

CRS Report for Congress

Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests

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Jim Nichol
Specialist in Russian and Eurasian Affairs
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division



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Summary

In the early 1990s, Georgia and its breakaway South Ossetia region had agreed to a Russian-mediated ceasefire agreement that provided for Russian “peacekeepers” to be stationed in the region. Moscow extended citizenship and passports to most ethnic Ossetians. Simmering long-time tensions erupted on the evening of August 7, 2008, when South Ossetia and Georgia accused each other of launching intense artillery barrages against each other. Georgia claims that South Ossetian forces did not respond to a ceasefire appeal but intensified their shelling, “forcing” Georgia to send in troops. On August 8, Russia launched large-scale air attacks and dispatched troops to South Ossetia that engaged Georgian forces later in the day. By the morning of August 10, Russian troops had occupied the bulk of South Ossetia, reached its border with the rest of Georgia, and were shelling areas across the border. Russian troops occupied several Georgian cities. Russian warships landed troops in Georgia’s breakaway Abkhazia region and took up positions off Georgia’s Black Sea coast.

On August 12, Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev declared that “the aim of Russia’s operation for coercing the Georgian side to peace had been achieved and it had been decided to conclude the operation.... The aggressor has been punished.” Medvedev endorsed some elements of a European Union (EU) peace plan presented by visiting French President Nicolas Sarkozy. The plan calls for both sides to cease hostilities and pull troops back to positions they held before the conflict began. It calls for allowing humanitarian aid and facilitating the return of displaced persons. It calls for the immediate withdrawal of Russian combat troops from Georgia, but allows Russian “peacekeepers” to remain and to patrol in a larger security zone outside South Ossetia. The plan also may provide for a possibly greater international role in peace talks and peacekeeping, both of seminal Georgian interest. On August 15, Secretary Rice traveled to Tbilisi and obtained Saakashvili’s agreement to the plan. On August 22, the Russian military withdrew from some areas but also continued to occupy other areas. On August 25, President Medvedev declared that “humanitarian reasons” led him to recognize the independence of the regions. This recognition has been widely condemned by the United States and the international community.

On August 13, President Bush announced that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would travel to France and Georgia to assist with the peace plan and that Defense Secretary Robert Gates would direct U.S. humanitarian aid shipments to Georgia. Congress had begun its August 2008 recess when the conflict began, but many members spoke out on the issue. On August 12, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Joseph Biden warned Russia that its aggression in Georgia jeopardized congressional support for legislation to collaborate with Russia on nuclear energy production and to repeal the Jackson-Vanik conditions on U.S. trade with Russia. Senators McCain and Obama both condemned the Russian military incursion, called for a re-evaluation of U.S.-Russia relations, and urged NATO to soon extend a MAP to Georgia.

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Most Recent Developments

In an interview with Cable News Network (CNN) on August 28, 2008, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin alleged that the United States may have orchestrated the conflict in Georgia to disguise its economic and foreign policy problems and boost the prospects of a presidential candidate. He also alleged that the United States not only failed to dissuade Georgia from operations in South Ossetia on August 7-8, but armed the Georgians and directed them to attack. White House press secretary Dana Perino responded that the allegations were “patently false” and “not rational,” and that “it is a time for the countries who believe in sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity to band together to fight against” Russia’s violation of such principles.¹

Background

Tensions in Georgia date back at least to the 1920s, when South Ossetia made abortive attempts to declare its independence but ended up as an autonomous region within Soviet Georgia after the Red Army conquered Georgia. In 1989, South Ossetia lobbied for joining its territory with North Ossetia in Russia or for independence. Georgia’s own declaration of independence from the former Soviet Union and subsequent repressive efforts by former Georgian President Gamsakhurdia triggered conflict in 1990. In January 1991, hostilities broke out between Georgia and South Ossetia, reportedly contributing to an estimated 2,000-4,000 deaths and the displacement of tens of thousands of people.

In June 1992, Russia brokered a cease-fire, and Russian, Georgian, and Ossetian “peacekeeping” units set up base camps in a security zone around Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia. The units usually totalled around 1,100 troops, including about 530 Russians, a 300-member North Ossetian brigade (which was actually composed of South Ossetians and headed by a North Ossetian), and about 300 Georgians. Monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) did most of the patrolling. A Joint Control Commission (JCC) composed of Russian, Georgian, and North and South Ossetian emissaries ostensibly promoted a settlement of the conflict, with the OSCE as facilitator. According to some estimates, some 20,000 ethnic Georgians resided in one-third to one-half of the

¹ The White House. Office of the Press Secretary. *Press Briefing*, August 28, 2008; Steve Gutterman, “Putin accuses U.S. in Georgia War,” *Associated Press*, August 28, 2008.

region and 25,000 ethnic Ossetians in the other portion. Many fled during the fighting in the early 1990s or migrated.

Figure 1. Map of South Ossetia



Source: Central Intelligence Agency via the University of Texas at Austin. Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection. [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/georgia_republic.html]

Some observers have argued that Russia's increasing influence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia over the years has transformed the separatist conflicts into essentially Russia-Georgia disputes. Most residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia reportedly have been granted Russian citizenship and passports and most appear to want their regions to be part of Russia.²

In late 2003, Mikheil Saakashvili came to power during the so-called "rose revolution" (he was elected president in January 2004). He pledged to institute democratic and economic reforms, and to re-gain central government authority over the separatist regions. In 2004, he began to increase pressure on South Ossetia by tightening border controls and breaking up a large-scale smuggling operation in the region that allegedly involved Russian organized crime and corrupt Georgian officials. He also reportedly sent several hundred police, military, and intelligence personnel into South Ossetia. Georgia maintained that it was only bolstering its peacekeeping contingent up to the limit of 500 troops, as permitted by the cease-fire agreement. Georgian guerrilla forces also reportedly entered the region. Allegedly, Russian officials likewise assisted several hundred paramilitary elements from Abkhazia, Transnistria, and Russia to enter. Following inconclusive clashes, both sides by late 2004 ostensibly had pulled back most of the guerrillas and paramilitary forces.

² Vladimir Socor, *Eurasia Insight*, November 20, 2006.

In July 2005, President Saakashvili announced a new peace plan for South Ossetia that offered substantial autonomy and a three-stage settlement, consisting of demilitarization, economic rehabilitation, and a political settlement. South Ossetian “president” Eduard Kokoiti rejected the plan, asserting in October 2005 that “we [South Ossetians] are citizens of Russia.”³ The Georgian peace plan received backing by the OSCE Ministerial Council in early December 2005. Perhaps faced with this international support, in mid-December 2005, Kokoiti proffered a South Ossetian peace proposal that also envisaged benchmarks, but presumed that South Ossetia would be independent.

In November 2006, a popular referendum was held in South Ossetia to reaffirm its “independence” from Georgia. The separatists reported that 95% of 55,000 registered voters turned out and that 99% approved the referendum. In a separate vote, 96% reelected Kokoiti. The OSCE and U.S. State Department declined to recognize these votes. In “alternative” voting among ethnic Georgians in South Ossetia (and those displaced from South Ossetia) and other South Ossetians, the pro-Georgian Dmitriy Sanakoyev was elected governor of South Ossetia, and a referendum was approved supporting Georgia’s territorial integrity.

In March 2007, President Saakashvili proposed another peace plan for South Ossetia that involved creating “transitional” administrative districts throughout the region — ostensibly under Sanakoyev’s authority — which would be represented by an emissary at JCC or alternative peace talks. In July 2007, President Saakashvili decreed the establishment of a commission to work out South Ossetia’s “status” as a part of Georgia. The JCC finally held a meeting (with Georgia’s emissaries in attendance) in Tbilisi, Georgia, in October 2007, but the Russian Foreign Ministry claimed that the Georgian emissaries made unacceptable demands in order to deliberately sabotage the results of the meeting.⁴ No further meetings have been held.

