

**What are the main causes of conflict in South Ossetia and how can they best be addressed to promote lasting peace?**

Greg Jentzsch

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# **WHAT ARE THE MAIN CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN SOUTH OSSETIA AND HOW CAN THEY BEST BE ADDRESSED TO PROMOTE LASTING PEACE**

By: Greg Jentzsch

Conflict between the Georgian government and Ossetian separatists has plagued the region known today as South Ossetia since the early 1990s. At times this conflict has erupted into all-out warfare. At other times it has lapsed into “frozen conflict” status. Nevertheless, the conflict in South Ossetia has yet to be fully resolved. In this paper I will seek to explain the dominant characteristics of the South Ossetian conflict and offer possible approaches to resolve this conflict. In order to do so, I will first place this conflict in context by providing some general information about the conflict zone, and also by providing a brief history of the conflict. Then, I will examine the conflicts causes. After that, I will analyze the positions, interests and needs of the major participants in the conflict. Following this analysis I will then offer some general observations regarding the resolution of the South Ossetian conflict, and finally provide a number of tailored recommendations for resolving this conflict.

## **CONFLICT IN CONTEXT**

### **Geographical, Demographical, and Political Context**

The territory of the former Soviet Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia (hereafter referred to simply as South Ossetia) is a small, highly mountainous region located in the north central part of Georgia. To its north, South Ossetia is bordered by the Greater Caucasus Mountains (geographically), and the Russian Federation’s North Ossetia Autonomous Republic (politically). South Ossetia covers about 3,900 square kilometers and is a predominantly rural, South Ossetia is home to roughly 70,000 inhabitants. Of those, about 40,000 are considered

ethnic Ossetians, and some 20,000-30,000 are considered ethnic Georgians.<sup>1</sup> Also, although the vast majority of states legally recognize South Ossetia as part of Georgia, South Ossetia was formally recognized as an independent state by Russia, Belarus and Nicaragua following the August 2008 war there.<sup>2</sup>



Note: Map taken from *World Factbook* 2008.<sup>3</sup>

### Brief History of the Conflict

Violence between the Georgian government and ethnic Ossetians first broke out in 1920 following a number of Ossetian rebellions in favor of independence. Soon afterward, Georgia came under Soviet control and South Ossetia was given the status of “autonomous oblast” within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Despite increased autonomy, South Ossetians continued to feel that they were at a political disadvantage and wished to attain the status of

<sup>1</sup> Rayfield, Donald. “Limiting Conflict in the Caucasus.” *Public Policy Research* 15, Issue 3 (September 2008): 127-128.

<sup>2</sup> King, Charles. “The Five-Day War,” 2-11.

<sup>3</sup> “Georgia.” *World Factbook* 2008. Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Public Affairs. <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>> (accessed October 3, 2003).

“autonomous republic.” Accordingly, South Ossetian leaders sent an official request to become an autonomous republic to the Georgian Supreme Soviet in 1989. Not only was the plea denied, it angered the Georgian government and led to increased tension. Then, just before the Georgian parliamentary elections of 1990, the Georgian Supreme Soviet adopted a law banning regional political parties. In protest, Ossetians boycotted the elections and held their own. However, these actions sent the Georgian government reeling, and, in December of 1990, the newly elected Georgian government cancelled the results of the Ossetian elections and took away South Ossetia’s status as an autonomous oblast. Then, in January 1991, several thousand Georgian troops were sent into the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali; this action began a devastating war that would continue until June 1992, when a ceasefire agreement was signed between Russian and Georgian authorities.<sup>4</sup>

As part of the Georgia-Russia ceasefire agreement, a Joint Control Commission (JCC) was created to “supervise observance to the agreement, draft and implement conflict settlement measures, promote dialogue, design and carry out measures to facilitate refugee and IDP return, solve problems related to economic reconstruction and monitor human rights.”<sup>5</sup> The commission was also tasked with coordinating the activities of Joint Peacekeeping Forces (made up of Georgian, Russian, and Ossetian peacekeeping battalions).<sup>6</sup> In addition to these efforts, the Organization for Security Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) also helped to promote peace in

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<sup>4</sup> The info in this paragraphs was gathered from: International Crisis Group (ICG), *Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia*, 26 November 2004. Europe Report N°159  
<[http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/europe/caucasus/159\\_georgia\\_avoiding\\_war\\_in\\_south\\_ossetia.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/europe/caucasus/159_georgia_avoiding_war_in_south_ossetia.pdf)> (accessed 10 April 2009), 2-4.

