

Chapter 5

Military Events of 2008

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Security-related events in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone preceding the outbreak of the August 2008 armed conflict

The steadily deteriorating political relationship between Georgia and the Russian Federation in 2006 - 2008 was accompanied by rising political tension, particularly in the conflict zones in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In spring 2008, a marked increase in military tension could be observed in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. One reason for this was the intensification of air activities over the conflict zone, including flights over the ceasefire line both by jet fighters and by unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). In the period of 18 March – 12 May, the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG)¹ was able to verify five Georgian reconnaissance UAVs and two jet fighter (the SU-25 type) flights over Abkhaz-controlled territory.² A number of Georgian UAVs were reportedly shot down by Abkhaz and Russian forces.³

The Georgians claimed that the purpose of the UAV flights was to monitor Russian military reinforcements in Abkhazia, but Sukhumi viewed them as a part of preparations for Georgian military operations in Abkhazia.

UNOMIG considered both the Georgian flights in the conflict zone as well as the actions taken by the Abkhaz and the Russian forces against Georgian UAVs (albeit in a defensive posture) as violations of the ceasefire regime since the Moscow Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces prohibited the introduction and operation of heavy weapons in the zone of conflict.⁴ The involvement of the Russian air force, not part of the Russian-manned CIS peacekeeping force (CIS PKF), in the downing of a Georgian UAV on 20 April 2008 was inconsistent with the Moscow Agreement and “was considered by the UN Security Council on 23 April and 30 May 2008”.⁵ UAV overflights were also observed in the Kodori

¹ <http://www.un.org/depts/dpko/missions/unomig/>.

² According to some international experts, these UAVs seemed to be Israeli Hermes 450 variants, designed for aerial reconnaissance and fire-control, but not for air-to-surface attack.

³ Georgia Slams Russian Encroachment on Unrecognized Republics. Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFERL) Newline 18.04.2008, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1144095.html>; accessed on 18.08.2009. Also: Abkhazia Claims to Have Shot Down Another Georgian Spy Plane. RFERL Newline 21.04.2008, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1144096.html>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

⁴ UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, S/2008/631, 3 October 2008. Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces. In: Tamaz Diasamidze, *Regional Conflicts in Georgia (The Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia, The Autonomous SSR of Abkhazia 1989-2008)*. Tbilisi 2008. pp. 179-181.

⁵ UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, S/2008/480, 23 July 2008.

Valley, both in its lower (controlled by the Abkhaz) and its upper (controlled by the Georgians) parts. None of the sides admitted to flying UAVs in the Kodori Valley.

In the period from 29 February to 5 March, the Abkhaz side conducted military exercises which involved tanks, small arms and mortar firings, including in the Ochamchira area close to the Georgian-Abkhaz ceasefire line⁶.

In mid-April, the Abkhaz side complained about an alleged build-up of Georgian forces along the ceasefire line. UNOMIG carried out extensive patrolling of the area, but found no evidence to substantiate the Abkhaz allegations.⁷

At the end of April 2008, referring to the possibility of a further deterioration in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone, the Russian Federation reinforced the CIS PKF with a 525-strong airborne battalion deployed in the Restricted Weapons Zone, pointing out that the CIS PKF would still remain below the authorized threshold of 3,000 personnel.⁸ However, the new Russian battalion was reportedly equipped, *inter alia*, with 10 pieces of artillery⁹, which do not traditionally belong to the inventory of a peacekeeping force. UNOMIG attempts to monitor the camp of the new CIS PKF contingent were obstructed by the Abkhaz *de facto* law enforcement agencies for a certain period.¹⁰

At the end of May 2008, referring to a presidential decision on the provision of humanitarian assistance to the Abkhaz side¹¹, the Government of the Russian Federation also introduced a 400-man strong military railway unit to Abkhazia to rehabilitate the local railway south of Sukhumi up to the town of Ochamchira. At the end of July, the unit completed the repair work and was withdrawn.

The Georgian Government considered both these measures aggressive in nature and demanded an immediate withdrawal of all additional Russian forces and equipment,

⁶ В Вооруженных Силах Абхазии Начались Крупные Учения по Управлению Огнем Артиллерии и Ударами Авиации (Large Scale Exercises on Management of Artillery Fire and Strikes by the Air Force were Started by the Armed Forces of Abkhazia). Apsnypress 29.02.2008, <http://www.apsnypress.info/archiv.htm>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

⁷ UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General... S/2008/480... *Op. cit.*

⁸ Georgia, Russia Exchange New Accusations. RFERL Newline 30.04.2008, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1144103.html>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

⁹ UNOMIG source.

¹⁰ UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General... S/2008/631... *op. cit.*

¹¹ Putin Tasks Government with Providing Further Assistance to Abkhazia, South Ossetia. RFERL Newline 17.04.2008, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1144094.html>; accessed on 18.08.2009; Railroad Landing, 02.06.08, http://www.kommersant.com/p898706/r_l/Russia_to_repair_Abkhazian_railroads/.

including the railway troops. The Georgian side stated that the lack of advance notification and the introduction of an airborne battalion were in clear violation of a number of CIS regulations governing peacekeeping operations. As far as the railway troops are concerned, the Georgian authorities stated that the reinforcement of infrastructure in the conflict zone by the Russian military could only be viewed as preparation for an armed intervention in Georgia.¹² Russia's move was criticised by the U.S. Administration and the NATO Secretary General, who assessed it as a violation of Georgia's territorial integrity¹³. In its resolution of 5 June 2008, the EU Parliament stated that the Russian troops could no longer be considered neutral and impartial peacekeepers and that the peacekeeping format should therefore be revised.¹⁴

Additionally, the Georgian side argued that the above-mentioned military reinforcements confirmed that the Russian Federation was a party to the conflict and could no longer serve in either a mediating or a peacekeeping capacity.¹⁵ Georgia intensified its calls for a change of the peacekeeping format and in particular proposed the replacement of the existing peace operation with a joint Georgian-Abkhaz police force under European Union and OSCE supervision and training, without excluding the possibility that the Russian Federation might play a role. Georgia announced that if a substantial change in the peacekeeping format was not achieved, it was ready to make a formal request for the withdrawal of the CIS PKF.¹⁶

For its part, the Abkhaz side insisted that the CIS PKF was strengthened in response to Georgian plans to carry out a military action. It reiterated its opposition to any change in the peacekeeping format and warned that a withdrawal of the CIS PKF would lead to a resumption of hostilities. The Abkhaz side also indicated that if the Government of Georgia should decide to withdraw its consent to the presence of the CIS PKF, it would propose an

¹² Tbilisi Condemns Russian 'Railway Troops' in Abkhazia. Civil Georgia 2.06.2008, [http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18445&search="Tbilisi%20Condemns%20Russian%20%`Railway%20Troops`%20in%20Abkhazia,;](http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18445&search=) accessed on 24.07.2009.

¹³ Daily Press Briefing, Sean McCormack, Spokesman, 30.04.2008, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2008apr/104228.htm>; NATO Secretary General's statement on the Deployment of Russian Railway Troops into Georgia, 03.06.2008, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-123EE2D2/861F1313/natolive/news_7760.htm?selectedLocale=en.

¹⁴ European Parliament resolution of 5 June 2008 on the situation in Georgia. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P6-TA-2008-0253&format=XML&language=EN>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

¹⁵ Georgian MFA: Moscow Tries to Legalize 'Ethnic Cleansing' in Abkhazia. Civil Georgia 18.07.2008, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18813&search=peacekeeping>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

¹⁶ President Saakashvili's Interview with Rustavi 2 TV. Civil Georgia 10.06.2008, <http://www.civilgeorgia.ge/eng/article.php?id=18516>; accessed on 18.08.2009. Russia Warns Tbilisi Against Peacekeepers' Withdrawal. Civil Georgia 17.06.2008, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18557&search=peacekeeping>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

agreement on military cooperation with the Russian Federation to retain its military presence in Abkhazia.¹⁷

From mid-May until July 2008, a number of incidents occurred involving personnel of the CIS PKF and the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs, reflecting an alarming state of tension in the area as well as in the Georgian-Russian relationship.

