WHO’S TO BLAME? WESTERN RESPONSES TO THE 2008 GEORGIA – RUSSIA – SOUTH OSSETIA CONFLICT

Jessica Lynn Golliday

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Approved by:
Dr. Graeme Robertson
Dr. Robert Jenkins
Dr. Jacqueline Olich
ABSTRACT

JESSICA LYNN GOLLIDAY: Who’s To Blame? Western Responses to the 2008 Georgia – Russia – South Ossetia Conflict
(Under the direction of Dr. Graeme Robertson)

It has been called the August War, the Five-Day War, the start of a new Cold War, and even “Europe’s First War of the 21st Century.” Whichever title one chooses, the bottom line is that this short war, which saw Georgian, Russian, and South Ossetian forces clash for five days in August 2008, has significant implications not just for the parties directly involved in the fighting, but also the international community. This paper will assess the origins of the most recent conflict in South Ossetia as well as the response of the United States and the European Union. American social scientist Charles Tilly’s book, Credit and Blame, provides a useful and interesting framework for this analysis. With as many times as the word “blame” was thrown around during and after this conflict, it will help us to explore the nature of blame and how it affects the underlying tensions between Georgia, South Ossetia, and Russia as well as the international community’s interpretation of the conflict.
To my mother, Patricia Ann Javins Golliday (1947-1998), who always taught me to be the best that I can be and whose love and spirit will forever inspire me to achieve great things in life.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the August 2008 conflict between Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia, the Russian Central Armed Forces Museum in Moscow opened a new exhibition in early September entitled, “The Caucasus: Five Days in August,” which portrays Russia’s “victory” in Georgia less than a month earlier. “Now people understand who started this,” said Aleksandr Nikonov, the museum’s director.1 Georgia, too, planned to open a new “Russian Aggression Museum” as part of the Stalin House-Museum in the city of Gori, Stalin’s birthplace, and the scene of heavy fighting in August. The museum would “expose” acts of Russian aggression in the most recent conflict over South Ossetia, said the Georgian Minister of Culture, Nikoloz Vacheishvili, in late September 2008.2 Thus, the conflict not only caused fierce fighting on the ground, it also launched a blustery battle of narratives between the Georgians, Russians, and South Ossetians as well as Western journalists, scholars, and heads of state to explain what “really” happened during those five days in August. These dueling museums in Moscow and Gori also made sure their visitors would see a “true” depiction of the conflict.

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It has been called the August War, the Five-Day War, the start of a new Cold War, and even “Europe’s First War of the 21st Century.” Whichever title one chooses, the bottom line is that this short war, which saw Georgian, Russian, and South Ossetian forces clash for five days in August 2008, has major implications not just for the parties directly involved in the fighting but also the broader international community. This most recent conflict is just one in a series of confrontations between Georgia and its ethnic minority regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Behind these clashes, there is a long and complex history of antagonism, aggression, and affliction, which having never been effectively addressed or resolved by the warring parties, continues to spark new conflicts and further entrench tensions and grievances. Additionally, the conflict was not just a simple two-sided battle between Georgia and South Ossetia or Georgia and Russia, but all three, which adds another layer of complexity to resolving this situation.

While Moscow has played a role in past conflicts between Georgia, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia, the August 2008 conflict was the first time Russia explicitly and purposefully intervened, as its own force, rather than surreptitiously supporting these regions in their fight against Georgia. Russia’s crushing use of force not only in South Ossetia, but also in Georgian cities and ports, shocked many in the West and challenged the international community’s response to and mediation of a conflict that involved the disproportionate use of force by one of its partners. Additionally, Russia’s recognition of South Ossetia’s and Abkhazia’s independence on August 26, 2008 further complicated efforts to resolve the

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4 Map of Georgia and E. Europe, see Appendix II. Map of major battle sites, see Appendix I and III.
situation. Thus, while the war was relatively short-lived, it had a large impact, which will be long-lasting in terms of the challenge it presents to international mediation efforts as well as the West’s relationship with Russia.