<sup>5</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *Georgia’s South Ossetia Conflict: Make Haste Slowly*, 7 June 2007. Europe Report N°183  
<[http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/europe/caucasus/183\\_georgia\\_s\\_south\\_ossetia\\_conflict\\_make\\_haste\\_slowly.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/europe/caucasus/183_georgia_s_south_ossetia_conflict_make_haste_slowly.pdf)> (accessed 10 April 2009), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

the region by launching a conflict resolution mission to Georgia in 1992.<sup>7</sup> Taken together, these and other actions helped to prevent military confrontations from occurring in the region for the subsequent twelve years.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, in 2004 the conflict became violent once again.

Two key events appear to have led to a renewal of violence in 2004. First, the Georgian government launched a large anti-smuggling campaign in and around South Ossetia, which greatly increased the number of Georgian Ministry of the Interior troops in the conflict region.<sup>9</sup> South Ossetian leaders portrayed this campaign as an attack on South Ossetian independence and security.<sup>10</sup> In addition to this, South Ossetians saw these increased troop levels as a Georgian preparation for military action.<sup>11</sup> What is more, the anti-smuggling campaign also hurt South Ossetians economically (as many South Ossetians relied upon trade and cheap goods for their livelihood).<sup>12</sup> The second event that led to a renewal of violence was Georgian accusations that Russia was supplying South Ossetia with weapons, and Georgia's subsequent seizure of Russian peacekeeping trucks containing missiles and other weapons.<sup>13</sup> Together, these events caused tensions to escalate and brought the region into a renewed state of violent conflict as opposing factions exchanged small arms and mortar fire.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, a new ceasefire was established in August of 2004.<sup>15</sup>

Despite formal ceasefire agreements, Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Russian relations remained highly tense after 2004. Violent exchanges and other aggressive actions (such as Russia's intentionally provocative violation of Georgian airspace) began to escalate substantially

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<sup>7</sup> Ghebali, Victor-Yves. "The OSCE Mission to Georgia (1992-2004): The failing art of half-hearted measures." *Helsinki Monitor* 15, Issue 4 (October 2004): 280-292.

<sup>8</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *Georgia's South Ossetia Conflict: Make Haste Slowly*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia*, 11-12.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *Georgia's South Ossetia Conflict: Make Haste Slowly*, 1.

in 2008.<sup>16</sup> Then, in early August of that year, these tensions finally came to a head. While the exact chronology of events may never be known (as both sides claim that the other initiated the violence), most accounts seem to conclude that the Russian intervention in Georgia was carried out in response to Georgian military actions in South Ossetia.<sup>17</sup> While this could be disputed, what *is* certain is that when the fog of war finally settled, Russian troops had occupied both of the breakaway regions (i.e. Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and large portions of Georgia proper.<sup>18</sup> A ceasefire agreement was subsequently brokered by French President Nicolas Sarkozy and the European Union, and then signed on 15-16 August in Tbilisi and Moscow.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, relations continued to remain tense, and in September 2008 the Georgian government severed its diplomatic ties with the Russian government.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, while open warfare in South Ossetia appears to have ceased, as of yet Russia has failed to fulfill its promise to pull its military forces back to pre-war positions (as per the conditions of the August ceasefire agreement).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cornell et al. *Russia's War in Georgia: Causes and Implications for Georgia and the World*. Central Asia – Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program Policy Paper Series (August 2008). <<http://www.isdp.eu/files/publications/pp/08/0808Georgia-PP2.pdf>> (accessed March 13, 2009), 7-22.

<sup>17</sup> For example, see: Stepanova, Ekaterina. *South Ossetia and Abkhazia: Placing the Conflict in Context*. SIPRI Policy Brief, November 2008. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute <<http://books.sipri.org/files/misc/SIPRIPB0811.pdf>>, 1. See also: "Georgia." *World Factbook 2008*. Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Public Affairs.