In June, UNOMIG noted that the Georgian side had increased the number of trainees and training areas as well as the frequency of training conducted for its law enforcement agencies (in the Security Zone) and its military (in the Restricted Weapons Zone).¹⁸

From the end of June until mid-July 2008, a series of bomb blasts occurred in public places on the Abkhaz side of the ceasefire line as well as roadside explosions on the Georgian side.¹⁹ The bombings resulted in four fatalities, including the head of the Gali branch of the Abkhaz *de facto* security service, and left 18 people injured, mostly civilians.

Referring to security considerations, as of 1 July the Abkhaz authorities closed the Inguri bridge, a main communication link over the ceasefire line for the local, mainly Georgian, population.²⁰

On 20 June 2008, Abkhaz *de facto* Vice-President Raul Khajimba publicly stated that the use of force might be needed in order to seize control of the Georgian-controlled upper Kodori Valley.²¹ On 9 July, there was a clash between Abkhaz and Georgian forces on the Achamkhara heights in the lower Kodori Valley, resulting in several personnel being injured on both sides. Tensions rose further after allegations by the Georgian side of mortar firing into the Kvabchara Valley, an area in the Georgian-controlled upper Kodori Valley, on 26

¹⁷ UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General... S/2008/480... *Op. cit.*

¹⁸ UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General... S/2008/480... *Op. cit.*

¹⁹ Е.г. МВД Абхазии ищет причастных к взрывам в Гаграх и Сухуме лиц (Ministry of Internal Affairs of Abkhazia is looking for persons involved in blasts in Gagra and Sukhumi). Kavkazskiy Uzel 1.07.2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/138629>; accessed on 18.08.2009. В зоне конфликта Абхазии и Грузии произошло четыре взрыва (Four explosions in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone). Kavkazskiy Uzel, 6.07.2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1224811.html>; accessed on 18.08.2009. В Абхазии прогремел взрыв: двое погибших (Blast in Abkhazia kills two). Kavkazskiy Uzel, 7.07.2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1224842.html>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

²⁰ Абхазия закрыла границу с Грузией на неопределенный срок (Abkhazia closes its border with Georgia for indefinite period). Kavkazskiy Uzel 1.07.2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/138613>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

²¹ Apsnypress 20.06.2008, <http://www.apsnypress.info/archiv.htm>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

July. UNOMIG began conducting independent investigations into the incidents, but had to suspend them because of the August hostilities.²²

Security-related events in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone²³

In the course of summer 2008, the main focus of tension shifted from the Abkhaz to the Ossetian conflict zone, accompanied by subversive attacks as well as by intensified exchanges of fire between the Georgian and South Ossetian sides, including mortar and heavy artillery fire.

Tension in the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict zone started to rise in mid-June 2008 with explosions and mine incidents close to the Georgian-administrated villages of Kekhvi, Ergneti and Tamarasheni and the *de facto* South Ossetian militia post in Kokhati as well as with the exchange of fire between the Georgian-administered villages of Sveri and Prisi and the South Ossetian-administered villages of Andzisi and Zemo Prisi respectively. Prolonged exchange of fire also took place in the southern environs of Tskhinvali and nearby Georgian villages. These incidents were a clear violation of the ceasefire agreement, resulted in a number of dead and wounded and caused collateral damage to houses on both sides.²⁴

The overall precarious security situation in the zone of the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict dramatically deteriorated in early July 2008. On 3 July, explosions in the Ossetian-administered village of Dmenisi killed Nodar Bibilov, leader of the *de facto* South Ossetian militia.²⁵ A few hours later on the same day, another device was reportedly targeted against the pro-Georgian leader of the Temporary Administrative Unit of South Ossetia, Dimitri Sanakoyev (while he was travelling on the by-pass road linking the Small and Big Liakhvi Georgian enclaves), causing injuries to three Georgian special forces policemen.²⁶

An extensive exchange of light arms fire and mortar shelling occurred in Tskhinvali and its southern environs during the night of 3-4 July, causing several casualties and property damage.²⁷ In a public statement, the South Ossetian leadership blamed the Georgian side for

²² UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General... S/2008/631... *Op. cit.*

²³ The texts on the “Security-related events in the Georgian-Ossetian zone of conflict” and in some other parts of the Chapter on the “Military Events of 2008” are largely based on the information received from the international organizations present in the region. The IFFMCG respects their explicit wish not to be quoted.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Idem.*

²⁶ *Idem.*

²⁷ *Ibidem.*

initiating the fire exchange and qualified it as an act of aggression against South Ossetia.²⁸ In an official statement, the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs blamed the South Ossetian side for firing against Georgian villages and claimed that the Georgian side returned fire in order to protect the civilian population in the area.²⁹

The shelling on 3-4 July was followed by an exchange of fire between the South Ossetian-administered village of Ubiati and the Georgian-administered village of Nuli.³⁰ Another exchange of fire erupted between the newly established Georgian and Ossetian peacekeeping posts on the strategically important Sarabuki heights, overlooking both the South Ossetian Geri by-pass road as well as the Eredvi-Kheiti by-pass road, the only functional road linking the Georgian enclave north of Tskhinvali, with a population of about 10 000, with the rest of Georgia.³¹

In the night of 7-8 July, four Georgian armed forces servicemen were detained by the South Ossetian *de-facto* authorities. In the evening of 8 July they were released with the assistance of the OSCE Mission to Georgia.³² On the same day, four Russian military aircraft entered into Georgian airspace around the zone of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict.³³ These events took place at the time of a visit to Georgia by representatives of the Permanent Missions of the OSCE member-states from Vienna (6-10 July)³⁴ and on the eve of a visit to Georgia by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (9 July).³⁵

In a statement on 9 July, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia qualified the incident as an “open aggression directed against the country and a brutal and undisguised attempt to infringe on its sovereignty and territorial integrity”.³⁶ In statements on 10 and 14 July, the

²⁸ Заявление МИД РЮО 4.07.2008 (A Statement of the MFA of the Republic of South Ossetia 4.07.2008). The Ministry for Press and Mass Media of the Republic of South Ossetia, <http://cominf.org/en/node/1166477530>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

²⁹ Грузия заявляет об обстреле ее сел Южной Осетией (Georgia claims South Ossetia fired at Georgian villages). Kavkazskiy Uzel 6.07.2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/138811>; accessed on 18.08.2009. Also: Two Killed in Overnight Shelling... *op. cit.*

³⁰ Жители Южной Осетии просят Россию о защите (South Ossetian population asks Russia for protection). Kavkazskiy Uzel, 4.07.2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/138754>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

³¹ See Footnote 23.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ OSCE Ambassadors, Danish FM Visit Georgia. Civil Georgia 7.07.2008, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18710&search=>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

³⁵ Rice Arrives in Tbilisi. Civil Georgia 9.07.2008, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18738&search=>; accessed on 18.08.2009 and related articles.

³⁶ Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=59&info_id=6975; accessed on 18.08.2009.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation explained the violation of Georgian airspace as a “forced extreme” measure aimed at preventing an “armed attack” on South Ossetia and an alleged attempt by Tbilisi to liberate its detained servicemen.³⁷

On 10 July, Georgia presented an appeal to the UN to probe the violation of its airspace by convening an extraordinary session of the UN Security Council.³⁸ Also at Georgian request, a special meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council was convened in Vienna on 14 July to discuss the situation.³⁹ These two events may serve as an additional indication of the seriousness of the situation in the region at that time.