During the latter half of July 2008, Russia conducted a military exercise that proved to be a rehearsal for Russian actions in Georgia a few weeks later. Code-named Caucasus 2008, the exercise involved more than 8,000 troops and was conducted near Russia’s border with Georgia. One scenario was a hypothetical attack by unnamed (but undoubtedly Georgian) forces on Georgia’s breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russian forces practiced a counterattack by land, sea, and air to buttress Russia’s “peacekeepers” stationed in the regions, protect “Russian citizens,” and offer humanitarian aid. The Georgian Foreign Ministry protested that the scenario constituted a threat of invasion. Simultaneously with the Russian military exercise, about 1,000 U.S. troops, 600 Georgian troops, and token forces from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine conducted an exercise in Georgia,

³ Open Source Center. *Central Eurasia: Daily Report* (hereafter *CEDR*), October 7, 2005, Doc. No. CEP-15001. *CEDR*, December 12, 2005, Doc. No. CEP-27204. South Ossetians who were citizens of Russia voted in the 2004 Russian presidential election, and a poster in South Ossetia afterward proclaimed that “Putin is our president.” Many South Ossetians voted in the 2007 Russian Duma election and the 2008 Russian presidential election. *CEDR*, December 3, 2007, Doc. No. CEP-950289; February 28, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-4015.

⁴ *CEDR*, November 1, 2007, Doc. No. CEP-950449.

code-named Immediate Response 2008, aimed at increasing troop interoperability for NATO operations and coalition actions in Iraq. Most if not all of these troops had left Georgia by the time of the outbreak of conflict.⁵

Renewed Conflict in South Ossetia

Tensions escalated in South Ossetia on July 3, 2008, when an Ossetian village police chief was killed by a bomb and the head of the pro-Georgian “government” in South Ossetia, Dmitriy Sanakoyev, escaped injury by a roadside mine. That night, both the Georgians and South Ossetians launched artillery attacks on each other’s villages and checkpoints, reportedly resulting in about a dozen killed or wounded. The European Union, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe issued urgent calls for both sides to show restraint and to resume peace talks.

On July 8, 2008, four Russian military planes flew over South Ossetian airspace. The Russian Foreign Ministry claimed that the incursion had helped discourage Georgia from launching an imminent attack on South Ossetia. The Georgian government denounced the incursion as violating its territorial integrity, and on July 11 recalled its ambassador to Russia for “consultations.” The U.N. Security Council discussed the overflights at a closed meeting on July 21, 2008. Although no decision was reached, Georgian diplomats reportedly stated that the session was successful, while Russian envoy Vitaliy Churkin denounced the “pro-Georgian bias” of some Security Council members.⁶

The day after the Russian aerial incursion, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice arrived in Georgia for two days of discussions on ways to defuse the rising tensions between Georgia and Russia. She stated that “some of the things the Russians did over the last couple of months added to tension in the region,” called for Russia to respect Georgia’s independence, and stressed the “strong commitment” of the United States to Georgia’s territorial integrity.⁷

On July 25, 2008, a bomb blast in Tskhinvali, South Ossetia, killed one person. On July 30, both sides again exchanged artillery fire, with the South Ossetians allegedly shelling a Georgian-built road on a hill outside Tskhinvali, and the Georgians allegedly shelling two Ossetian villages. Two days later, five Georgian police were injured on this road by a bomb blast. This incident appeared to trigger serious fighting on August 2-4, which resulted in over two dozen killed and

⁵ CEDR, July 18, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-548001; July 28, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-358017; Georgia National Guard, “‘Immediate Response’ Underway in Republic of Georgia,” *Army.Mil News*, July 15, 2008; Capt. Bryan Woods, “Security Cooperation Exercise Immediate Response 2008 Begins with Official Ceremony in Republic of Georgia,” *Army.Mil News*, July 17, 2008.

⁶ CEDR, July 22, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-950329; July 22, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-950042.

⁷ U.S. Department of State. Press Release. *Secretary’s Remarks: Remarks En Route Prague, Czech Republic*, July 8, 2008.

wounded. Kokoity threatened to attack Georgian cities and to call for paramilitary volunteers from the North Caucasus, and announced that women and children would be evacuated to North Ossetia. Georgia claimed that these paramilitary volunteers were already arriving in South Ossetia.

On the evening of August 7, 2008, South Ossetia accused Georgia of launching a “massive” artillery barrage against Tskhinvali, while Georgia reported intense bombing of some Georgian villages in the conflict zone. Saakashvili that evening announced a unilateral ceasefire and called for South Ossetia to follow suit. He also called for reopening peace talks and reiterated that Georgia would provide the region with maximum autonomy within Georgia as part of a peace settlement. Georgia claims that South Ossetian forces did not end their shelling of Georgian villages but intensified their actions, “forcing” Georgia to declare an end to its ceasefire and begin sending ground forces into South Ossetia. Georgian troops reportedly soon controlled much of South Ossetia, including Tskhinvali.

Russian President Medvedev addressed an emergency session of the Russian Security Council on August 8. He denounced Georgia’s incursion into South Ossetia, asserting that “women, children and the elderly are now dying in South Ossetia, and most of them are citizens of the Russian Federation.” He stated that “we shall not allow our compatriots to be killed with impunity. Those who are responsible for that will be duly punished.” He appeared to assert perpetual Russian control in stating that “historically Russia has been, and will continue to be, a guarantor of security for peoples of the Caucasus.”⁸ On August 11, he reiterated this principle that Russia is the permanent guarantor of Caucasian security and that “we have never been just passive observers in this region and never will be.”⁹

In response to the Georgian incursion into South Ossetia, Russia launched large-scale air attacks in the region and elsewhere in Georgia. Russia quickly dispatched seasoned professional (serving under contract) troops to South Ossetia that engaged Georgian forces in Tskhinvali on August 8. That same day, Russian warplanes destroyed Georgian airfields, including the Vaziana and Marneuli airbases near the Georgian capital Tbilisi. Saakashvili responded by ordering that reservists be mobilized and declaring a 15-day “state of war.”

Reportedly, up to 14,000 Russian troops had retaken Tskhinvali, occupied the bulk of South Ossetia, reached its border with the rest of Georgia, and were shelling areas across the border by early in the morning on August 10 (Sunday).¹⁰ These troops were allegedly augmented by thousands of volunteer militiamen from the North Caucasus.¹¹

⁸ *CEDR*, August 8, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-950325.

⁹ *CEDR*, August 12, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-950226.

¹⁰ *CEDR*, August 18, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-349001.

¹¹ Anne Barnard, Andrew Kramer, C.J. Chivers and Ellen Barry, “Clashes in Georgia Move Another Step Closer to All-Out War: Russian Bombers Strike Capital’s Airport,” *The New York Times*, August 11, 2008; Dario Thurn, “Russia’s Ragtag Volunteers Enrol for (continued...) ”

On August 10, Georgian National Security Council Secretary Alexander Lomaia reported that Georgia had requested that Secretary Rice act as a mediator with Russia in the crisis over the breakaway region of South Ossetia, including by transmitting a diplomatic note that Georgia's armed forces had ceased fire and had withdrawn from nearly all of South Ossetia.¹² Georgian Foreign Minister Eka Tkeshelashvili also phoned Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to report that all Georgian forces had been withdrawn from South Ossetia and to request a ceasefire, but Lavrov countered that Georgian forces remained in Tskhinvali.¹³

On August 11, Russia bombed apartment buildings in the city of Gori — within undisputed Georgian territory — and occupied the city.

Actions in Abkhazia and Western Georgia

On August 10, the U.N. Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, Edmond Mulet, reported to the U.N. Security Council that the U.N. Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG; about 100 observers in all) had witnessed “ongoing aerial bombardments of Georgian villages in the Upper Kodori Valley” the previous day.¹⁴ They also had observed “the movement by the Abkhaz side of substantial numbers of heavy weapons and military personnel towards the Kodori Valley.” Mulet also warned that Abkhaz separatist leader Sergei Bagapsh had threatened to push the Georgian armed forces out of the Upper Kodori Valley. In violation of their mandate, the Russian “peacekeepers” “did not attempt to stop such deployments” of Abkhaz rebel weaponry, Mulet reported. Fifteen UNOMIG observers were withdrawn from the Kodori Valley because the Abkhaz rebels announced that their safety could not be guaranteed, Mulet stated.¹⁵

Russian peacekeepers also permitted Abkhaz forces to deploy in the Gali region and along the Inguri River bordering Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia. Russian military and Abkhaz militia forces then moved across the river into the Zugdidi district, southwest of Abkhazia and indisputedly in Georgian territory (although some part is within the peacekeeping zone). Bombs fell on the town of Zugdidi on August 10. As the local population fled, Russian troops reportedly occupied the town and its police stations on August 11. Reportedly, the Russian military stated that it would not permit the Abkhaz forces to occupy the town of Zugdidi. The next day, the

¹¹ (...continued)
Combat,” *Agence France Presse*, August 10, 2008.

¹² *Agence France Presse*, August 10, 2008.

¹³ *Interfax*, August 10, 2008.