<<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>> (accessed October 3, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> "Georgia." *World Factbook 2008*.

<sup>19</sup> See: International Crisis Group (ICG), *Russia vs. Georgia: the Fallout*, 22 August 2008. Europe Report N°195

<[http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/europe/caucasus/195\\_russia\\_vs\\_georgia\\_the\\_fallout.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/europe/caucasus/195_russia_vs_georgia_the_fallout.pdf)> (accessed 10 April 2009). See also: Stepanova, Ekaterina. *South Ossetia and Abkhazia: Placing the Conflict in Context*, 1.

<sup>20</sup> United Nations Secretary General. "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1839 (2008)." United Nations Website. <<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/223/52/PDF/N0922352.pdf?OpenElement>> (accessed 23 April 2009). 2.

<sup>21</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *Georgia: the Risks of Winter*, 26 November 2008. Europe Report N° 51 <[http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/europe/caucasus/b51\\_georgia\\_the\\_risks\\_of\\_winter.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/europe/caucasus/b51_georgia_the_risks_of_winter.pdf)> (accessed 10 April 2009).

## **CAUSES OF CONFLICT**

In analyzing causes of conflict, it is often tempting to look for simplistic, overarching explanations and theories (especially given the emphasis many social scientists place on parsimony). However, causes of conflict—especially protracted conflicts—are often very complicated. This holds true in the case of South Ossetia. In the following sub-sections I will first outline the root causes of conflict in South Ossetia, then examine why this conflict has become a protracted conflict.

### **Root Causes**

The academic literature on the conflict in South Ossetia varies greatly with regard to root causes. For example, some scholars argue that Russia's desire to maintain hegemony in the region is at the root of this violent conflict. Others argue that Georgia's mistreatment and neglect of ethnic Ossetians living in Georgia is the primary cause. Others still, place the blame on Western encroachment on Russia's historical sphere of influence (citing continuing NATO expansion, increasing American military aid to ex-Soviet states, and the staging of military exercises in the region). In addition to these, a last group of scholars sees the breakup of the Soviet Union (and Georgia's subsequent refusal to let South Ossetia secede) as the root cause of the problem. The question therefore arises: which of these varying explanations is most accurate?

In reality, no single theory can adequately explain the causes of the South Ossetian conflict. Instead, all of the previously mentioned explanations of the causes of the South Ossetian conflict provide important insight into the origins of this conflict. In fact, the South Ossetian conflict began as a separatist conflict following the dissolution of the Soviet Union when South Ossetians tried to secede from Georgia (and were denied secession by the Georgian

authorities). In this sense, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a secessionist movement can both be seen as root causes of the conflict. Nevertheless, subsequent wars to bring South Ossetia under Georgian rule, repeated violent outbreaks between ethnic Georgians and ethnic Ossetians, and general mistreatment of South Ossetians by the Georgian government can also be seen as causes of the conflict given that they have further imbued South Ossetians with a desire to secede from Georgia.

### **Causes of Protraction**

Although Russian involvement in South Ossetia should not be seen as a *root* cause of conflict there, Russian involvement in South Ossetia *can* be seen as a cause of the conflicts protraction. In fact, as Cory Welt pointed out in his 2005 article “Balancing the Balancer: Russia, the West, and Conflict Resolution in Georgia,” Russia’s involvement in Georgia’s separatist conflicts has—whether intentionally or not—hindered the peace process by producing a stalemate in negotiations over the legal status of the breakaway regions. He writes: “Thanks to Russian support for the de facto independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the balance of negotiating power between Georgia and the breakaway regions has been too skewed to tell if an opportunity to promote peaceful reunification even exists. Currently, the regional leaderships do not need to enter into negotiations that will result in any kind of settlement other than one that institutionalises their status as Russian protectorates.” Yet, this is not the only way in which Russian involvement has served to prolong conflict in Georgia, Russia’s recent military actions in Georgia have further complicated future prospects for peace by internationalizing the conflict.