The 2008 conflict in South Ossetia, which erupted with such fury but ended relatively quickly, suddenly left the world to make sense of what happened during those five days in August as the 2008 Summer Olympic Games opened in Beijing, China. Both Russia and Georgia proclaimed they were defending their citizens from acts of aggression, violence, and genocide perpetrated by the other side. Immediately following the outbreak of violence on August 8, 2008, new battles over who started the conflict raged in the media, amongst scholars, as well as between heads of state. Initially, much of the Western media as well as Western leaders, focusing on Russia’s disproportionate use of force against a relatively small Georgian army, blamed Russia for starting the conflict. Scholars and regional specialists, however, seeking to simplifying this complex dynamic, engaged in confusing debates using the history of the region, information about what was happening on the ground, timelines, and well as their own personal biases, to determine who started the conflict and who was to blame. Their discussions highlighted not only the complexity of the region but also how overly-absorbed the Western media, scholars, and leaders became with figuring out “who started it?” rather than “how can we resolve the situation?”

The response of the international community, specifically the United States and the European Union and its member states, provides another complicating dynamic to the battle over narratives. The U.S. administration and the leaders of many EU member countries initially determined that Russia was the aggressor and that Georgia was, more or less, the innocent victim. This interpretation was reflected in the rhetoric as well as the policy actions
of both parties. Interestingly, however, by November 2008, their “stories” began to change. American President George W. Bush and his administration, who were perhaps Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili’s most fervent supporters, became more critical of Georgia’s role in the conflict and notably tabled its offer to help Georgia enter NATO as quickly as possible. The EU also changed course, ultimately agreeing on a softer policy response to Russia and reopening partnership talks that had been suspended after the conflict in August. While things seemed to have “returned to normal” by the end of 2008—that is, the conflict was unresolved and the status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia were unclear, as they have been since the early 1990s—the challenge that still remains is how to continue to effectively mediate this conflict in order to prevent another outbreak of violence in this region.

**Credit and Blame**

American social scientist Charles Tilly’s book, *Credit and Blame*, provides an interesting and useful framework that will allow us to appraise the response of the international community and the options it has to effectively mediate this conflict. With as many times as the word “blame” was thrown around during and after this conflict, it will help us to take a closer look at the nature of blame and how it affects the underlying tensions between Georgia, South Ossetia, and Russia as well as the international community’s interpretation of the events of August 2008.

The assignment of credit and blame is a common form of social interaction that affects and is affected by relationships between people and groups. When things go right or

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6 Ibid, p. 3.
wrong, people insist that someone caused them, and that that individual should therefore take responsibility for the consequences, whether they are positive or negative. The way in which credit or blame is assigned depends on the “previously existing relationships between the creditor and the credited and the blamer and the blamed.” As a result, the act of crediting and blaming can define or redefine relationships between the parties at hand. Additionally, credit and blame play key role in defining relationships not only on a personal level between friends, siblings, parents and children, but also on an international political level between leaders, governments, and organizations.

The nature of credit and blame, however, differ in several notable ways, as Tilly describes. First, and perhaps most clearly, “those who blame estimate a loss in value rather than a gain.” In other words, one is blamed for causing a negative outcome, such as war, but is credited for causing a positive outcome such as peace. Second, blamers usually try to calculate the precise role an actor played in bringing about a negative outcome, whereas creditors tend to err on side of generosity, ignoring other outside factors such as luck or other people’s contributions to a positive outcome. Third, actors striving to avoid blame try to deny their agency, competence, and responsibility in certain unfavorable outcome, but those wanting credit try to exaggerate their agency, competence, and responsibility. Fourth, evaluators of losses generally demand that the perpetrator’s penalty match the loss closely, while in assigning credit, the reward and gain in value do not always correlate. For example, one might receive a medal or certificate for saving someone’s life, but face serious penalties

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7 Tilly, p. 4.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid, p. 103.
and be forced to compensate victims for the loss of life. Finally, while credit sorts people into worthy and less worthy categories, blame draws a sharper us-them boundary, placing perpetrators on the other side of the line from judges, victims, and survivors. This paper will focus on blame, whose nature is far more destructive and divisive and thus often leads to conflict as well as appears in its aftermath.

The Politics of Credit and Blame

Credit and blame play a key role in politics as a means of both explaining and justifying particular foreign policy objectives, actions, and decisions. As Tilly states, “a great deal of public politics in the United States and elsewhere consists of taking or denying credit, assigning or resisting blame.” For example, Tilly explains that credit and blame played a key role in the U.S. War on Terrorism. By blaming rogue states and non-state actors as a threat to peace and crediting itself as the guarantor of world order the U.S. justified its decision to use preemptive military intervention in order to prevent future terrorist attacks.