¹⁴ In July 2006, a warlord in the Kodori Valley area of northern Abkhazia, where many ethnic Svans reside, foreswore his nominal allegiance to the Georgian government. The Georgian government quickly sent forces to the area, defeated the warlord's militia, and bolstered central authority.

¹⁵ “Security Council Holds Third Emergency Meeting as South Ossetia Conflict Intensifies, Expands to Other Parts of Georgia,” *States News Service*, August 10, 2008.

Russian military reported that it had disarmed Georgian police forces in the Kodori Valley and the Georgian police had pulled out.¹⁶

On August 10, Russia sent ships from the Black Sea Fleet to deliver troops to Abkhazia and take up positions along Georgia's coastline. Russian military officials reported that up to 6,000 troops had been deployed by sea or air. Russian television reported that Igor Dygalo, Russian naval spokesman and aide to the Russian navy commander-in-chief, claimed that Russian ships had sunk a Georgian vessel in a short battle off the coast of Georgia.¹⁷ Georgian officials reported that the Russian ships were preventing ships from entering or leaving the port at Poti. The Russians reportedly also sank Georgia's coast guard vessels at Poti. Russian troops occupied a Georgian military base in the town of Senaki, near Poti, on August 11.

Ceasefire

On August 12, the Russian government announced at mid-day that Medvedev had called Javier Solana, the European Union's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy to report that "the aim of Russia's operation for coercing the Georgian side to peace had been achieved and it had been decided to conclude the operation."¹⁸ In a subsequent meeting with Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov and chief of Armed Forces General Staff Nikolai Makarov, Medvedev stated that "based on your report I have ordered an end to the operations to oblige Georgia to restore peace.... The security of our peacekeeping brigade and civilian population has been restored. The aggressor has been punished and suffered very heavy losses." Seemingly in contradiction to his order for a halt in operations, he also ordered his generals to continue "mopping up" actions, which included ongoing bombing by warplanes throughout Georgia, the occupation of villages, and destruction of military bases, bridges, industries, houses, and other economic or strategic assets.¹⁹

Later on August 12, Medvedev met with visiting French President Sarkozy, who presented a ceasefire plan on behalf of the EU.²⁰ President Medvedev reportedly backed some elements of the plan. French Foreign Minister Koucher then flew to Tbilisi to present the proposals to the Georgian government. Medvedev and Saakashvili consulted by phone the night of August 12-13 and they reportedly agreed in principle to a six-point peace plan, according to a press conference by Sarkozy.

¹⁶ *CEDR*, August 10, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-950192 and Doc. No. CEP-950191.

¹⁷ *CEDR*, August 10, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-950216.

¹⁸ *ITAR-TASS*, August 12, 2008.

¹⁹ *CEDR*, August 12, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-950208.

²⁰ President Sarkozy — whose country had taken the rotating leadership of the EU in July 2008 — had extensive phone consultations on August 10 with Saakashvili, Medvedev, Bush, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and other European leaders to work out the EU peace plan.

The peace plan calls for all parties to the conflict²¹ to cease hostilities and pull troops back to positions they had occupied before the conflict began. Other elements of the peace plan include allowing humanitarian aid into the conflict zone and facilitating the return of displaced persons. It excludes mention of Georgia's territorial integrity. The plan calls for the withdrawal of Russian combat troops from Georgia, but allows Russian "peacekeepers" to remain and to patrol in a larger security zone outside South Ossetia that will include a swath of Georgian territory along South Ossetia's border. The plan also calls for "the opening of international discussions on the modalities of security and stability of South Ossetia and Abkhazia." This seems to provide for possibly greater international roles in peace talks and peacekeeping, both of seminal Georgian interest. However, it does not specifically state that international peacekeepers will be deployed within South Ossetia. Supposedly, the Russian "peacekeepers" will cease patrolling the area outside South Ossetia after the modalities of international peacekeeping are worked out and monitors are deployed within this area, a process that could take some time.

An emergency meeting of EU foreign ministers on August 13 endorsed the peace plan and the possible participation of EU monitors. Medvedev hosted the *de facto* presidents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Moscow on August 14, where they signed the peace agreement. On August 15, Secretary Rice traveled to Tbilisi and Saakashvili signed the agreement. France submitted a draft resolution based on the plan at a meeting of the U.N. Security Council on August 19, but Russia blocked it, reportedly stating that only the verbatim elements of the vaguely-written plan should be included in the resolution.²²

Occupation Operations

The Russian military was widely reported to be carrying out extensive "mopping up" operations throughout Georgia, except for the capital, Tbilisi. These appear to involve degrading Georgia's remaining military assets and occupying extensive "buffer zones" of Georgian territory near the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. On August 20, Russia's General Staff deputy head Nogovitsyn claimed that the 6-point peace plan permitted the establishment of "buffer zones" and no-fly zones near Georgia's borders with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He specified that the zone around Abkhazia would include Georgia's Senaki military base, precluding Georgia's use of the base. These zones appear somewhat like those established by Armenia during the early 1990s conflict over Azerbaijan's breakaway Nagorno Karabakh region.

International media reported that Russian troops and paramilitary forces were widely looting, destroying infrastructure, detaining Georgians, and placing mines throughout the country, similar to what often took place during Russia's operations

²¹ The Russian Foreign Ministry has asserted that the parties to the conflict covered by the peace plan are Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia signed the peace plan as a mediator of the conflict, along with France, signing for the EU. The OSCE might also sign as a mediator. *CEDR*, August 19, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-950086.

²² Christopher Boian, "Russia Moves Toward Recognition of Georgian Rebel Zones," *Agence France Presse*, August 20, 2008.

in its breakaway Chechnya region early in the decade. On August 18, Russian forces burned the Ganmukhuri youth patriotic camp near Zugdidi, which Russia had claimed was a Georgian military base. From the occupied base at Senaki, Russian troops made repeated forays into the countryside. Russian forces occupying Poti reportedly prevented most trade in and out of the port and widely pillaged. They detained 20 Georgian troops and police guarding the port on August 19. They also allegedly destroyed a Georgian missile boat and seized U.S. HUMVEEs being shipped out of the port.²³ France reportedly raised concerns that a mountain warfare training base it had helped Georgia set up in Sachkere in Western Georgia for NATO interoperability training was being threatened with destruction by Russian military forces.²⁴

Russia's Partial Withdrawal

On August 21, the deputy chief of the Russian General Staff, Anatoliy Nogovitsyn, stated that "by the end of August 22 all forces of the Russian Federation [now in Georgia] will be within the area of responsibility of the Russian peacekeepers." Western media on August 22 reported sizeable but not complete Russian military withdrawals. On August 22, Russian forces reportedly left the village of Igoeti, 17 miles from Tbilisi, but an Ossetian militia occupied the village of Akhalgori, 25 miles north-west of Tbilisi.²⁵ Russian forces reportedly were leaving Gori on August 22. Until then, access to the city had been partially restricted. In the northwest, Russian troops reportedly left the Senaki military base. Russia claimed that it would retain 2,142 Russian "peacekeepers" in the Abkhaz conflict zone while the rest withdrew to Russia.²⁶

Nogovitsyn and other Russian officials seemingly had argued that Georgia's actions had negated past ceasefire regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Nonetheless, Nogovitsyn asserted on August 28 that the 1992 ceasefire accords for South Ossetia permitted Russia to deploy "peacekeeping" troops in Poti, more than one hundred miles from South Ossetia, or in other areas "adjacent" to the region.²⁷

Russia Recognizes the Independence of the Regions

On August 25, Russia's Federation Council (upper legislative chamber) and the Duma (lower chamber) met and recommended that the president recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In an announcement on August 26,

²³ Bela Szandelszky and Mike Eckel, "Russia Moves Toward Pullback but Shows Strength," *Associated Press*, August 20, 2008.

²⁴ "French-Funded Army Training Center in Georgia Threatened," *Agence France Presse*, August 20, 2008.

²⁵ *The Guardian* (London), August 19, 2008.

²⁶ Svante Cornell, Johanna Popjanevski, and Niklas Nilsson, *Russia's War in Georgia: Causes and Implications for Georgia and the World*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, August 2008, p. 21.

²⁷ *CEDR*, August 28, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-950418.

Medvedev claimed that “humanitarianism” dictated that Russia recognize the independence of the regions, and he called on other countries to also extend diplomatic recognition.