The overall security situation in the zone of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict continued to deteriorate further in the second half of July. From 24 to 28 July, several explosions occurred in the southern environs of Tskhinvali and in the Georgian-administered village of Avnevi, close to the post of the Georgian Peacekeeping Force (PKF) battalion.⁴⁰ From 29 to 31 July, exchanges of fire were reported between the Georgian-administered village of Sveri and the South Ossetian-administered village of Andzisi in the Sarabuki area, where the Georgian and Ossetian JPKF battalions established their posts after the events of 3 July⁴¹. On the same day, exchanges of fire also took place in the area of Khetagurovo between the South Ossetian militia post and the Georgian police post on the Georgian Avnevi-Zemo Nikozi by-pass road. On 29 July, a Joint Monitoring Team of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF) came under fire, but neither side admitted responsibility for the incident.⁴²

In the meantime, both sides started to strengthen their positions and to build new fortifications in various strategic locations in the conflict zone, including in the villages of

³⁷ Комментарий Департамента информации и печати МИД России в связи с ситуацией в Южной Осетии, (Commentary on the situation in South Ossetia, Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia 1014-10-07-2008, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/CCF2BD3D05F81BB1C325748200449D3D; accessed on 18.08.2009. Комментарий Департамента информации и печати МИД России относительно возможного обсуждения ситуации в Южной Осетии в СБ ООН, (Commentary on the possible discussion of the situation in South Ossetia by the Security Council of the UN, Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia) 1035-14-07-2008, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/1623764C4DE2D64EC32574860055E227; accessed on 18.08.2009.

³⁸ Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=59&info_id=7056; accessed on 18.08.2009.

³⁹ http://www.osce.org/documents/pc/2008/07/32215_en.pdf; accessed on 18.08.2009.

⁴⁰ See Footnote 23.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Idem*; Кокойты: Южная Осетия адекватно ответит на провокации Грузии (Kokoity: South Ossetia will give an adequate response to Georgian provocations). Kavkazskiy Uzel, 29.07.2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/139737>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

Tliakana, Khetagurovo, Zemo Prisi, Didi Gromi, Kverneti, Kusireti, Chorbauli and the Tsunarishba reservoir on the Ossetian side and, on the Georgian side, in the village of Prisi and close to the Georgian by-pass road running from Avnevi to Zemo Nikozi.⁴³ Also reported were the completion of construction by a Russian company of a military base (Ugardanta) in the Java district and a so-called military rehabilitation centre in the north-western part of Tskhinvali.⁴⁴

In early July, the South Ossetian authorities introduced restrictions on the freedom of movement of vehicles and people to and from the Georgian side. The OSCE observers encountered difficulties with visiting South Ossetian positions.⁴⁵

In mid-July, a yearly U.S.-led military exercise called “Immediate Response” took place at the Vaziani base outside Tbilisi, involving approximately 2 000 troops from Georgia, the United States, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine.⁴⁶

From 15 July to 2 August 2008, Russian troops carried out large-scale training exercises known as “Kavkaz-2008” (Caucasus-2008) in the North Caucasus Military District, near the Russian-Georgian border and on the Black Sea. The Russian exercise officially involved approximately 8 000 Russian troops. [Some analysts believe that the number of troops involved “may have been intentionally understated”]⁴⁷. Apart from the “Kavkaz-2008” exercise, there were a number of signals from the Russian side that it would intervene in case of a Georgian military operation in South Ossetia.⁴⁸

The beginning of August 2008 was marked by an even further deterioration of the security situation in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone. On 1 August, an improvised explosive device that went off on the Georgian Eredvi-Kheiti road by-passing Tskhinvali left five Georgian policemen injured.⁴⁹ During the evening and night of 1-2 August, a series of intense and extensive exchanges of fire including sniper fire and mortar shelling occurred in the

⁴³ See Footnote 23.

⁴⁴ Андрей АРЕШЕВ, Начнется ли новая война в Южной Осетии? (Andrei Areshev: Will there be a new war in South Osetia ?). 6.11.2007, <http://www.fondsk.ru/article.php?id=1051>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

⁴⁵ See Footnote 23.

⁴⁶ U.S. Troops Start Training Exercise In Georgia. RFERL 15.07.2008, http://www.rferl.org/content/U.S._Troops_Training_In_Georgia/1183750.html; accessed on 18.08.2009.

⁴⁷ “The Guns of August 2008. Russia’s War in Georgia”. From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia by *Johanna Popjanovski*.

⁴⁸ Russia Warns It Won’t Stand Back In Georgian Region. <http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1188612.html>. See also: http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/1623764C4.

⁴⁹ See Footnote 23.

conflict zone, causing fatalities and casualties.⁵⁰ The events on 1-2 August were assessed by the OSCE Mission to Georgia as the most serious outbreak of fire since the 2004 conflict. Exchanges of fire continued in the nights of 2-3 and 3-4 August.⁵¹

In early August 2008, the South Ossetian authorities started to evacuate their civilian population to locations on the territory of the Russian Federation.⁵²

Beginning in the afternoon of 6 August fire was exchanged along virtually the whole line of contact between the Georgian and South Ossetian sides, with particular hotspots in the Avnevi-Nuli-Khetagurovo area (west of Tskhinvali) and the Dmenisi-Prisi area (east of Tskhinvali). After a short break in the morning, firing, involving mortars and artillery, continued on 7 August, reportedly causing human casualties and fatalities. The same day, international observers could see significant movements of Georgian troops and equipment towards Gori from the east and west. Other troops and equipment were observed stationary north of Gori, just outside the zone of conflict.⁵³

Diplomatic efforts were undertaken on 7 August, involving the Georgian State Minister for Reintegration, Temuri Yakobashvili, the Russian Special Envoy for the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, Ambassador Yuri Popov and the Commander of the JPKF, Major-General Marat Kulakhmetov. They aimed to arrange for high-level Georgian-South Ossetian peace talks but did not bring any positive results.⁵⁴

In the afternoon of 7 August, Georgian representatives left the JPKF Headquarters in Tskhinvali.⁵⁵

At 19.00 hours (Tbilisi time) on 7 August, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili stated in a televised address that he had just ordered Georgian troops to unilaterally cease fire. He called on the South Ossetian and Russian sides to stop the bloodshed and to meet at the negotiating table in either bilateral or multilateral format.⁵⁶ For some hours, the ceasefire seemed to be

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Idem.*

⁵² Очередная колонна с эвакуируемыми детьми отправилась сегодня из Цхинвала (Another column evacuating children left Tskhinvali today). The Ministry for Press and Mass Media of the Republic of South Ossetia, <http://cominf.org/node/1166477833>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

⁵³ See Footnote 23.

⁵⁴ *Idem.*

⁵⁵ *Idem.*

⁵⁶ President Saakashvili's Televised Address on S. Ossetia. Civil Georgia 7.08.2008, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18934&search=>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

stable and was also observed by the South Ossetian side, until firing was reportedly resumed again at around 22.00 hours.⁵⁷

Outbreak of large-scale hostilities

The rising tension in South Ossetia in the period of June-early August 2008, which was characterized by some analysts as a low-intensity war, culminated in a large-scale Georgian military operation against the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali and the surrounding areas, undertaken in the night of 7-8 August 2008.