Given that Russia’s military involvement in Georgia has served to prolong conflict in South Ossetia, Russian motives behind intervention can also be seen as causal factors for the conflicts continuation. These motives include: Russia’s desire to punish Georgia for pursuing



integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, Russia's desire to punish the West for its recognition of the Kosovo Unilateral Declaration of Independence (as well as for its support of Georgia), Russia's desire to regain control over what Moscow sees as its historical and geographical sphere of influence, and Russia's desire to re-establish its status as a world power. In addition to this, domestic political considerations may have also influenced Russia's decision to become militarily involved in Georgia given that the intervention was highly popular with Russian constituents (not excluding those in the Russian Federation's North Ossetian Autonomous Republic).<sup>22</sup> At any rate, because all of these motivations and considerations ultimately brought about Russian military involvement, these factors can also be seen as causal factors of continued conflict.

## **POSITIONS OF KEY ACTORS**

In this section I will examine the positions, interests, and needs of those key actors involved in the conflict in South Ossetia. I will then draw on this analysis in a subsequent section to make recommendations for resolving the Georgia-South Ossetia conflict and restoring peace to South Ossetia.

### **Position of the Georgian Government**

The Georgian government has long seen the conflict in South Ossetia as being more of a Georgia-Russia conflict than a Georgia-South Ossetia conflict. In fact, in September 2005, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili declared that there is "no Ossetian problem in Georgia," only "a problem in Georgian-Russian relations with respect to certain territories."<sup>23</sup> This view

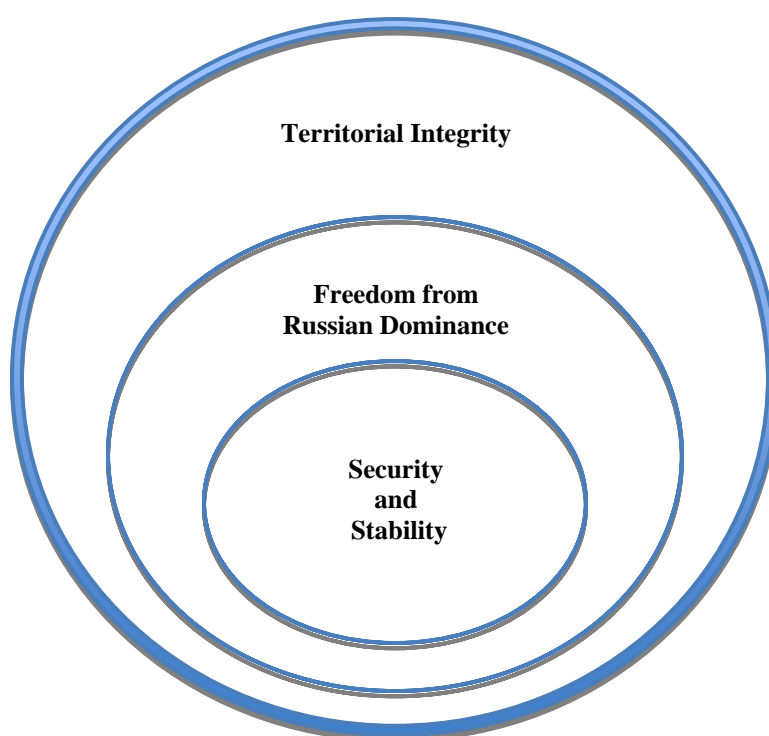
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<sup>22</sup> See: King, Charles. "The Five-Day War," 2-11. See also: Stepanova, Ekaterina. *South Ossetia and Abkhazia: Placing the Conflict in Context*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> German, Tracy C. "Visibly Invisible: EU Engagement in Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus."

can be seen as both a reflection of Georgian fears regarding Russian domination, and the result of Russia's continued backing of separatist movements in Georgia. Such perceptions caused Georgian officials to see the August 2008 introduction of Russian troops into Georgia as an invasion aimed at "overthrowing" and "occupying" the Georgian government.<sup>24</sup> Such perceptions have also led Georgian officials to see Russian Joint Peace Keeping Forces (JPKF) as a direct threat to Georgian security.<sup>25</sup>

The onion diagram on the right geographically depicts the positions, interests, and needs of the Georgian government with respect to the conflict in South Ossetia. The outermost layer of the metaphorical onion represents the Georgian government's official position. Publically, the Georgian government has stated that it is determined to restore Georgia's



territorial integrity. In fact, in a January 2004 speech, Georgian president Saakashvili proclaimed: "Georgia's territorial integrity is the goal of my life." <sup>26</sup> The second layer of the diagram represents the Georgian government's underlying interests in preventing South

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*European Security* 16, Number 3-4 (September - December 2007): 363.