The U.N. High Commissioner of Refugees raised concerns in late August about reports of newly displaced Georgians in areas north of Gori, caused by “marauding bands” who forced them to flee.²⁸

Implications for Georgia and Russia

According to some observers, the recent Russia-Georgia conflict harms both countries. In the case of Georgia and South Ossetia, the fighting reportedly has resulted in hundreds of military and civilian casualties and large-scale infrastructure damage that may well set back economic growth and contribute to urgent humanitarian needs. Tens of thousands of displaced persons add to humanitarian concerns. The fighting appears to have hardened anti-Georgian attitudes in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, making the possibility of re-integration with Georgia more remote. Georgia also may face more difficulty in persuading some NATO members that it is ready for a Membership Action Plan (MAP), usually considered as a prelude to membership. In the case of Russia, its seemingly disproportionate military campaign and its unilateral declaration of recognition appear to have widely harmed its image as a reliable and peaceable member of the international community. Russia also reports that its military operations and pledges to rebuild South Ossetia are costing hundreds of millions of dollars.

President Medvedev’s vow on August 8 to “punish” Georgia denoted Russian intentions beyond restoring control over South Ossetia. When he announced on August 12 that Russian troops were ending their offensive against Georgia, he stated that Russia’s aims had been accomplished and the aggressor punished. Various observers have suggested several possible Russian reasons for the “punishment” beyond inflicting casualties and damage. These include coercing Georgia to accept Russian conditions on the status of the separatist regions, to relinquish its aspirations to join NATO,²⁹ and to reverse democratization.³⁰ In addition, Russia may have wanted to “punish” the West for recognizing Kosovo’s independence, for seeking to integrate Soviet successor states (which are viewed by Russia as part of its sphere of influence) into Western institutions such as the EU and NATO, and for developing oil and gas pipeline routes that bypass Russia.

The prospects of opening Russia-Georgia peace talks appear dimmed by Russia’s refusal to further negotiate with Saakashvili, and Georgia’s decision on

²⁸ U.N. Security Council. *Press Release: Security Council Briefed by Political Affairs, Peacekeeping on Georgia Developments, Including Aug. 26 Recognition Decrees on Abkhazia, South Ossetia*, August 28, 2008.

²⁹ “Russia ‘Punishing’ Georgia for NATO Aspirations,” *RFE/RL*, August 10, 2008.

³⁰ Robert Kagan, “Putin Makes His Move,” *Washington Post*, August 11, 2008.

August 29 to sever diplomatic relations with Russia.³¹ Ruptured trade and transport ties, with regional economic and humanitarian repercussions, are likely to persist for some time, according to many observers.

The Russia-Georgia conflict seemed to show that Putin was the dominant figure in the Russian government. Putin left the Beijing Olympics early and flew to Vladikavkaz in North Ossetia. State-controlled media showed Putin meeting with military officers and seemingly in charge of military operations. Later government-issued reports and telecasts of meetings between Medvedev and Putin during the crisis appeared to show Putin “suggesting” courses of action to Medvedev. Following international criticism of Russia’s incomplete withdrawal of military troops from Georgia and its recognition of the regions as independent, both Putin and Medvedev have escalated their anti-Western rhetoric, according to many observers. One Russian commentator has raised concerns that the hard line followed by Putin and Medvedev has strengthened the influence of the so-called *siloviki* — the representatives and veterans of the military, security, and police agencies — over foreign and defense policy.³²

Many observers have warned Russia that it risks international isolation by engaging in behavior widely condemned by the world of nations. Appearing to preempt Western consideration of sanctions against Russia, Prime Minister Putin has downplayed the importance of Russia joining the World Trade Organization or retaining membership in the G-8, and has implemented trade restrictions on U.S. food exports. Russia attempted to gain support for its actions at a late August summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (a trade and security organization consisting of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan), but the communique appeared to reflect China’s disapproval of recognizing breakaway regions.³³

Casualties and Displaced Persons

Claims of dead and injured were impossible to verify independently, since both Russia and Georgia limited media access in South Ossetia. On August 20, sources in South Ossetia claimed that nearly 1,500 people had been killed during the conflict with Georgia. On August 20, the deputy head of Russia’s General Staff, Anatoliy Nogovitsyn, stated that 64 Russian military personnel had been killed and 323 wounded during the fighting. Russian military sources reported that four of its warplanes had been shot down. A Georgian official reported on August 19 that 215 soldiers and civilians had been killed and nearly 1,500 wounded.

According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 150,000 persons were displaced by the fighting in Georgia, South Ossetia, and

³¹ The Russian Foreign Ministry asserted on August 18 that while Russia was ready for negotiations with Georgia over the South Ossetia crisis, “we do not regard Mikheil Saakashvili as a negotiating partner.” *Interfax*, August 19, 2008.

³² *CEDR*, August 11, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-25028.

³³ *CEDR*, August 28, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-950470.

Abkhazia. Russia's Emergency Situations Ministry reported in late August that 35,000 South Ossetians had fled to North Ossetia during the fighting, but that 24,000 had returned to their homes and that all the temporary accommodation facilities opened in North Ossetia had been closed.³⁴ According to Georgian reports, Ossetian and allied paramilitary forces in South Ossetia were engaged in "ethnic cleansing" against ethnic Georgians, forcing those remaining to flee the region. A similar process allegedly was threatened in Abkhazia.³⁵

On August 12, 2008, Georgia filled a case against Russia at the International Court of Justice for alleged acts of ethnic cleansing and other crimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia between 1990 and 2008. President Medvedev also had threatened to file a case with the Court about Georgia's "genocide" in South Ossetia. The Court has scheduled an urgent hearing on September 8-10, 2008. It may issue a "provisional measures" order to Russia to immediately cease and desist from further acts of ethnic cleansing, after which the Court will conduct hearings on the details of the allegations. Besides Russia's support for ethnic cleansing, Georgia has requested that the Court declare as unlawful Russia's moves to recognize the separatist regions and Russia's denial of the right of return of internally displaced ethnic Georgians. The case also requests monetary compensation for the damage Russia has inflicted on Georgia.³⁶

Several non-governmental organizations have alleged that both Russia and Georgia committed human rights abuses during the conflict. Human Rights Watch (HRW) has alleged that the Georgian military used "indiscriminate and disproportionate force resulting in civilian deaths in South Ossetia" on August 7-8, and that the Russian military subsequently used "indiscriminate force" in South Ossetia and the Gori area, and targeted convoys of civilians attempting to flee the conflict zones. HRW has alleged that Russia used cluster bombs against civilians, and has rejected claims by Russia that Georgia was carrying out "genocide" in South Ossetia. HRW argues that hospital records and eyewitness accounts do not support Russian and South Osetian claims that thousands of civilians were killed. HRW urges an international investigation of human rights abuses during the conflict and

³⁴ U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). *Situation Report No. 8 on the Situation in Georgia*, August 27, 2008.

³⁵ Laurence Peter, "Civilian emergency hits Georgia," *BBC News*, August 12, 2008; "15,000 Refugees Return to South Ossetia: Russian Ministry," *Agence France Presse*, August 20, 2008.

³⁶ International Court of Justice. Press Release. *Georgia Institutes Proceedings Against Russia for Violations of the Convention On the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, No. 2008/23, August 12, 2008; *Georgia Submits a Request for the Indication of Provisional Measures*, No. 2008/24, August 14, 2008; *Proceedings Instituted by Georgia Against Russia: Urgent Communication to the Parties from the President under Article 74, Paragraph 4, of the Rules of Court*, No. 2008/26, August 15, 2008. See also *News Conference with Legal Council for the Republic of Georgia Payam Akhavan*, National Press Club, August 21, 2008.

the deployment of an international security mission to protect civilians and help displaced persons return home.³⁷

International Response

Myriad world leaders and organizations initially rushed to mediate the Georgia-Russia conflict. While many governments have appeared to consider that both Russia and Georgia may share blame for the recent conflict, they have stressed that the most important concern at present is implementation of a ceasefire regime and urgent humanitarian relief. These governments have criticized Russia for excessive use of force and peremptorily recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in violation of the principle of Georgia's territorial integrity, and Georgia for attempting to reintegrate South Ossetia by force.³⁸

Immediately after the events of August 7-8, the U.N. Security Council (UNSC) met daily for several days to attempt to agree on a resolution, but Russia and China refused to agree to various texts proffered by the United States, France, and Great Britain. The latter states were working on a resolution based on the EU peace plan (see below).³⁹ At the UNSC meeting on August 10, U.S. Permanent Representative Zalmay Khalilzad denounced the "Russian attack on sovereign Georgia and targeting of civilians and a campaign of terror," and warned that "Russia's relations with the United States and others would be affected by its continued assault on Georgia and its refusal to contribute to a peaceful conclusion of the crisis." Churkin countered that it was "completely unacceptable" for Khalilzad to accuse Russia of a campaign of terror, "especially from the lips of a representative of a country whose action we are aware of in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Serbia."