On 7 August at 23.35 hours Georgian artillery units began firing smoke bombs and, subsequently, at 23.50 hours, opened fire on both fixed and moving targets of the “enemy forces” on the territory of South Ossetia.⁵⁸ According to Georgian Government officials, this interval was supposed to allow the civilian population enough time to leave dangerous zones or to find protection/shelters.⁵⁹

In the early morning of 8 August, Georgian troops launched a ground attack against the city of Tskhinvali as well as operations on the left flank of the city (by the 4th Infantry Brigade coming from Vaziani) and on the right flank (by the 3rd Infantry Brigade coming from Kutaisi). The flank operations seemed to aim, *inter alia*, at occupying important heights surrounding Tskhinvali and then at moving further northwards to take control of the strategically important Gupta bridge and the roads, including the Ossetian-controlled Dzara by-pass road, leading from the Roki tunnel to Tskhinvali to block movements of the Russian troops from the north.

After securing the heights in the vicinity of Tskhinvali, the Georgian forces (including Ministry of Interior special forces), supported by artillery and tanks, moved into the town. By the afternoon of 8 August, the Georgian forces reportedly managed to seize control of a great part of the town of Tskhinvali (with the exception of its northern quarters and a part of its centre) and a number of villages, including Znauri, Muguti, Khetagurovo, Kokhati, Tsinagari, Orchosani, Didmukha, Gromi, Artsevi and Dmenisi.

However, the Georgian troops in Tskhinvali and vicinity started to encounter growing fire power from the opposite side, including from the Russian air force and artillery. The flank

⁵⁷ See Footnote 23.

⁵⁸ Official Georgian chronology of events, provided to the IIFFMCG.

⁵⁹ Interview of the IIFFMCG with the Chief of the Joint Staff of the Georgian Armed Forces, Major General Devi Chankotadze. 4 June 2009.

operations of the Georgian forces were generally not particularly successful and they did not manage to achieve their main goal of blocking the Gupta bridge and the main routes leading to Tskhinvali from the Roki tunnel and the Java base. In the meantime the Gupta bridge was targeted by Georgian artillery and aircraft (4 Su-25) and reportedly damaged, but the bridge was quickly repaired by the Russian and the South Ossetian forces.

Russian forces engaged in the armed conflict, including ground and air forces as well as the Black Sea Fleet, also attacking targets on Georgian territory outside South Ossetia. In the morning of 8 August, Russian air forces reportedly started their attacks in central Georgia (Variani, Gori), gradually extending them to other parts of Georgia including the Senaki military base (9 August), military targets in the port of Poti and the capital of Tbilisi. Some civilian targets were also damaged.

Experiencing growing resistance, in the evening of 8 August the Georgian forces withdrew from the centre of Tskhinvali but still held their positions in the southern parts of the town. Then they were regrouped and reinforced by the 2nd Infantry Brigade from Senaki. Reportedly, the 4th Brigade reinforced the Ministry of Interior special forces in Tskhinvali, while positions and objectives of the 4th Brigade on the left flank were transferred to the 2nd Brigade.⁶⁰

After regrouping, the Georgian forces undertook attempts to regain their control of position in Tskhinvali in the afternoon of 9 August but met with resistance, suffered losses and had to withdraw.⁶¹ Meanwhile, elements of the 2nd Infantry Brigade engaged a column of Russian armoured vehicles heading towards the north-western entrance of Tskhinvali with the Commander of the 58th Army, Army General Anatoly Khrulyov, who was injured in the ambush.⁶²

With Russia's intervention advancing and its forces gaining superiority on the ground, signs of collapse of morale seemed to appear among the Georgian troops in the afternoon of 10 August.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁶¹ Танки и пехота Грузии вошли в столицу Южной Осетии (Tanks and infantry entered the capital of South Ossetia). Kavkazskiy Uzel, 9.08.2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/140242>; accessed on 18.08.2009. Грузия сообщает, что выводит войска из Южной Осетии (Georgia declares troop withdrawal from South Ossetia). Kavkazskiy Uzel, 10.08.2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/140268>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

⁶² Russian general wounded in Georgia's rebel region. Reuters 9.08.2008. <http://www.reuters.com/article/europeCrisis/idUSL9494498>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

On 10 August, the Georgian side declared that it would observe a unilateral ceasefire and would move its forces out of South Ossetia.⁶³ The opposite sides did not follow suit.

By midnight on 10 August, most Georgian troops had left the territory of South Ossetia in the direction of Gori. On 11 August, the Georgian forces withdrew from Gori to the town of Mtskheta, and started preparing a defensive line in the mountainous terrain for protection of Tbilisi, the capital.⁶⁴ In the process of withdrawal, a significant quantity of military equipment was reportedly left behind.

The withdrawing Georgian troops were followed by Russian forces, who entered deeper into Georgian territory by crossing the administrative boundaries of South Ossetia and occupying a number of locations, including the town of Gori (on 12 August). While in Gori, Russian forces reportedly destroyed installations and barracks at the local military base.⁶⁵ The Russian forces were occasionally accompanied or followed by South Ossetian militia who committed serious human rights violations, particularly in the Georgian villages of South Ossetia. (More on this issue in Chapter 7: “International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law”).

Military operations on the second (western) front

In early August, tension also grew along the Georgian-Abkhaz ceasefire line, particularly in the Kodori Valley. The Georgian side repeatedly claimed that it had information about an impending Abkhaz and/or Russian offensive into the valley, whereas the Abkhaz side alleged of a build-up of Georgian troops there. Both sides also made claims that the other side was hiding heavy military equipment in the section of the valley under their control.

The dramatic escalation of hostilities in South Ossetia on 7-8 August and the Russian-Georgian military confrontation had profoundly affected the situation in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone.

⁶³ Georgia Announces Ceasefire, Pulls Out Troops. Civil Georgia 10.08.2008, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19025&search=>; accessed on 18.08.2009. Also *Interfax*, 10 August 2008.

⁶⁴ The Guns of August 2008. Russia’s war in Georgia. After August 7: The Escalation of the Russia-Georgia War by Pavel Felgenhauer, pp. 174-175

⁶⁵ Timeline of Overnight Attacks. Civil Georgia 11.08.2008, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19040&search=Gori>; accessed on 18.08.2009. Six Die in Gori Bombing – Official. Civil Georgia 12.08.2008, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19063&search=Gori>; accessed on 18.08.2009. В Грузии самолеты России бомбили Гори погибшие (Russian planes bomb Gori in Georgia causing fatalities). Kavkazskiy Uzel, 12.08.2008. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/140367>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

On 8 August, the Abkhaz side began introducing heavy weapons into the Restricted Weapons Zone, in violation of the 1994 Moscow Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces, disregarding protests by UNOMIG.⁶⁶

In the early morning of 9 August, several Russian vessels from the Black Sea Fleet deployed to the Ochamchira port, in Abkhazia, close to the Georgian-Abkhaz ceasefire line.⁶⁷ The same day, the Black Sea Fleet set up a so-called “maritime security zone” along a large portion of the Georgian coast, including the port of Poti, to deny the area to Georgian and international maritime movement.⁶⁸

In the afternoon of 9 August, the Abkhaz authorities requested a UNOMIG team monitoring the Kodori Valley to immediately leave its base in Adjara in the Georgian-controlled upper part of the valley.⁶⁹ After the departure of UNOMIG personnel, aerial bombardments of the upper Kodori Valley started on the same day.⁷⁰

In the night of 9-10 August, Abkhaz forces crossed the ceasefire line on the Inguri river and made incursions into Georgian-controlled territory for reconnaissance purposes and in order to cut some Georgian communication and supply lines.⁷¹

On 10 August, the Russian Federation continued its military build-up in Abkhazia, deploying additional ground forces by sea to the Ochamchira port and also by air to the Babushera airport near Sukhumi, with some 9 000 troops and 350 units of armoured vehicles. The troops were not part of the CIS peacekeeping force and therefore were clearly operating outside the 1994 Ceasefire Agreement.⁷² The same day, the Abkhaz authorities introduced

⁶⁶UNSC. Report of the Secretary-General... S/2008/631... *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ Боевые Корабли Черноморского Флота Стоят в Морской Акватории Очамчира (Warships of the Black Sea Fleet Deployed in the Coastal Waters of Ochamchira). Apsnypress 10.08.2008, <http://www.apsnypress.info/archiv.htm>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

⁶⁸ Грузия обвиняет Россию во вторжении (Georgia accuses Russia of an invasion). Kavkazskiy Uzel, 9.08.2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/140205>; accessed on 18.08.2009. СМИ Грузии: в результате бомбардировки Россией Поти и Сенаки есть погибшие (Georgian mass media: Russian bombardment of Poti and Senaki take lives). Kavkazskiy Uzel, 9.08.2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/140206>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

⁶⁹ UNSC. Report of the Secretary-General... S/2008/631... *op. cit.*

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹ Russian official answers to the IIFFMCG questionnaire related to military issues. Abkhaz official answers to the IIFFMCG questionnaires.