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. "URGENT: Russian Ground Forces Invade Georgia, Georgian Army Retreats to Defend Capital; Government Appeals for Urgent International Intervention." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Website. [http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=ENG&sec\\_id=30&info\\_id=7258](http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=30&info_id=7258) (accessed 21 April 2009).

<sup>25</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *Georgia's South Ossetia Conflict: Make Haste Slowly*, 12.

<sup>26</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia*, 7.

Ossetia's secession. In particular, Georgian officials are extremely interested in maintaining freedom from Russian dominance. In order to prevent Georgia from being dominated by Russian regional hegemony, the Georgian government has sought to strengthen its ties with the West (particularly with the EU and NATO). Nevertheless, South Ossetia's unresolved status represented an obstacle to Georgian integration into western institutions (for instance, when Georgia was denied a NATO Membership Action Plan, German chancellor Angel Merkel stressed that a country with unresolved conflicts cannot join NATO).<sup>27</sup> Lastly, the core of the metaphorical onion represents the Georgian government's needs (in relation to the South Ossetian conflict). More than anything else, the Georgian government is concerned with maintaining security and stability in the region. The Georgian government believes that Russia wishes to purposely destabilize Georgia and overthrow its government.<sup>28</sup> As a result, it has come to see Russia's military presence—including its "peacekeeping" presence—in South Ossetia as a significant threat to Georgian security. These concerns, coupled with belief that the Greater Caucasus Mountains represent a natural protective barrier against Russian aggression, have caused the Georgian government to see control over South Ossetia as a crucial element of Georgian stability and security.

### **Position of the South Ossetian Leaders**

South Ossetians have enjoyed *de facto* independence for well over a decade and have no desire to be reintegrated into Georgia proper.<sup>29</sup> South Ossetians are highly distrustful of the Georgian government and feel that they have received unequal treatment under Georgian rule. This

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<sup>27</sup> Cornell et al. *Russia's War in Georgia: Causes and Implications for Georgia and the World*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. "URGENT: Russian Ground Forces Invade Georgia, Georgian Army Retreats to Defend Capital; Government Appeals for Urgent International Intervention." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Website. <[http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=ENG&sec\\_id=30&info\\_id=7258](http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=30&info_id=7258)> (accessed 21 April 2009).

<sup>29</sup> King, Charles. "The Five-Day War." *Foreign Affairs* 87, Issue 6 (Nov/Dec. 2008): 2-11.

distrust has been perpetuated and reinforced by repeated Georgian efforts to retake South Ossetia by military force (as occurred in 1991-1992, 2004, and 2008).<sup>30</sup> In contrast, Russian influence in South Ossetia has been widely embraced. The acceptance of Russian influence in South Ossetia has been largely the result of Russian security guarantees. However, other forms of Russian aid, such as economic aid, have also contributed to the leadership's positive view of Russian influence in South Ossetia. In addition to this, an acceptance of Russian influence in South Ossetia has also been a product of shared ethnic ties with North Ossetia, which lies just across the border (within the Russian Federation).

Within the context of the Georgia-South Ossetia

dispute, the positions, interests, and needs

of the South Ossetian leaders can be

divided into three basic layers. The

onion diagram on the right

provides a visual representation of

these layers. The outer layer

represents the position that the

South Ossetian leadership has taken

publicly. Namely, that they will settle for

nothing less than either complete independence from

Georgia, or full accession to the Russian Federation (which the South Ossetian leadership has

sought to justify based on the principle of self-determination). The second layer represents what

the South Ossetian leaders want to achieve: political autonomy. The third, innermost, layer

represents the most important needs of the South Ossetian leadership. As the diagram shows,



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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

the South Ossetian leadership sees the security and the social, economic and political protection of ethnic Ossetians as paramount.