The problem with blame, however, is that it often exhibits destructive and pervasive characteristics. For example, as Tilly explains, “the al-Qaeda-coordinated attacks in New York and Washington, DC on September 11th, 2001 started an epidemic of credit and blame.” Falling into the blaming trap is relatively easy because it allows the blamer to avoid complicated details and instead focus on declaring that he or she was right and

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10 The five differences between credit and blame are based on Tilly, pp. 103-104.
11 Ibid, p. 22.
12 Ibid, p. 28-29.
13 Ibid, p. 25.
someone else was wrong. Not only does this absolve the blamer from any responsibility for the negative outcome, it also puts the blamer in a superior position to the blamed. The problem with this situation, as Tilly emphasizes, as will this paper, is that playing the blame game in politics is neither productive nor helpful. In order to effectively address and resolve a negative outcome, it is more critical to try to explain why things happened and what we can learn from them so that the same “mistake” will not be repeated in the future.\textsuperscript{14}

Additionally, as described above, blame is divisive in nature. As Tilly notes, ‘us versus them’ boundaries “cut across much of politics. As a result, disputes over whether a given action deserves credit or blame figure regularly in political debate.”\textsuperscript{15} The case of war is a prime example. As Tilly posits, us-them boundaries often create situations where side A blames side B for a particular action for which B’s supporters give B credit. In the case of the September 11\textsuperscript{th} terrorist attacks, for example, Americans deplored the act and blamed the terrorists for the death and destruction it created; whereas bin Laden’s supporters saw it as a significant blow against American imperialism, for which the act deserved credit.\textsuperscript{16}

In our case, Georgia blamed Russia for invading its country and attacking its people; whereas Russia felt that it deserved credit for protecting its citizens in South Ossetia from Georgian aggression. Not only does blame impede these two countries from working together to resolve the conflict, since both see the other as being on the other side of an irreproachable boundary, it also encourages observers to take sides. The result, as Tilly and this paper will emphasize, is that taking sides only serves to strengthen those that are blamed.

\textsuperscript{14} Tilly, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
and excluded; encouraging not only their leaders and governments, but also the public to join together against the blamer. Tilly cautioned that after the September 11th terrorist attacks, taking sides would only strengthen excluded powers and dissident movements in other countries. If the U.S. bombs the presumed originating country of the attackers and thus forces other countries to take sides, the U.S. will aggravate the very conditions American leaders will declare they are preventing…democracy will decline. Thus, in cases of violence and war, blame spawns a particularly divisive and potentially dangerous cycle.

**Introduction to the Chapters**

This paper will assess the history behind the August 2008 conflict in South Ossetia as well as the response of the international community through the lens of Tilly’s theories on credit and blame. Due to the fact that we are discussing a negative outcome, war, I will focus primarily on the nature of blame. While touching briefly on the origins of the conflict after the fall of the Russian empire and Georgia’s incorporation into the Soviet Union, the chapters on the history of this conflict will focus mainly on the post-Soviet period from the late 1980s to 2008. Additionally, I divided the history section into two chapters in order to highlight the role that Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili has played in escalating tensions and violence in the region as well as the significant deterioration of Georgian – Russian relations under the regimes of Saakashvili and Russian President, Vladimir Putin. In terms of assessing the international community’s response, I will concentrate on the period from August to December, 2008.

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17 Tilly, pp. 26-27.
The second chapter will examine the nature of Georgian – South Ossetian – Russian relations from the late 1980s to the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia. It is important to understand the underlying tensions between these three actors as well as the fact that past conflicts have not been resolved because these are two important root causes of the August 2008 conflict in South Ossetia. Here I argue that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia, South Ossetia, and Russia have entered a vicious and seemingly never-ending triangular cycle of tensions and grievances that are subsequently exacerbated by violence and war, which then reinforce these tensions and grievances, which when left unresolved after a conflict, serve as kindling for the subsequent fire of violence. I will also examine the role that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Georgian independence movement played in provoking the first post-Soviet conflict in South Ossetia, which lasted from 1990 until 1992. Additionally, I will examine the role that Georgian, South Ossetian, and Russian leaders have played in reinforcing rather than resolving tensions and outbreaks of violence.