⁷² UNSC. Report of the Secretary-General... S/2008/631... *op. cit.*

martial law in the districts of Gali, Ochamchira and Tkvarcheli, adjacent to the Georgian-Abkhaz ceasefire line, and announced partial mobilisation.⁷³

In the late evening of 10 August, the Russian forces crossed the Georgian-Abkhaz ceasefire line on the Inguri river moving deep into Georgian territory and occupying a number of locations, including the towns of Zugdidi, Senaki and Poti (12 August), without encountering any armed resistance from the Georgian side. The Russian forces destroyed installations in the military sector of Poti port and the Georgian navy vessels there, and plundered the Senaki military base.⁷⁴

The Russian military advances in the Zugdidi district and in other areas south of the Inguri river created a risk of encirclement for the Georgian security forces deployed in the upper Kodori Valley. In the night of 11-12 August, Georgian forces left the upper Kodori Valley with most of the local population. Abkhaz and Russian forces occupied the area on 12-13 August.⁷⁵

In an attempt to justify its armed incursion into the upper Kodori Valley, the Abkhaz side referred to the presence of the Georgian security forces in the area as a “threat to the Abkhaz statehood”.⁷⁶ However, the Russian authorities acknowledged that the Abkhaz side had been planning its military operation in the upper Kodori Valley “in case of Georgian military actions against Republic of South Ossetia”.⁷⁷ Indeed, the operation against the upper Kodori Valley seems to have been well-prepared in advance and the forces assigned to this operation reportedly started their deployment in the lower Kodori Valley already on 6 August.

On 12 August, Abkhaz armed personnel entered the Ganmukhuri and Kurcha pockets north of the Inguri river on the Georgian side of the ceasefire line, which the Abkhaz occupied till 9 September.⁷⁸ UNOMIG patrols were denied access to this and other areas in the lower Gali district till 4 September. Up to 15 August, Abkhaz forces occasionally crossed the ceasefire

⁷³ В Абхазии объявлены частичная мобилизация и военное положение (Partial mobilisation and martial law announced in Abkhazia). Kavkazskiy Uzel, 10.08.2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/140281>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

⁷⁴ Interview by the IIFFMCG with commanding officers at the Senaki military base on 31.05.2009.

⁷⁵ Russian official answers to the IIFFMCG questionnaire related to military issues.

⁷⁶ Abkhaz answers to the IIFFMCG questions.

⁷⁷ Russian official answers to the IIFFMCG questions related to military issues.

⁷⁸ UNSC. Report of the Secretary-General... S/2008/631... *op. cit.*

line in other locations as well, entering Georgian villages on the southern side of the Inguri river.⁷⁹

Georgian operations

According to available sources, Georgian ground forces engaged in the 2008 August conflict consisted mainly of the following units: the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Infantry Brigades, 1st Artillery Brigade, 53rd Infantry Battalion, artillery and mechanized elements of the 1st Brigade, Separate Tank Battalion, Separate Infantry Battalion and Air Defence Battalion. In addition to the forces under the Defence Ministry, anti-riot and counter terrorism battalion-size units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (special police forces) also took part in the operations. The total strength was estimated at 10 000-11 000 personnel.⁸⁰

The Georgian air force used Su-25 aircraft and Mi-24, Mi-8/17 and UH-1H type helicopters. However, due to its huge numerical inferiority vis-à-vis the Russian air force, it did not seem to play a significant role in combat and conducted a limited number of sorties, mainly in the morning of 8 August.

On 8 August, President Saakashvili declared a mobilisation of the reserve National Guard, assembling around 5 000 men, but they reportedly failed to play a noteworthy role in the August armed conflict. Meanwhile, 2 000 of the best-trained Georgian soldiers of the elite 1st Infantry Brigade were deployed in Iraq. On 10-11 August, US transport facilities flew them back to Georgia⁸¹ but in the end they did not take part in combat, having arrived too late.

Most international experts believe that the Georgian artillery and air defence performed quite well and generally better than other units in the course of the August hostilities. Many of them also believe that the massive Russian military action in August 2008 caught the Georgians off guard and unprepared both strategically and tactically. At the time, the Georgian military seems to have been more prepared for a mobile, mostly offensive war in either Abkhazia or South Ossetia, but not for simultaneous large-scale combat with superior,

⁷⁹ *Ibidem* and the Russian official answers to the IIFFMCG questions related to military issues.

⁸⁰ The Georgian and Russian official answers to the IIFFMCG questionnaire, related to military issues.

⁸¹ Georgia Recalls All Troops from Iraq – Saakashvili. Civil Georgia 9.08.2008, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18993&search=Iraq>; accessed on 18.08.2009. Georgian Troops Back from Iraq – Saakashvili. Civil Georgia 10.08.2008, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19027&search=Iraq>; accessed on 18.08.2009. Iraqi Troops Take Over From Withdrawn Georgians. RFERL 15.08.2008. http://www.rferl.org/content/Iraqi_Troops_Take_Over_From_Withdrawn_Georgians/1191269.html; accessed on 18.08.2009.

heavily armed, and air-supported enemy forces entering from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, i.e. on both fronts, at the same time.⁸²

Russian Operations

The official Russian material submitted to the IIFFMCG in July 2009 holds that “On 8 August at 14.30 units of the 693rd and 135th Motorised Rifle Regiments of the 19th Motorised Rifle Division charged with the task of carrying out the peacekeeping mission entrusted to the Russian Federation and protecting Russian citizens were deployed from the territory of the Russian Federation to the territory of South Ossetia through the Roki tunnel and began to move into South Ossetia. The air force and artillery units launched strikes against Georgian military facilities to restrict movements of the enemy reserves, disrupt its communications, incapacitate base airfields, destroy warehouses and bases containing fuel and lubricants and to seal off the areas of hostilities.”⁸³

In addition to the two regiments of the 19th Motorised Rifle Division of the 58th Army referred to in the Russian information mentioned above, previous information provided to the IIFFMCG by the Russian authorities in mid-May 2009 stated that a number of other military units participated in the Russian operation on the eastern front (South Ossetia) including elements from the 42nd Motorised Rifle Division (from Chechnya), the 76th Assault Division (Pskov), the 98th Airborne Division (Ivanovo), the 20th Motorised Rifle Division (Volgograd), the 234th Assault Division, the 205th Separate Motorised Rifle Brigade, the 429th and 71st Motorised Rifle Regiments, the 104th Assault Regiment, the 331st Parachute Regiment and the 45th Special Purpose Regiment (Moscow district).⁸⁴

According to the Georgian official material submitted to the IIFFMCG the 33rd Motor Rifle Mountain Brigade (Dagestan), the 114th Rocket Brigade (Astrakhan district), the Separate Anti-Aircraft Rocket Brigade (Volgograd) and the 10th Special Forces Brigade (Krasnodar district) also participated in the Russian operation on the eastern front.⁸⁵

⁸² The Guns of August 2008. Russia’s War in Georgia. After August 7: The Escalation of the Russia-Georgia War, by Pavel Felgenhauer, page 165.