On August 10, Lavrov claimed that Rice had "incorrectly interpreted" remarks he made to her in a phone conversation earlier about Saakashvili. Lavrov emphasized that Russia "cannot consider as a partner a person [referring to Saakashvili] who gave an order to carry out war crimes," but he rejected the inference

³⁷ Human Rights Watch. *Georgia: International Groups Should Send Missions to Investigate Violations and Protect Civilians*, August 18, 2008; *Georgia: Civilians Killed by Russian Cluster Bomb 'Duds'*, August 21, 2008. Amnesty International. *Civilians Vulnerable after Hostilities in Georgia*, August 14, 2008. For mutual accusations by Russia and Georgia of human rights abuses during the conflict, see U.N. Office at Geneva. Conference on Disarmament. *Conference Hears Georgia Say Russian Forces Guilty of Targeting Civilians; Russia Alleges Georgian Policy of Ethnic Cleansing*, August 14, 2008.

³⁸ Alexei Malashenko, quoted in *Moscow Times*, August 11, 2008.

³⁹ Some observers pointed out that Russia and China dismissed arguments that Georgia was dealing with its own internal affairs in South Ossetia, while Moscow and Beijing reject international "interference" in how they deal with separatist problems in Chechnya, Tibet, and Xinjiang.

that Moscow was demanding Saakashvili's ouster as a condition for ending military operations.⁴⁰

The presidents of the three Baltic states and Poland called on August 9 for the EU and NATO to oppose the "imperialist policy" of Russia. The next day, Polish President Lech Kaczynski unveiled a plan worked out by the Baltic states, Poland, and Ukraine, for an international stabilization force for the South Caucasus, and recommended the plan to French President Sarkozy for consideration by the EU. Commenting on the plan, Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski stated that an EU stabilization force was needed, since "it is no longer possible for Russian soldiers alone to assure the peace in South Ossetia." In apparent contrast to the Polish position, Italy's Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi warned against the EU adopting an "anti-Russian" stance regarding the Russia-Georgia conflict.⁴¹ EU foreign ministers met in Brussels in emergency session on August 13. They emphasized support for the EU peace plan, called for bolstering OSCE monitoring in South Ossetia, and suggested that EU or U.N. observers might be necessary.⁴²

On August 19, Russia agreed to the stationing of 20 observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to be deployed immediately to an area adjacent to South Ossetia. They will supplement the 8 monitors who are already in Georgia and will later be bolstered to 100 monitors. Secretary Rice stated that the United States would facilitate the transport and equipping of the monitors. The initial group of monitors began work at the end of August.

European and other international leaders were overwhelmingly critical of what they viewed as Russia's non-compliance with the provision of the six-point peace plan that called for Russia to withdraw its military forces from Georgia. Sarkozy reportedly phoned Medvedev to stress that Russian military troops are only temporarily permitted to patrol in a restricted security zone along South Ossetia's border pending the deployment of international monitors. However, Russia has appeared to have rejected this understanding.⁴³

European and other international leaders likewise were overwhelmingly critical of Medvedev's decision to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Chancellor Merkel termed the recognition "absolutely not acceptable," and raised the hope that a dialogue still could be opened with Russia, although she stated that such a dialogue presupposed "shared values, and those include respecting the territorial integrity of individual states, as well as the use of international mechanisms

⁴⁰ *Agence France Presse*, August 10, 2008.

⁴¹ *EDR*, August 11, 2008, Doc. No. EUP-58004 and Doc. No. EUP-100019; August 12, 2008, Doc. No. EUP-58002.

⁴² Council of the European Union. *Council Conclusions on the Situation in Georgia*, August 13, 2008.

⁴³ Ahto Lobjakas "EU Overwhelmed By Russian 'Cut-And-Thrust' In Georgia," *RFE/RL*, August 26, 2008.

to resolve conflicts.”⁴⁴ Sarkozy, in his capacity as the EU President, issued a statement strongly condemning the recognition as “contrary to the principles of the independence, the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Georgia,” and that the EU would “examine from this point of view the consequences of Russia’s decision.”⁴⁵ Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini likewise decried the apparent creation of ethnically-homogeneous enclaves in the region, but cautioned against a Western reaction of isolating Russia.⁴⁶

During a UNSC meeting on August 28, most members criticized Russia’s non-compliance with the six-point plan and the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, including the United States, Great Britain, France, Spain, Costa Rica, Belgium, and Indonesia. U.S. Deputy Permanent Representative Alejandro Wolff reportedly condemned Russia’s recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as incompatible with a UNSC resolution approved in April 2008 that reaffirmed the commitment of U.N. Members to respect the territorial integrity of Georgia. He raised the question that such disregard for the resolution by Russia could be a portent of further disregard for the U.N. He also stated that Russia’s attack in Abkhazia disregarded UNOMIG’s mandate. Churkin responded that UNSC members should not have violated U.N. resolutions by recognizing Kosovo.⁴⁷

Some observers have suggested that sanctions the West might take against Russia might include no longer inviting Russia to participate in the Group of Eight (G-8) industrialized democracies, withdrawing support for Russia as the host of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, and re-examining Russia’s suitability for membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO). U.S. analyst Ariel Cohen urged the West “to send a strong signal to Moscow that creating 19th century-style spheres of influence and redrawing the borders of the former Soviet Union is a danger to world peace.”⁴⁸ EU analyst Nicu Popescu has called for the EU to sanction Russia, including by suspending talks on a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.⁴⁹

Several Western diplomats and analysts drew parallels between Russia’s activities in Georgia and the 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia (Yugoslavia), which was aimed at forcing Serb President Slobodan Milosevic to end Serbian attacks in the Kosovo region. Moscow opposed the NATO operation. According to former Greek

⁴⁴ *Associated Press*, August 26, 2008.

⁴⁵ “EU Condemns Russian Recognition of South Ossetia, Abkhazia: Presidency,” *Agence France Presse*, August 26, 2008.

⁴⁶ Lisa Bryant, “West Slams Russian Recognition of Breakaway Regions,” *Agence France Presse*, August 26, 2008.

⁴⁷ John Helprin, “Russia Says it Is Ready to Negotiate with Georgia,” *Associated Press*, August 10, 2008. U.N. Security Council. *Security Council Briefed by Political Affairs, Peacekeeping on Georgia Developments, Including 26 August Recognition Decrees on Abkhazia, South Ossetia*, Press Release SC/9438, August 28, 2008.

⁴⁸ Ariel Cohen, “The Russian-Georgian War: A Challenge for the U.S. and the World,” *Heritage Foundation Web Memo*, August 11, 2008.

⁴⁹ *EUObserver*, August 13, 2008.

diplomat Alex Rondos, “Russia wants to serve up to the West a textbook copy of what the West did to Serbia, but of course it’s a ghastly parody.”⁵⁰ These observers criticize Russia’s disproportionate response in Georgia and stress that NATO’s military aircraft and artillery did not target civilians in Serbia, as Russian forces allegedly targeted ethnic Georgian villages in South Ossetia and across the border. They also stress that NATO halted operations after Serbia pulled its forces out of Kosovo and accepted international peacekeeping, while Russia continued operations after Georgia’s withdrawal of troops from South Ossetia and its calls for a ceasefire.