The third chapter will examine the nature of Georgian – South Ossetian – Russian relations from the 2003 Rose Revolution to the August 2008 conflict in South Ossetia. The election of Mikhail Saakashvili in 2004, following the Rose Revolution, which forced President Eduard Shevardnadze to resign, dramatically escalated tensions in the region as he began a campaign to reincorporate the separatist regions of Adjara, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia. Additionally, Saakashvili’s escalation of the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia from a domestic issue to an international battle against Russia, as well as Putin’s willingness to play along, increased the stakes not only for the warring parties but also for the international community’s response. Thus, the resulting triangle of three charismatic and nationalist leaders—Saakashvili in Georgia, Eduard Kokoity in South Ossetia, and Putin in
Russia—proved to be a volatile combination, which ultimately exploded in South Ossetia in August 2008.

The fourth chapter will examine the role that Tilly’s concepts of outcome, agency, competence, and responsibility play in assigning blame by assessing the debates over the question, “who started the 2008 conflict in South Ossetia?” In this chapter, I will argue that much of the media as well as Western scholars poured far too much time and effort into answering this flawed and unanswerable question, which is overly simplistic and too broad to be answered definitely without any further specifications or limitations on the question. Additionally, I will argue that the other problem with the “who started it” question is that it was posed with only two possible answers: Russia or Georgia. These choices ignore the role that other actors, such as the South Ossetians and the international community, played in provoking the outbreak of violence in August 2008.

The fifth chapter will examine the responses of the United States and the European Union to the conflict by discussing the “stories” they created to explain what happened as well as to justify their responses. I will argue that blame plays an important role in the initial responses of the U.S. and EU member countries as well as why their responses changed just a few short months after the conflict. Additionally, I will argue that these stories are important because they highlight the dangerous and infectious nature of blame, both as a foreign policy tool as well as a scapegoat for effective conflict mediation.

The sixth chapter will take a closer look at the real victims of this conflict—the innocent civilians who were attacked, killed, or displaced during and after the outbreak of violence in August. Additionally, I will examine the role of repercussions/punishments in the assignment of blame. Finally, I will conclude with a review of the role of blame and the
challenges it presents to effectively resolving the 2008 conflict in South Ossetia as well as to international conflicts more generally.
CHAPTER 2
THE FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE TO THE ROSE REVOLUTION

_In general it is easier to ignite a war than to extinguish it, simpler to start one than to end one, because once it has begun, a war, like a fire, begins to live according to its own laws._

Leonid Nikitinsky, _Izvestia_  

Introduction

The long, tense relationship between Georgia, the separatist region of South Ossetia, and Russia played a significant role in sparking the August 2008 conflict. Beginning with the 1988 Georgian independence movement and the first post-Soviet era war between Georgia and South Ossetia, continuing to the ceasefire agreement signed by Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze and Russian President Boris Yeltsin in 1992, to the 2003 Rose Revolution and a failed peace process under Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, recent history has allowed these ethnic tensions to fester rather than be resolved. While the collapse of the Soviet Union is often thought of as peaceful, it is often forgotten that the atmosphere of fragmentation and confusion it created regarding national identity as well as territorial boundaries, led to conflicts in many former republics with multi-ethnic populations.  

In the case of Georgia, it led to devastating wars in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

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Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a dissident writer and a prominent leader of Georgia’s resurgent nationalist movement, who would later be elected as Georgia’s first post-Soviet president in 1991, took advantage of the freedom and openness afforded by the President of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev’s glasnost policy. In his fight for Georgia’s independence, his rhetoric and actions increasingly polarized the Georgian independence movement by excluding the participation of the populations in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Gamsakhurdia’s radical nationalistic rhetoric was often characterized by the phrase, “Georgia for [ethnic] Georgians.”