⁸³ The official Russian answers to the IIFFMCG questions related to military issues

⁸⁴ Short Chronology. Peacekeeping Operation to Force Georgia to Peace, handed over to the IIFFMCG by the Russian authorities on 15 May 2009.

⁸⁵ Georgian official answers to the IIFFMCG questionnaire related to military issues.

Some experts assess that over 12 000 Russian troops were deployed on the eastern front, i.e. in South Ossetia and beyond, in the course of the August crisis.⁸⁶

Separately, elements from the 7th Assault (Mountain) Division (Novorossiysk), the 34th Rifle Mountain Brigade (Karachai-Cherkessia), the 31st Separate Assault Brigade (Ulianovsk), the 526th, 131st and 15th Separate Motorised Rifle Brigades as well as the 2nd, 108th and 247th Assault Regiments deployed in Abkhazia and beyond its administrative boundaries (Zugdidi, Senaki, Poti)⁸⁷ and some of these troops may have taken part in the Russian operations on the western (second) front in Georgia.

According to some sources, Russia deployed up to 15 000 troops in Abkhazia in total. The overall number of Russian troops moved into Georgia in August 2008 amounted to 25 000 - 30 000 supported by more than 1 200 pieces of armour and heavy artillery. Also involved in the action were up to 200 aircraft and 40 helicopters.⁸⁸ Several thousand armed Ossetians and volunteer militias from the North Caucasus supported the Russian forces on the eastern front as well as up to 10 000 Abkhaz troops and militia forces with armour and guns on the western front.⁸⁹

Russian air operations reportedly opened in the morning of 8 August with the first attacks targeting the Georgian air defence installations in the Gori district.⁹⁰ Units employed during the armed conflict in August 2008 seemed to have come mainly from the 4th Air Forces and Air Defence Army (Rostov district) and included Su-24, Su-25, Su-27 and Su-29 aircraft as well as Mi-8 and Mi-24 helicopters.⁹¹

The target set was focused on Georgian operational ground and air assets. Air defence radar sites and airbases were attacked, with regular repeat attacks against Marneuli, Vaziani and Bolnisi. These targets were well away from the main conflict zone. Hence, rather than to

⁸⁶ The Guns of August 2008. Russia's War in Georgia. After August 7: The Escalation of the Russia-Georgia War, by Pavel Felgenhauer, page 171

⁸⁷ Short Chronology. Peacekeeping Operation to Force Georgia to Peace, handed over to the IIFFMCG by the Russian authorities on 15 May 2009

⁸⁸ "Pyatidnevnyaya voyna", (The five-day war), Vlast, 18 August 2008.

⁸⁹ Из Северной Осетии в Южную Осетию отправились семь тысяч добровольцев (Seven thousand volunteers left North Ossetia for South Ossetia). Kavkazskiy Uzel, 9.08.2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/140241>; accessed on 18.08.2009. Abkhaz separatists strike disputed Georgia gorge. Reuters 9.08.2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/gc07/idUSL932653720080809>; accessed on 18.08.2009. After August 7: The escalation of the Russia-Georgia War by Pavel Felgenhauer, The Guns of August 2008, Russia's War in Georgia, M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2009, page 173.

⁹⁰ RIA Novosti – 0920, 0925 08 August, page 22 / 5-Day War – 0941 08 August, page 153

⁹¹ Georgian official answers to the IIFFMCG questionnaire related to military issues.

provide close air support to ground forces in contact, the Russian air raids seemed to be strategically intended to support a broader military objective, including to deprive the Georgian brigades engaged in South Ossetia of any support from second echelon forces, particularly air support. Given this primary objective, the targets also included port installations along the Black Sea coast, air traffic radar sites, aircraft manufacturing and maintenance plants. As the Georgian withdrawal continued, Russian efforts diverted to supporting Russian ground troops in order to accelerate Georgian withdrawal. In the course of the August hostilities, the Russian air force reportedly lost several aircraft, including one strategic bomber and reconnaissance aircraft Tu-22M3.⁹²

The Russian Black Sea Fleet, deployed in Georgian territorial waters and/or in its vicinity reportedly consisted of around 13 vessels, including its flagship - guided missile cruiser “Moskva”,- as well as landing, antisubmarine and patrol ships, and minesweepers .⁹³

Russian military operations in Georgia in August 2008 appear to most analysts to have been well-planned and well-executed. The operational planning had been validated in practice during the “Kavkaz-2008” military exercise (and previous similar exercises since 2005), which ended on 2 August 2008. After the exercise, some units returned to their garrisons, but others seem to have remained and deployed in a precautionary move near the Georgian border.⁹⁴ Therefore, they could quickly move to South Ossetia through the Roki tunnel when ordered to do so.

Cyber war

Reported cyber attacks were one of the particular features of the Russian-Georgian conflict in August 2008.⁹⁵ It looks quite apparent that significant cyber attacks were launched against Georgia in the course of the conflict. Most Georgian Government and media sites were unavailable or defaced at some time during the first days of the conflict. A number of websites were then relocated to US, Estonian and Polish⁹⁶ servers. Some experts believe that these attacks may have reduced Georgian decision-making capability, as well as its ability to

⁹² Mikhail Baranov in Moscow Defence Brief 3-2008

⁹³ Georgian official answers to the IIFFMCG questionnaire related to military issues

⁹⁴ From Moratorium to War. The Causes and Consequences of Russia’s Suspension of the CFE Treaty. Georgian Institute for Russian Studies. 29.06.2009. <http://eng.girs.org.ge/index.php?newsid=25>; accessed on 19.08.2009.

⁹⁵ *Stephen W. Korns*, Joshua E. Kastenberg, Georgia's Cyber Left Hook. “Small Wars Journal Parameter”, winter 2008-2009 issue, <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/08winter/korns.pdf>; accessed on 20.08.2009.

⁹⁶ E.g. Polish “www.president.pl”

communicate with allies, thereby possibly impairing the operational flexibility of Georgian forces.

The most significant occurrences include the following:⁹⁷

- On 20 July, President Saakashvili's website was shut down for 24 hours;
- On 7 August, several Georgian servers and the Internet traffic were seized and placed under external control;
- On 8 August, large-scale cyber attacks against sites in Georgia began. The source of the cyber attacks was uncertain. Some reports attributed them to an organization called the "Russian Business Network".⁹⁸
- At this time, it was reported that all Georgian Government websites were unobtainable from US, UK and European cyberspace. The Turkish AS9121 TTNNet server, one of the routing points for traffic into the Caucasus, was blocked, reportedly via COMSTAR;
- On 9 August, the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs website was defaced by hackers, who replaced it with offensive photographs. Other Georgian websites which also suffered cyber or hacker attacks included those of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Defence and the website of Sanakoyev's pro-Georgian Interim Administration of South Ossetia. In addition, reportedly the National Bank of Georgia was defaced and Georgian news portals were affected by DDoS (distributed denial of service) attacks.⁹⁹
- By 12 August, President Saakashvili's website and a popular Georgian TV website (www.rustavi2.com) were transferred to Tulip Systems. Tulip was then also attacked;
- On 12-13 August, the Ministry of Defence website experienced extensive cyber attacks and two periods of downtime.

More limited attacks of no particular significance may have been launched against some Russian sites, too. For example, the RIA Novosti website was offline because of DDoS attacks for over 10 hours.

