , Georgia , Ukraine and Italy next week, almost immediately after addressing the Republican National Convention on Labor Day.

And so it was that a team from the vice president's office, U.S. security officials and others were in Georgia several days before the war began.

It had nothing to do, the vice president's office said, with a military operation that some have said suggests a renewal of the Cold War.

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