### **Position of the Russian Government**

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has claimed that the events of August 2008 were actually the result of an American plot to obtain Poland's signature on anti-missile defenses or to get John McCain elected.<sup>31</sup> Even so, Russia's primary justification for military involvement in South Ossetia appears to have been the protection of Russian "citizens" and peacekeepers in the region.<sup>32</sup> In fact, many South Ossetians hold Russian citizenship (given that for years Russia has pursued a program of issuing Russian passports to South Ossetians, then integrating them into the Russian health, education, and pension system).<sup>33</sup> What is more, the Russian government has openly accused the Georgian government of participating in ethnic cleansing and genocide against South Ossetians.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, many have questioned the sincerity of Russia's concern for these foreign-born citizens (arguing instead that the Russian government has pursued a policy of issuing passports to South Ossetians with the express intent of justifying Russian military involvement in the region). In light of these competing claims, it is interesting to note that Russia's practice of issuing Russian passports to South Ossetians continued to occur within South Ossetia even after the August 2008 fighting had already begun.<sup>35</sup>

As the onion diagram on the right depicts, the Russian position toward the Georgia-South Ossetia conflict can be seen as having three basic layers. The first layer

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<sup>31</sup> Rayfield, Donald. "Limiting Conflict in the Caucasus," 132.

<sup>32</sup> Hamilton, Robert F. *Russia's Strategy in the War Against Georgia*, 14 August 2008. Center for Strategic and International Studies, Critical Questions.

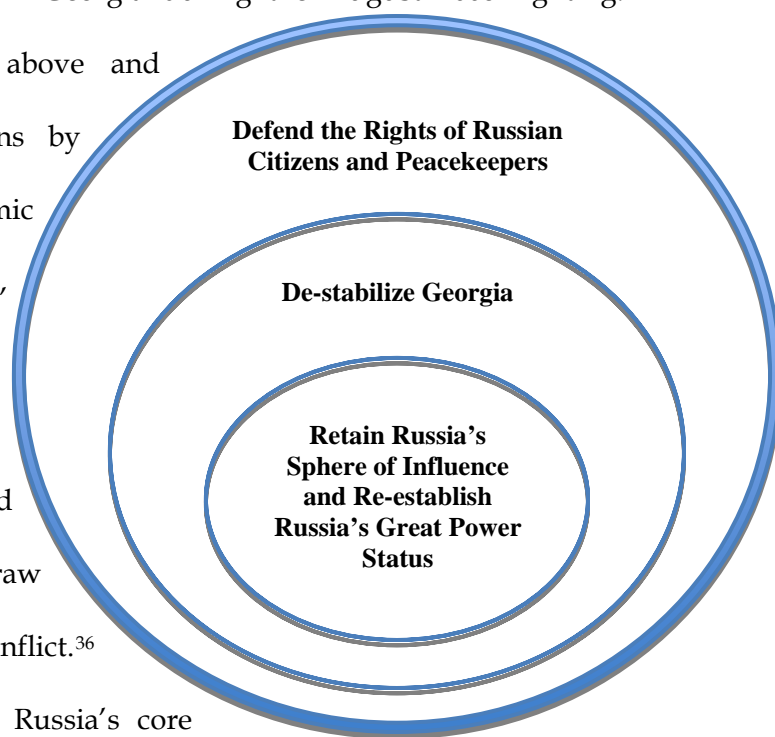
<[http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/080814\\_cq\\_hamilton\\_russia.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/080814_cq_hamilton_russia.pdf)>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>34</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Cornell et al. *Russia's War in Georgia: Causes and Implications for Georgia and the World*, 19.

represents the position that Russia has taken publicly. Namely, that Russian military action in Georgia has been to defend the rights of Russian citizens and peacekeepers. The second layer represents Russia's underlying interest in carrying out military action in Georgia: destabilizing Georgia. This hidden interest was demonstrated by the way in which Russia used military force in Georgia during the August 2008 fighting. In particular, Russian forces went above and beyond protecting Russian citizens by targeting military and economic infrastructure throughout Georgia, carrying out cyber-attacks against Georgian governmental and non-governmental websites, and occupying and refusing to withdraw from areas outside of the zone of conflict.<sup>36</sup>