⁹⁷ Georgian Government Accuses Russia Of Waging 'Cyberwarfare'. RFERL 12.08.2008, http://www.rferl.org/content/Georgian_Government_Accuses_Russia_Of_Cyberwar/1190477.html; accessed on 18.08.2009. <http://georgiamfa.blogspot.com/2008/08/cyber-attacks-disable-georgian-websites.html>.

⁹⁸ [Http://intelfusion.net/wordpress/?p=388](http://intelfusion.net/wordpress/?p=388)

⁹⁹ Официальный сайт МИД Грузии взломан хакерами (The official website of the Georgian MFA has been broken by hackers). INTERFAX, 9.08.2008.

If these attacks were directed by a government or governments, it is likely that this form of warfare was used for the first time in an inter-state armed conflict. However, the nature of defence against cyber attacks at this stage of its development means that such attacks are easy to carry out, but difficult to prevent, and to attribute to a source.

Ceasefire Agreement

On 12 August, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, in his capacity as President of the Council of the European Union, visited Moscow and Tbilisi in a move to end the military hostilities. A six-point ceasefire plan was agreed upon, providing, *inter alia*, for cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of forces to the positions occupied prior to the armed conflict.¹⁰⁰ On the same day, the ceasefire arrangement was publicly confirmed by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. Russian troops were to stop military activities at 15.00 on 12 August¹⁰¹. However, Russian and South Ossetian forces reportedly continued their advances for some time after the 12 August ceasefire was declared and occupied additional locations, including Akhagori/Leningori (16 August).

Most of the Russian troops withdrew from their positions beyond the administrative boundaries of South Ossetia and Abkhazia after 22 August, some of them remained in the so-called buffer zones and withdrew much later, after an implementation agreement, as a complement to the 12 August ceasefire agreement, was reached on 8 September 2008 in Moscow.¹⁰² On 9 October 2008, the Russian Foreign Ministry officially confirmed the completion of the withdrawal of the Russian forces from the „zones adjacent to South Ossetia and Abkhazia.”¹⁰³ However, the issue of full compliance by the parties with the above two agreements have remained a subject of diverging interpretations and remain contentious to date.

Contentious issues

1. At an early stage of the operation, the Commander of the Georgian contingent to the Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF) Brig. Gen. Mamuka Kurashvili¹⁰⁴ publicly stated that the

¹⁰⁰ See Volume III of the IIFFMCG Report.

¹⁰¹ Official Russian answer to the IIFFMCG questions related to military issues.

¹⁰² Russia Agrees Troops Pullout From Georgian Heartland Within 'Month'. RFERL 9.09.2008.
http://www.rferl.org/content/Russia_Agrees_Troops_Pullout_From_Georgia_Heartland/1197424.html;
accessed on 18.08.2009.

¹⁰³ http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/04ABEF7ADD27CBFBC32574DD005AA32B; accessed on 18.08.2009.

¹⁰⁴ The full title of Brig. Gen. Mamuka Kurashvili was Chief of Staff for Peacekeeping Operations in Georgia's Conflict Zones in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

objective of the operation was to restore “constitutional order” in the territory of South Ossetia¹⁰⁵. Somewhat later the Georgian authorities refuted Kurashvili’s statement as unauthorised and, as justification of the operation, emphasized a countering of the Russian incursion.

The official Georgian information provided to the IIFFMCG says in this regard that “in order to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia as well as the security of Georgia’s citizens, at 23.35 on August 7, the President of Georgia issued an order to start a defensive operation with the following objectives:

- Protection of civilians in the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia;
- Neutralization of the firing positions from which fire against civilians, Georgian peacekeeping units and police originated;
- Halting of the movement of regular units of the Russian Federation through the Roki tunnel inside the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.”¹⁰⁶

The Georgian allegations of a Russian invasion were supported, *inter alia*, by arguments of illegal entry into South Ossetia of a large amount of Russian troops and armour, prior to the commencement of the Georgian operation. According to the official Georgian answers to the IIFFMCG questions, the process of the build-up of Russian forces in South Ossetia started in early July 2008 and continued in the course of August, including troops and medical personal, tents, armoured vehicles, tanks, self-propelled artillery and artillery guns. This process allegedly intensified in the night of 6-7 August and in the late evening of 7 August.

Georgian allegations concerning a Russian military build-up in South Ossetia prior to 8 August 2008 were denied by the Russian side. According to Russian official information provided to the IIFFMCG, the first Russian units entered the territory of South Ossetia and the Russian air force and artillery started their attacks on Georgian targets at 14.30 on 8 August,¹⁰⁷ i.e. immediately after the decision on an intervention was made by the leadership of the Russian Federation.

¹⁰⁵ Georgia Decided to Restore Constitutional Order in S.Ossetia’ – MoD Official. Civil Georgia 8.08.2008, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18941&search=Kurashvili>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

¹⁰⁶ Georgian official answers to the IIFFMCG questions related to military issues.

¹⁰⁷ Russian official answers to the IIFFMCG questions related to military issues.

At the time of the writing of the Report, the Mission was not in a position to consider the Georgian claim concerning a large-scale Russian military incursion into South Ossetia before 8 August 2008 as substantiated. However, there are a number of reports and publications, including of Russian origin, indicating the provision by the Russian side of training and military equipment to South Ossetian and Abkhaz forces prior to the August 2008 conflict. They also indicated an influx of irregular forces from the territory of the Russian Federation to South Ossetia in early August as well as the presence of some Russian forces in South Ossetia, apart from the Russian PKF battalion, prior to 14.30 hours on 8 August 2008.¹⁰⁸ Also, it seems that the Russian air force started its operations against Georgian targets, including those outside South Ossetian administrative boundaries, already in the morning of 8 August, i.e. prior to the time given in the Russian official information.¹⁰⁹

2. In the course of the armed conflict, subsequently named a “five-day war” (7–12 August 2008), and its immediate aftermath, the Russian side justified its military intervention in Georgia by the intention to stop an allegedly ongoing genocide of the Ossetian population by the Georgian forces as well as to protect Russian citizens residing in South Ossetia and the Russian contingent of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces, deployed in South Ossetia in accordance with the Sochi Agreement of 1992. In this connection, the Russian side claimed that in the morning of 8 August 2008 two Russian peacekeepers were killed and five wounded by the Georgian attacks on the peacekeepers’ premises in Tskhinvali, which casualties “gave the right to the leadership of the Russian Federation to take a decision on the introduction of troops into South Ossetia”¹¹⁰. The Georgians denied their deliberate attacks on the Russian peacekeepers, arguing that the Georgian troops entering Tskhinvali were fired at from the Russian peacekeepers’ compounds and that they had to return fire. At the time of the writing of this Report, the Mission did not have access to reliable independent reports which could substantiate or refute the allegations of either side in this regard. Albeit, taking into account the existing dangerous environment on the ground, casualties among the Russian

¹⁰⁸ Ossetian tragedy. The White Book of Crimes Against South Ossetia. August 2008. Europe Publishing House. Moscow. 2009, pages 40, 44, 138, 277 and 278. War timeline. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=556; accessed on 20.08.2009. ЖИЗНЬ ПРОДОЛЖАЕТСЯ. Беседа с капитаном Денисом Сидристым о войне в Южной Осетии (Life continues. A Conversation with Captain Denis Sidiristiy on the war in South Ossetia). <http://www.otechestvo.org.ua/main/20089/0407.htm>; accessed on 20.08.2009. Пермские солдаты оказались в эпицентре войны (Soldiers from Perm in epicenter of war). “Permskiye Novosti”, http://www.permnews.ru/stat_st.asp?st=2912; accessed on 20.08.2009. Мама, нас отправляют в Южную Осетию (Mother, we are being sent to South Ossetia). “Viatskiy Krai”, http://www.vk-smi.ru/2008/2008_08/vk_08_08_15_03.htm; accessed on 20.08.2009.