While some commentators objected to Georgia’s military incursion into South Ossetia as unjustifiable, others argued that Georgia had been provoked by Russia and South Ossetia and had been forced to counter-attack. Taking the former view, London’s Independent argued on August 10 that “U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice ... should, while defending Georgia’s sovereignty, also point out to President Saakashvili that the US cannot underwrite a bellicose approach towards its separatist regions.”⁵¹ Taking the latter view, British analyst David Clark argued on August 11 that Georgia’s “resort to offensive operations came at the end of a long period of rising tension in which Russia had done everything it could to stir up trouble and provoke a reaction.”⁵² Similarly, U.S. analyst Robert Kagan argued that Russia “precipitated a war against Georgia by encouraging South Ossetian rebels,” and that Saakashvili “[fell] into Putin’s trap.”⁵³

Taking a seemingly dimmer view of Russian intentions, U.S. analyst Ronald Asmus has stated that “despite everything we may have hoped for we are in a new geopolitical competition in the old Soviet spheres of influence. We may lose Georgia. We may lose the ... best chance for a democratic future in the Caucasus. The next target for Moscow will be Ukraine.”⁵⁴ One Italian commentator asserted that Russia’s actions in Georgia represented the beginning of Russia’s efforts to roll back the Euro-Atlantic integration of Eastern European and Soviet successor states.⁵⁵

Some observers have raised concerns that Russia’s alleged attempts to bomb the Georgian sections of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the South Caucasus [gas] Pipeline (SCP) were Russian attempts to disrupt Caspian energy pipelines that it does not control. The BTC pipeline provides oil to Europe and the United States. The SCP provides gas to Turkey and to EU-member Greece, and may be further extended to other EU members. Azerbaijan’s pledge to provide gas through a prospective Nabucco pipeline that would run through Georgia and Turkey

⁵⁰ *Wall Street Journal*, August 11, 2008.

⁵¹ It conditioned this by adding that “the Russians should not be allowed to get away with supporting breakaway regions within Georgia.”

⁵² David Clark, *The Guardian*, August 11, 2008.

⁵³ Robert Kagan, “Putin Makes His Move,” *Washington Post*, August 11, 2008.

⁵⁴ Ronald Asmus, *Christian Science Monitor*, August 11, 2008; Ronald Asmus, “Black Sea Watershed,” *GMF News*, August 11, 2008.

⁵⁵ Open Source Center. *Europe: Daily Report* (hereafter *EDR*), August 12, 2008, Doc. No. EUP-25002.

to Europe also might face greater Russian opposition, as might the proposed trans-Caspian oil and gas pipelines, which would provide Central Asian countries with non-Russian export routes to the West.

Some observers in Soviet successor states voiced concerns that Russia's actions in Georgia did not bode well for their own sovereignty and independence. Russia's *Moscow Times* newspaper termed Russia's actions in Georgia "the strongest possible signal of how far [Russia] is ready to go to retain influence" in other Soviet successor states, and warned that these states are likely to "seek protection from the West," because of fears that they one day might be invaded.⁵⁶ Ukraine and Azerbaijan appeared to be among the Soviet successor states with heightened concerns about Russian intentions. However, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan quickly endorsed Russia's actions and shipped humanitarian assistance to North and South Ossetia.

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner reportedly warned on August 27 that Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia amounted to "an armed seizure of foreign territory," and that Russia's next targets might be "Ukraine, namely Crimea, and Moldova." British Foreign Secretary David Miliband visited Ukraine on August 27 where he called on Russia "to clarify its attitude to the territorial integrity of its neighbors," and called for greater EU and NATO efforts to support a democratic Ukraine.⁵⁷ Different views within the Ukrainian government on the implications of the Russia-Georgia conflict threatened to contribute to the collapse of the coalition government.

International Humanitarian Assistance

Many countries and international organizations have launched humanitarian assistance efforts. The U.N. World Food Program reported that it began efforts in Georgia on August 9. On August 18, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) requested \$59.65 million in an initial "flash appeal" to cover the "immediate life-saving" food, shelter, health, water, sanitation, and protection needs of an estimated 158,700 persons over the next six months.⁵⁸ As of August 29, OCHA reported that 17 donor countries and organizations had contributed \$10 million to the flash appeal and had pledged another \$13 million. It also reported that U.N. agencies, NGOs, and donor governments had quickly mobilized to deliver large amounts of relief commodities to Georgia.

The ICRC issued a preliminary appeal on August 11 for \$7.4 million to support its efforts to monitor captured or arrested persons, to provide surgical care for the wounded; and to assist civilians in South Ossetia and the rest of Georgia and persons

⁵⁶ *Moscow Times*, August 11, 2008.

⁵⁷ *EDR*, August 27, 2008, Doc. No. EUP-100001; *CEDR*, August 27, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-950415 and Doc. No. CEP-950357.

⁵⁸ U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Consolidated Appeal Process, *Georgia Crisis Flash Appeal 2008*, August 18, 2008.

displaced to North Ossetia. Among international institutions and NGOs, Russia has permitted only the ICRC to work in South Ossetia.⁵⁹

U.S. Response

For years, the United States had urged Georgia to work within existing peace settlement frameworks for Abkhazia and South Ossetia — which allowed for Russian “peacekeeping” — while criticizing some Russian actions in the regions. This stance appeared to change during 2008, when the United States and other governments increasingly came to support Georgia’s calls for the creation of alternative negotiating mechanisms to address these “frozen” conflicts, particularly since talks under existing formats had broken down.

This U.S. policy shift was spurred by increasing Russian actions that appeared to threaten Georgia’s territorial integrity. Among these, the Russian government in March 2008 formally withdrew from economic sanctions on Abkhazia imposed by the Commonwealth of Independent States, permitting open Russian trade and investment.⁶⁰ Of greater concern, President Putin issued a directive in April 2008 to step up government-to-government ties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He also ordered stepped up consular services for the many “Russian citizens” in the two regions. He proclaimed that many documents issued by the separatist governments and businesses which had been established in the regions would be recognized as legitimate by the Russian government. Georgian officials and other observers raised concerns that this directive tightened and flaunted Russia’s jurisdiction over the regions and appeared to be moving toward official Russian recognition of their independence.

A meeting of the U.N. Security Council (UNSC) on April 23, 2008, discussed these Russian moves. Although the Security Council issued no public decision, the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany stated that same day that they “are highly concerned about the latest Russian initiative to establish official ties with ... Abkhazia and South Ossetia without the consent of the Government of Georgia. We call on the Russian Federation to revoke or not to implement its decision.”⁶¹ The Russian foreign ministry claimed that Russia’s actions had been taken to boost the basic human rights of residents in the regions.

According to one U.S. media report, Bush Administration officials “were taken by surprise” by Georgia’s attempt to occupy South Ossetia in early August 2008, since the Administration had cautioned Georgia against actions that might result in

⁵⁹ “Red Cross Says Its Experts Heading for South Ossetia,” *Agence France Presse*, August 20, 2008.

⁶⁰ The economic sanctions had been approved by the Commonwealth of Independent States in January 1996 at Georgia’s behest as an inducement to Abkhazia to engage in peace negotiations with Georgia.

⁶¹ “Germany, Great Britain, France, U.S.A. and Germany Passed Communique,” *Black Sea Press*, April 24, 2008.

a Russian military response. At the same time, a “senior U.S. official” on August 9 reportedly described the fighting in South Ossetia as localized and unlikely to escalate.⁶²

President Bush was at the Beijing Olympics when large-scale fighting began. Although he did not cut short his trip (unlike Putin), President Bush stated on August 9 in Beijing that “Georgia is a sovereign nation, and its territorial integrity must be respected. We have urged an immediate halt to the violence and a stand-down by all troops. We call for the end of the Russian bombings.” A similar statement was issued by Secretary Rice. On August 10, Deputy National Security Adviser James Jeffrey warned Russia of a “significant long-term impact” on US-Russian relations if Moscow continued “disproportionate actions” in Georgia and urged Russia to respond favorably to Georgia’s withdrawal of forces from South Ossetia.⁶³ Late on August 10, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza flew to Tbilisi to assist with Koucher’s EU peace plan.

On August 10, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told Secretary Rice in a phone conversation that “given the continuing direct threat to the lives of Russian citizens in South Ossetia, Russian peacekeeping forces... are continuing operations to force peace on the Georgian side.” U.S. Permanent Representative to the U.N. Khalilzad revealed that Lavrov had told Rice that Saakashvili “must go” as a condition for a ceasefire.⁶⁴

Vice President Cheney issued a statement on August 10 after a phone conversation with Saakashvili that “Russian aggression must not go unanswered,” and that the continuation of aggression “would have serious consequences for [Russia’s] relations with the United States, as well as the broader international community.”⁶⁵ Also appearing to take a stronger stance, President Bush on August 11 referred to his conversation with Putin on August 8, stating that he had told Putin that “this violence [in Georgia] is unacceptable,” and that he had “expressed my grave concern about the disproportionate response of Russia and that we strongly condemn bombing outside of South Ossetia.”⁶⁶ On August 12, Secretary Rice stated that she was encouraged by reports from French Foreign Minister Koucher in Moscow that there was progress in talks with President Medvedev about the EU

⁶² *Associated Press*, August 11, 2008; *Wall Street Journal*, August 11, 2008.