Finally, the third layer represents Russia's core interests with regard to its involvement in the South Ossetia conflict: to maintain Russia's historical sphere of influence (i.e. exclusive Russian hegemony in the region), and re-establish Russia's status as an important world military power. For years Russia has seen increasing Western influence in Georgia as an encroachment on Russia's sphere of influence (as it had been established by the Soviet Union during the Cold War). Russia has been particularly concerned with increases in American military aid to Georgia and promises of Georgia's accession into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 8.

In fact, Russia's heavy military involvement in South Ossetia could undermine Georgia's chances of being accepted into NATO by demonstrating to NATO members the danger of extending NATO protection to Georgia and portraying the Georgian government as unreliable and careless. At the same time, Russia's actions in Georgia may help to preserve its sphere of influence by causing other Westward-looking post-Soviet states to think twice about strengthening ties with the West. Lastly, Russian intervention in South Ossetia has helped preserve Russia's historical sphere of influence by ensuring a continued Russian military presence in Georgia (both in terms of Russian peacekeepers, and in terms of planned Russian military bases).<sup>38</sup>

## **OBSERVATIONS**

In order for lasting peace to take root in South Ossetia, a political agreement will likely need to be reached regarding South Ossetia's political status. Prospects for agreement over South Ossetia's political status have been complicated, however, by Georgia's repeated use of military force in trying to reign in South Ossetia, and by Russia's unilateral recognition of South Ossetian independence. In particular, Georgia's use of military force in South Ossetia is likely to prevent South Ossetians from re-joining Georgia, and Russia is unlikely to withdraw its recognition of South Ossetian independence. Nevertheless, efforts to create lasting peace in South Ossetia are likely to fail in the long run if the involved parties fail to achieve consensus on South Ossetia's political status (as the conflict's history has shown). Therefore, some sort of compromise must be achieved which is acceptable to all parties (based on their core needs).

Developing an agreement on South Ossetia's political status will likely require fresh

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<sup>38</sup> United Nations Secretary General. "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1839 (2008)," 3.

ideas and thinking in order to satisfy those parties whose interests are at stake. Such an agreement could involve, for example, granting South Ossetia political independence from Georgia, but requiring South Ossetia to de-militarize and requiring Russian troops to be withdrawn. In place of Ossetian and Russian forces, international peacekeeping troops and monitors could provide for and ensure the protection of those living in South Ossetia (similar to the way in which allied troops provided for the security of de-militarized Germany following World War II). Such an agreement could be acceptable to South Ossetia given that it would be granted political autonomy and given also that neutral forces would provide for its security. Such an agreement could also be acceptable to Georgia since it would require Russian military forces to be withdrawn from Georgia (as well as South Ossetia), and since the presence of international peacekeepers would provide a buffer from Russian aggression. Furthermore, although such an agreement would likely be resisted by Russia (because it would limit Russia's military presence in the region), international pressure could make Russia's public position untenable since concern for Russian citizens and peacekeepers would no longer be at issue. What is more, many have noted that Russia is highly concerned with re-establishing its role as a great power. Given the emphasis Russia places on sitting "at the top table,"<sup>39</sup> it may be persuaded to accept such a solution for fear of being marginalized by the international community. Even so, this example is just one of many options. Other options should also be explored which taken into account the interests and needs of each of the involved parties.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Much of the discourse surrounding the conflict in South Ossetia has focused almost exclusively on the international dimension of this conflict. However, establishing peace in South

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<sup>39</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *Russia vs. Georgia: the Fallout*, 6.



Ossetia will likely require addressing both the local and international dimensions of this conflict. In the subsections that follow I have outlined a number of tailored recommendations for achieving this end.