¹⁰⁹ Russian official answers to the IFFMCG questions related to military issues.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

PKF personnel were likely. There were no reports on clashes between the Georgian forces and the Russian peacekeepers outside Tskhinvali.

As far as the Russian accusations of genocide are concerned, they became less frequent in later months as the casualties among the Ossetian civilian population turned out to be much lower than initially claimed. Russian officials stated initially that about 2 000 civilians had been killed in South Ossetia by the Georgian forces and eventually the figure of overall civilian loses in the course of the August 2008 conflict was reduced to 162.¹¹¹

3. A number of foreign politicians and international analysts have criticised the Russian military operation in Georgia in August 2008. In particular, the crossing by the Russian forces of the administrative boundaries of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and their advancements deep into Georgia's territory were qualified as an unjustified and "disproportionate use of force". Moscow called its military actions in Georgia a "peace enforcement operation", while Tbilisi characterized it as an "aggression".

The Russian side justified its military advances/attacks deep into the Georgian territories¹¹² by operational needs on the eastern front (prevention of possible Georgian counter-attacks from the Gori region) and by the alleged danger of an imminent Georgian attack on Abkhazia in the west.¹¹³

Notwithstanding the legal aspects of the issue, the following comments may be noted in this context:

- The Georgian armed forces were hardly ever able to conduct military operations on two fronts at the same time, i.e. South Ossetia and Abkhazia simultaneously. Certainly, such operations were even less feasible after the commencement of the large-scale Russian intervention in the region;
- In practical terms, there were no Georgian combat troops in western Georgia when the Russian operation there started, since the Georgian 2nd Infantry Brigade from Senaki and the 3rd Infantry Brigade from Kutaisi were deployed on the eastern front and were already largely defeated by the Russian forces by that time. The Georgian security forces in the upper

¹¹¹ Official Russian answers to the IIFFMCG questions.

¹¹² Russian convoy moves deeper inside Georgia: witness. Reuters 15.08.2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/wtMostRead/idUSLF7284720080815>; accessed on 18.08.2009.

¹¹³ Official Russian answers to the IIFFMCG questions related to legal issues.

Kodori Valley (2 800-strong according to the Russian official assessment¹¹⁴ and 500-800-strong according to assessments by UNOMIG officers¹¹⁵) with their fortified positions there seemed to have defensive tasks in August 2008. Taking into account the mountainous terrain, most military experts also believe that any operation against the Abkhaz-controlled territories initiated from the upper Kodori Valley could have only a supportive role to a larger operation across the Inguri river and from the Black Sea, but such Georgian operations in August 2008 were not at all feasible.

Casualties and material losses

Killed, wounded, missing, POWs.

According to official sources of the parties to the conflict, about 850 persons were killed in the course of the August armed conflict, and 2 300 - 3 000 were wounded. On the Georgian side, 160 Georgian military personnel were reportedly killed, 10 missing in action and 973 wounded. Also 11 Georgian policemen were killed, 3 were missing in action and 227 wounded. Among the Georgian civilian population, 228 persons were killed and 547 wounded.¹¹⁶ Among civilians, 2 local journalists and 1 foreign journalist were killed and 4 wounded.

However, the number of losses among personnel in Georgian power structures alone was reportedly assessed by Russian military intelligence at about 3 000.¹¹⁷

The Russian casualties reportedly consisted of 67 military personnel killed,¹¹⁸

3 missing in action and 283 wounded.¹¹⁹ According to the Georgian authorities, the Russian losses in the August war amounted to 400 servicemen killed.¹²⁰

According to a Russian official agency, 162 South Ossetian civilians were killed and 255 wounded in the armed conflict of 7-12 August 2008.¹²¹ The Russian agency did not refer to

¹¹⁴ Short Chronology. Peacekeeping Operation to Force Georgia to Peace, handed over to the IIFFMCG by the Russian authorities on 15 May 2009.

¹¹⁵ Information given to the IIFFMCG team by UNOMIG officers at UNOMIG HQ in Sukhumi on 28 May 2009.

¹¹⁶ Official Georgian answers to the IIFFMCG questionnaire related to military issues (Vol. III).

¹¹⁷ <http://www.lenta.ru/news/2008/09/15/victims/>; accessed on 21.08.2009.

¹¹⁸ <http://lenta.ru/news/2009/08/07/losses/>; accessed on 21.08.2009.

¹¹⁹ According to Russia's Deputy Defence Minister General Nikolai Pankov, statement from 21.02.2009 (<http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKTRE51K1B820090221>; accessed on 21.08.2009).

¹²⁰ <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=1010801&print=true>

South Ossetian non-civilian casualties. The Russian press assessed that about 150 South Ossetian military and paramilitary personnel (including volunteers from North Ossetia) were killed.¹²² The South Ossetian side presented a list of 365 South Ossetian residents killed in the fighting between 7 and 12 August 2008, but it is unclear how many civilians and servicemen were among them.¹²³

Reportedly 42 Georgian POWs were exchanged for 12 Russian POWs.

Refugees, IDPs

In his report of 15 May 2009, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe estimated that “a total number of approximately 138 000 people were displaced in Georgia” by the August 2008 conflict.¹²⁴ Most of them have already returned to their homes.

According to the Georgian Government estimates, however, about 38 000 IDPs will not return in the foreseeable future. The figure includes 19 000 IDPs from South Ossetia, nearly 2 000 from the upper Kodori Valley and over 11 000 from the areas adjacent to South Ossetia, who can not return for reasons such as security or destruction of property, and some 5 000 IDPs from Akhalkalaki district.¹²⁵

According to Russian sources, about 2 000 refugees remained in North Ossetia out of estimated 30 000 – 35 000 who fled South Ossetia in August 2008.¹²⁶

In addition to the hardship of the new IDP population, in Georgia alone approximately 220 000 IDPs from territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been living in protracted displacement for the last 16-18 years as a consequence of the armed conflicts there in early 1990s.¹²⁷

¹²¹ Official Russian data, see: <http://lenta.ru/news/2009/08/07/losses/>; accessed on 21.08.2009. According to the Russian side, this number may increase. See also: <http://sledcomproc.ru/news/6967/> (accessed on 21.08.2009).

¹²² “Moscow Defense Brief” (September 2008, <http://www.mdb.cast.ru/mdb/3-2008/item3/article1/>; accessed on 31.08.2009).

¹²³ <http://osetinfo.ru/spisok>; accessed on 21.08.2009.

¹²⁴ Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe. Report on human rights issues following the August armed conflict. 15 May 2009. Comm. DH (2009)22, para 9.

¹²⁵ Office of the United Nations Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator, *Situation report No. 35 on the situation in Georgia, 6-13 November 2008*

¹²⁶ <http://www.unhcr.org/48f862c52.html>; accessed on 22.08.2009

¹²⁷ *Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons*, Walter Kälin, A/HRC/10/13/Add.2, op.cit., Para. 11, with footnotes included.

Material losses

According to an official Russian source, during the armed conflict on the territory of South Ossetia 655 houses were fully destroyed, and 2 139 damaged.¹²⁸

The Georgian material losses were reportedly estimated at USD 1 billion by the Georgian Government.¹²⁹

According to the Russian newspaper “Niezavisimaya Gazeta”, which referred to figures provided by the Moscow Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, the overall costs of the five-day war was estimated at 12,5 billion roubles for Russia (about USD 508 million).¹³⁰

¹²⁸ <http://lenta.ru/news/2009/08/07/losses/> (*op. cit.*).

¹²⁹ http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-08-27-Georgia-damage_N.htm; accessed on 22.08.2009.

¹³⁰ http://www.ng.ru/politics/2008-08-20/4_price.html; accessed on 22.08.2009.