⁶³ The White House. *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Dana Perino and Senior Director for East Asian Affairs Dennis Wilder and Deputy National Security Advisor Ambassador Jim Jeffrey*, August 10, 2008.

⁶⁴ John Heilprin, “U.S., Russian Ambassadors Spar at UN over Georgia,” *Associated Press*, August 10, 2008.

⁶⁵ Stephanie Gaskell, “Cheney Warns Russia: Veep Says Attack on Georgia ‘Must Not Go Unanswered’ as War Expands,” *Daily News* (New York), August 11, 2008.

⁶⁶ The White House. Office of the Press Secretary. *President Bush Discusses Situation in Georgia*, August 11, 2008.

peace plan, and reiterated that the United States supports Georgia's territorial integrity and "its democratically elected government."⁶⁷

On August 10, the U.S. military began flying 2,000 Georgian troops home from Iraq after Georgia recalled them. A U.S. military spokesman stated that "we want to thank them for the great support they have given the coalition and we wish them well." Another military spokesman stated that "we are supporting the Georgian military units that are in Iraq in their redeployment to Georgia so that they can support requirements there during the current security situation."⁶⁸ On August 11, Putin criticized these U.S. flights as aiding Georgia in the conflict.

In a strong statement on August 13, President Bush called for Russia "to begin to repair the damage to its relations with the United States, Europe, and other nations, and to begin restoring its place in the world [by meeting] its commitment to cease all military activities in Georgia [and withdrawing] all Russian forces that entered Georgia in recent days." He raised concerns that some Russian troops remained in the vicinity of Gori and Poti. He announced that he was sending Secretary Rice to France to "confer with President Sarkozy" on the EU peace plan and to Georgia, "where she will personally convey America's unwavering support for Georgia's democratic government [and] continue our efforts to rally the free world in the defense of a free Georgia." He also announced that Defense Secretary Robert Gates would direct a humanitarian aid mission, which already had begun with an airlift of medical supplies to Tbilisi.⁶⁹

In seemingly harsh language on August 19, Secretary Rice asserted that Russia is "becoming more and more the outlaw in this conflict," and that by "invading smaller neighbors, bombing civilian infrastructure, going into villages and wreaking havoc and wanton destruction of this infrastructure," Russia is isolating itself from the "community of nations."⁷⁰ The White House also complained that "It did not take [Russian forces] really three or four days to get into Georgia, and it really should not take them three or four days to get out."⁷¹

Appearing to have a different interpretation than Russia about the requirements of the peace plan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza asserted in a briefing on August 19, 2008, that the plan calls for all Russian military forces to

⁶⁷ U.S. Department of State. Office of the Press Secretary. *Remarks by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Situation in Georgia*, August 12, 2008.

⁶⁸ Kim Gamel, "U.S. Military Begins Flying Georgian Troops Home," *Associated Press*, August 10, 2008.

⁶⁹ The White House. Office of the Press Secretary. *President Bush Discusses Situation in Georgia, Urges Russia to Cease Military Operations*, August 13, 2008.

⁷⁰ U.S. Department of State. *Secretary Rice Delivers Remarks in Brussels, Belgium*, August 19, 2008; *CBS News Transcripts*, August 19, 2008.

⁷¹ The White House. *Press Briefing*, August 19, 2008.

leave Georgia — including the breakaway South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions — so that only the pre-conflict Russian “peacekeepers” remain in the regions.⁷²

Bryza also presented the most detailed Administration position to date on the events in Georgia. He appeared to argue that the outbreak of fighting in Georgia’s breakaway South Ossetia region on the night of August 7-8 was preplanned and provoked by Russia. He pointed out that “South Ossetia’s government and its security structures are run by Russian officials [who were] commanding these South Ossetian forces that were shooting at ... Georgian peacekeepers or troops and villages.” He also asserted that “there was an offensive under way from Russia, through the Roki Tunnel, toward Tskhinvali and Kurta and other ethnically Georgian villages. And at that point, the Georgian leadership told some of us: We have no choice but to defend our villages and our people” and lift a cease-fire that Georgia had declared earlier.

Despite this evidence, Bryza maintained, “whoever shot whom first is now no longer the issue at all. It is that Russia has escalated so dramatically and brutally.... Russia has moved well beyond South Ossetia.... It used strategic bombers to target civilian[s],” blocked the port of Poti, and destroyed east-west rail lines. Moreover, he stressed, Russian forces also invaded Georgia from its breakaway Abkhazia region, which “has nothing to do with South Ossetia at all.... In the case of Abkhazia, it was the Abkhaz who attacked the Georgians.” Bryza stated that the Administration in early August had “strongly recommended” to Georgia that it “not engage in a direct military conflict with Russia.”

U.S. Reaction to Russia’s Recognition Declaration

On August 26, President Bush condemned Medvedev’s decision to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia as “inconsistent with numerous U.N. Security Council Resolutions that Russia has voted for in the past and ... with the French-brokered six-point ceasefire agreement.... We expect Russia to live up to its international commitments, reconsider this irresponsible decision, and follow the approach set out in the six-point agreement.”⁷³ Secretary Rice expressed “regret” that Russia had violated a provision of the six-point peace plan that calls for international talks on the future of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. She stated that any attempt by Russia to bring the matter of Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence before the U.N. Security Council would “simply ... be dead on arrival.” The State Department also hinted at possible “consequences” for U.S.-Russia relations.⁷⁴

⁷² U.S. Department of State. Foreign Press Center. *Briefing: The Situation in the Republic of Georgia and its Implications for the Caucasus*, August 19, 2008.

⁷³ The White House. Office of the Press Secretary. *President Bush Condemns Actions Taken by Russian President in Regards to Georgia*, August 26, 2008.

⁷⁴ U.S. Department of State. *Remarks With Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas*, August 26, 2008; *Associated Press*, August 26, 2008. Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried has stated that without Secretary Rice’s efforts, “we would have no ceasefire at all with which to push the Russians and achieve some stability. Second, Secretary Rice focused the initial outrage and anxiety felt in Europe into a unified front at NATO in support of Georgia’s (continued...) ”

The Bush Administration has hoped to maintain cooperation with Russia on anti-terrorism (including assistance in operations in Afghanistan), non-proliferation, and sanctions against Iran and North Korea. On August 14, however, Secretary Gates stated that the Russia-Georgia conflict had forced the Administration to reconsider efforts to carry on “a long-term strategic dialogue with Russia,” and that “Russia’s behavior ... has called into question the entire premise of that dialogue and has profound implications for our security relationship going forward, both bilaterally and with NATO.”⁷⁵

U.S. Assistance

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) reported on August 26 that USAID, the State Department, and the Defense Department had provided \$22.2 million in direct humanitarian assistance to Georgia. Of this amount, the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) reported that its air transportation costs were \$13.5 million for over fifty flights to Georgia.⁷⁶ Turkey on August 20 approved a U.S. Navy ship and a Coast Guard cutter to traverse the Turkish Straits. On August 24, the USS McFaul docked at Georgia’s port of Batumi to deliver nearly 80 tons of humanitarian assistance, and on August 27, the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Dallas delivered 34 tons of assistance.

USAID Administrator Henrietta H. Fore reported that during a visit to assess needs she assured Georgian officials that “we in the United States government stand as friends with a vigorous and ongoing humanitarian assistance to the people and the government of Georgia. She reported that while some U.S. assistance may be provided to South Ossetia through international organizations, USAID is not allowed into South Ossetia.”⁷⁷

Georgia and the NATO Membership Action Plan

Some observers in Georgia and the West have argued that NATO’s failure to offer Georgia a Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the April 2008 NATO summit emboldened Russia’s aggressiveness toward Georgia. Others consider that NATO’s pledge that Georgia eventually would become a member, as well as Georgia’s ongoing movement toward integration with the West, spurred Russian aggression.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ (...continued)

territorial integrity and sovereignty, and the ceasefire agreement.” U.S. Department of State Official Blog. DipNote. *Secretary Rice: Leadership Through Negotiation in Georgia*, August 25, 2008.

⁷⁵ Steven Lee Myers and Thom Shanker, “Aides to Bush Say Russia Offensive Jeopardizes Ties,” *The New York Times*, August 15, 2008.

⁷⁶ USAID. *Georgia: Complex Emergency Fact Sheet*, No. 14 (FY2008), August 26, 2008.