**To the Georgian Government, *De Facto* South Ossetian Authorities, and Russian Government:**

If these parties want to bring about peace in South Ossetia, they could sign a non-use of force pact and re-commit themselves to strict compliance with established ceasefire agreements. In addition to this, these bodies could agree to re-establish diplomatic ties between the conflicting parties. Furthermore, the Georgian government, South Ossetian authorities, and Russian government could commit themselves to the peaceful settlement of the conflict in South Ossetia by agreeing to participate in constructive dialogues addressing a variety of issues related to the recent violent conflict. Eventually, such dialogues could serve as a platform for negotiating a consensus on South Ossetia's political status.

**To the Georgian Government:**

If the Georgian government wants to re-establish peaceful relations with South Ossetia, it could begin to actively pursue measures aimed at building confidence with South Ossetians. Such measures could include refraining from nationalist rhetoric, providing aid for reconstruction and development, and actively seeking to protect the rights of ethnic Ossetians throughout Georgia.

**To the *De Facto* South Ossetian Authorities:**

If the *de facto* South Ossetian authorities want to establish peace in South Ossetia, they should desist from attacking and displacing ethnic Georgians (as well as their property). They

should also allow international peacekeeping forces to take the place of those local and regional forces currently in place.

**To the Russian Government:**

If the Russian government would like to promote peace in South Ossetia, it could immediately withdraw all Russian troops from Georgian soil, and implement a phased withdrawal of those Russian troops in South Ossetia which are not operating under an international peacekeeping mandate (as those troops are replaced by international peacekeeping forces).

**To Members of the UN Security Council:**

If members of the UN Security Council are to contribute to the ending of violent conflict in South Ossetia, they could create a UN mandate to send international peacekeeping forces to South Ossetia in order to replace current peacekeeping forces, which are seen as directly involved in the conflict.

**To UN Member States:**

If UN member states would like to promote peace in South Ossetia, they could push for and facilitate an opening of dialogue amongst local, regional, and global leaders. This could involve creating a temporary forum for discussion of issues and concerns relating to the South Ossetia conflict, or other forms of UN-mediated discussions and/or negotiations. At the same time, UN member states could push for UN mandates to create humanitarian and development missions in the region. Member states could also put pressure on those actors directly involved in the conflict (namely, the Georgian government, *de facto* South Ossetian authorities, and

Russian government) to get them to re-establish diplomatic ties between the conflicting parties.

### **To EU Member States:**

The European Union (EU) is in a unique position to contribute to peace in South Ossetia. Given extensive interdependence between the European Union and the Russian Federation (especially due to the EU's heavy dependency on Russian energy and Russia's reliance on energy revenues from energy sales to the EU), the EU has a large incentive to maintain good relations with Russia. At the same time, given Georgia's geographical proximity to the EU, and given Georgia's geostrategic importance as a transit route for oil and gas pipelines to Europe, EU member states have a large stake in promoting peace and stability in Georgia (and the entire Caucasus region). These dual interests, combined with the EU's lack of direct involvement in the conflict in South Ossetia, place the EU in favorable position to offer assistance. In fact, the EU has already proved that it can provide added value to peace efforts in South Ossetia both by brokering the August 2008 ceasefire agreement between Moscow and Tbilisi (as mentioned previously), and by launching the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia.<sup>40</sup> These efforts are to be applauded. Even so, the EU could do much more to promote peace in South Ossetia.

The mandate of the EUMM in Georgia encompasses the entire territory of Georgia and tasks monitors with ensuring compliance with ceasefire agreements and observing respect for human rights and humanitarian law.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, EU monitors have been unable to fully perform this function because they have been denied access to South Ossetia. Thus, in order to more effectively support the establishment of peace in South Ossetia, EU member states could

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<sup>40</sup> Council of the European Union. "European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia." Council of the European Union Web Site. <[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/081023-EUMM\\_in\\_Georgia-version3\\_EN.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/081023-EUMM_in_Georgia-version3_EN.pdf)> (accessed March 24, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

put added pressure on the Russian and South Ossetian authorities to get them to allow EU monitors full access to South Ossetia and other zones of conflict. At the same time, EU member states and EU bodies can put pressure on Russia to allow Russian peacekeepers to be replaced by internationally mandated, international peacekeepers (which Russia has long sought to prohibit).

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