⁷⁷ USAID. *Conference Call Briefing with Henrietta Fore, USAID Administrator, on the Humanitarian Situation in the Republic of Georgia*, August 15, 2008; *Georgia: Complex Emergency Fact Sheet*, No. 14 (FY2008), August 26, 2008.

⁷⁸ For background, see CRS Report RL34415, *Enlargement Issues at NATO’s Bucharest* (continued...)

Saakashvili argued on August 10 that Russia wanted to crush Georgia's independence and end its bid to join NATO. British analyst David Clark on August 11 endorsed the view that NATO should now quickly provide Georgia with a MAP.⁷⁹ Conversely, London's *Independent* on August 10 stated that "thinking hard" about giving NATO membership to countries with separatist conflicts had turned out to be a good policy, and suggested that the conflict is "a setback to Georgia's NATO ambitions."

France and Germany, which had voiced reservations at the April 2008 NATO summit about extending a MAP to Georgia, may argue even more forcefully against admitting Georgia, citing both the higher level of tensions over the separatist regions, Georgia's military incursion into South Ossetia, and the danger of war with Russia. Although the United States strongly supported a MAP for Georgia at the April 2008 NATO summit, recent events may have dimmed this prospect. A Slovakia commentator argued that "it is difficult to get around the impression that Georgian President Saakashvili took leave of his senses when he ordered his army to 'liberate' South Ossetia.... now there is danger that they have blocked their path to the Alliance for a long time, if not definitively. Moreover, the West will think twice whether it will become engaged on their side at all. This is precisely what Moscow wanted the most."⁸⁰

An emergency meeting of NATO ambassadors on August 12, 2008 reiterated "in very strong terms" support for a sovereign, independent Georgia, and "condemned and deplored [Russia's] excessive, disproportionate use of force," according to a report by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. He termed Georgia "a highly respected partner of NATO," and stated that the question of a MAP for Georgia remains "very much alive" and may be decided in December 2008. At the same time, there was evidence of hesitancy among some NATO members about moving forward with a MAP for Georgia at the December 2008 session.⁸¹

NATO foreign ministers met in emergency session on August 19 in the face of Russian delays in withdrawing from Georgia. The day before the meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko had warned that "Russia is fairly carrying out its obligations, including within the framework of our partnership with NATO. We continue to help NATO in Afghanistan, give transit opportunities and maintain cooperation in counteracting terrorism and the WMD non-proliferation. But if NATO tries to keep covering for Georgia we may have problems with the alliance."⁸²

⁷⁸ (...continued)

Summit, by Paul Gallis, Paul Belkin, Carl Ek, Julie Kim, Jim Nichol, and Steven Woehrel.

⁷⁹ David Clark, *The Guardian*, August 11, 2008.

⁸⁰ *EDR*, August 10, 2008, Doc. No. EUP-59002.

⁸¹ Robert Wielaard, "NATO Extends Warm Support for Georgia," *Associated Press*, August 12, 2008; "Georgia Still on Track to Join NATO, Alliance Chief Says," *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, August 12, 2008. Russia's NATO Ambassador Dmitry Rogozin denounced Scheffer's comments and demanded that NATO colleagues condemn Saakashvili.

⁸² *ITAR-TASS*, August 18, 2008.

At a press conference following the session, NATO Secretary General Scheffer announced that “NATO-Russia Council meetings would be placed on hold until Russia adhered to the ceasefire, and the future of our relations will depend on the concrete actions Russia will take to abide by the peace plan.”⁸³ However, seeming to reflect disagreement within NATO about how to treat Russia, the final statement did not specifically state that NATO-Russia Council meetings would be suspended, although it did warn that “we have determined that we cannot continue with business as usual.”⁸⁴ It also stated that a new NATO-Georgia Commission would be set up to a body to oversee cooperative initiatives, including repairing Georgia’s military capabilities. Lavrov denounced the NATO statement as “trying to portray the aggressor as the victim [and] to whitewash a criminal regime,” and Russia announced that it was suspending many activities with NATO.⁸⁵

Congressional Response

Congress has long been at the forefront in U.S. support for Georgia, including humanitarian, security, and democratization assistance as well as support for conflict resolution. Among recent actions, the Senate approved S.Res. 550 (Biden) on June 3, 2008, calling on Russia to disavow the establishment of direct government-to-government ties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Congress had begun its August 2008 recess when the Russia-Georgia conflict began, but many members spoke out on the issue. Among the initial statements were:

- On August 8, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman urged all parties to cease fighting and for Russia to withdraw its troops and respect Georgia’s territorial integrity.⁸⁶
- On August 8, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Joseph Biden called for U.S. officials and the U.N. Security Council to facilitate negotiations between the conflicting parties and stated that “Moscow has a particular obligation to avoid further escalation of the situation.”⁸⁷
- On August 8, Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen stated that Russia’s invasion of Georgia caused little surprise, given Russia’s

⁸³ “NATO Rebukes Russia as Hostilities Ease,” *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, August 20, 2008.

⁸⁴ NATO. *Statement: Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Foreign Ministers held at NATO Headquarters, Brussels*, August 19, 2008.

⁸⁵ Nick Coleman, “Medvedev Commits to Friday Pull-Out as NATO Feud Erupts,” *Agence France Presse*, August 20, 2008.

⁸⁶ “Statement by Congressman Howard Berman, Chairman of House Committee on Foreign Affairs, on Escalating Violence in South Ossetia,” *States News Service*, August 8, 2008.

⁸⁷ “Biden Issues Statement on Continued Violence in South Ossetia,” *States News Service*, August 8, 2008.

other increasingly aggressive foreign policy actions, and called for an international peacekeeping force for South Ossetia.⁸⁸

- On August 10, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Levin averred that the United States does “not have much impact, I believe, in terms of [Administration] declarations anymore,” but should work with Europe to make clear to Russia that its action “is way out of line” and to convince it to halt aggression in Georgia.⁸⁹
- On August 12, Senator Biden warned Russia that its aggression in Georgia jeopardized congressional support for legislation to collaborate with Russia on nuclear energy production and to repeal the Jackson-Vanik conditions on U.S. trade with Russia.⁹⁰
- On August 12, the bipartisan leadership of the House issued a statement strongly condemning “the recent Russian invasion of the sovereign state of Georgia,” and calling for the “world community to re-engage in negotiations to end the conflict and restore stability in this region [and] ensure that the needs of ... the Georgian people are met.”⁹¹
- Senator John McCain, the Ranking Minority Member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who had previously visited South Ossetia, condemned the Russian military incursion on August 8 and warned Russia that there could be severe, long-term negative consequences to its relations with the United States and Europe. He also stated on August 12 that he had phoned Saakashvili to offer support.
- Senator Barack Obama, Chairman of the Senate Europe Subcommittee, on August 8 condemned the Russian military incursion into Georgia, called for Georgia to refrain from using force in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and urged all sides to pursue a political settlement that addresses the status of the regions. Both

⁸⁸ “Ros-Lehtinen Comments on Outbreak of Violence in Georgia,” *States News Service*, August 8, 2008. She stated that Russian aggression against Georgia was “another reason for the Administration to withdraw the nuclear cooperation agreement from consideration by Congress.”

⁸⁹ Ben Feller, “Bush Seeks to Contain Violent Conflict in Georgia,” *Associated Press*, August 10, 2008.

⁹⁰ “Op-Ed: Russia Must Stand Down,” *States News Service*, August 12, 2008.

⁹¹ Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, Republican Leader John Boehner, and Republican Whip Roy Blunt, *Joint Statement on Russia’s Invasion of Georgia*, August 12, 2008.

Senators McCain and Obama have urged NATO to soon extend a MAP to Georgia.⁹²

Several Members are drafting resolutions and planning hearings and other congressional activities upon their return to Congress to address the Russia-Georgia conflict.

⁹² Steven Hurst, "McCain: Today We're All Georgians," *Associated Press Worldstream*, August 12, 2008; Steven Hurst, "Obama Notes Georgian Role in Crisis," *Associated Press Worldstream*, August 12, 2008.

Figure 2. Conflict between Russia and Georgia

Military Conflict between Russia and Georgia August 2008



Jacqueline V. Nolan, GIS Cartographer
Congressional Cartography Program
Library of Congress -- Washington, DC -- 08/18/08

Source Data: Digitized base map extracted from United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR); <http://www.reliefweb.int/nw/nw.nsf/db900sid:JOPA-7HGDFL?OpenDocument> and "The Guardian" (http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Guardian/documents/2008/08/12/GEORGIA_map6.pdf); Stratfor (www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo_georgian_war_and_balance_power)