The South Ossetians and Abkhazians, threatened by Gamsakhurdia’s claims, sought the protection of Soviet authorities and later Russia. As a result, the cultural, linguistic, and territorial boundaries that existed between Georgia and its ethnic republics during Soviet times as well as under the Russian empire were easily exacerbated by the confusion and uncertainty of the Soviet Union’s collapse. Mutual mistrust and suspicion as well as South Ossetia’s desire for independence and protection (from Moscow) from Georgia has made it difficult for Georgia and South Ossetia, as well as Abkhazia, to reach any effective peace agreement and has in fact, instead, led to violence and war.

These relations are further complicated by Georgia’s relationship with Russia, whose influence on the side of the South Ossetians has also contributed to the difficulty in making any peace progress in the region. Since Georgia’s independence from the Soviet Union and especially since the election of pro-Western Georgian president, Mikhail Saakashvili, Georgia and Russia have engaged in a competition of influence, prestige, and power. While

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the dealings between Georgia’s second president, Eduard Shevardnadze, and Russia’s first president, Boris Yeltsin, may not have been as flashy as later performances by Saakashvili and Russian President Vladimir Putin, which will be discussed in the next chapter, the dynamic of their relationship is an important factor in setting the stage for greater hostilities, tension, and competition under their successors.

When Shevardnadze, the former Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, returned to Georgia, the country was in the middle of secessionist wars in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Unable to end the hostilities on his own, Shevardnadze called on Moscow for help. Yeltsin agreed and assisted the Georgians in ending the conflict in Abkhazia. Shevardnadze, however, paid a high price for this assistance: acceptance of increased Russian influence in Georgia. Thus, while Shevardnadze was reviled by many in Moscow for capitulating to the United States and bringing about the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, as the leader of Georgia, he gave Russia a second chance to re-establish its influence and power.

Circumstances eventually began to change as Shevardnadze received more attention and aid from the West. By 2003, however, his popularity in Georgia had waned and he was forced to step down following the peaceful Rose Revolution led by Mikhail Saakashvili. While a fragile peace held in South Ossetia for over a decade following the end of violence in 1992, Saakashvili’s policies brought renewed tension to the region, which will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

Thus, Georgia’s relatively short post-Soviet history already follows a cyclic pattern of unresolved tensions and violence, which is exacerbated by the three-sided nature of these

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21 Notably, the Russians also contributed to exacerbating the conflict between Georgia and the Abkhazia by supporting the Abkhazians.
conflicts, involving not only Georgia and South Ossetia (and Abkhazia) but also Russia. Additionally, the personalities of the Georgian, South Ossetian, and Russian leaders also perpetuate this triangular cycle of tension and violence and contribute to the fluctuations between relative peace and violent clashes in South Ossetia. In order to break this vicious cycle, however, it is important to understand the history behind and nature of these conflicts so that effective mediation mechanisms can be created, which will hopefully prevent future conflicts.

**Us Versus Them**

War leads to the collective assignment of credit and blame more often than any other human activity. “Even revolutions, bungled natural disasters, political corruption, and economic crises produce less collective pointing of fingers at villains and heroes,” he argues.\(^{22}\) Wars are fought between sides with opposing values, goals, and beliefs and fighting can start and end for a variety of reasons, but most highlight a key factor that lends itself to creating credit and especially blame situations: a sharp “us versus them” divide. Us-them boundaries develop under a variety of circumstances. Assigning blame is an important factor that often creates and/or exacerbates such boundaries. Sharp lines that separate people who assign credit or blame from the objects of their judgment can develop, for example, due to differences in ethnicity, culture, identity, ideology, and religion and arise where there are actual and/or perceived fundamental differences in understanding, beliefs, history, and so on.\(^{23}\) “Won, lost, stalemated, [wars] end with participants making collective claims about

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\(^{22}\) Tilly, p. 127.

\(^{23}\) Ibid, pp. 53-54.
who gets credit and who’s to blame."\textsuperscript{24} At the end of a conflict, or even during it, there is always someone to blame; who, however, depends on which side you stand.

Assigning blame is often much more divisive than assigning credit, as noted in Chapter 1, because, as Tilly explains, assigning credit “sorts people into worthy and less worthy” but “does not necessarily establish a sharp line between ins and outs.” Blame, however, puts a person or group on the other side of a well-defined boundary, away from “judges, victims, and survivors.”\textsuperscript{25} This ostracism makes it much harder for that person or group to come back across that line. The very existence of such a boundary, therefore, eases the assigning blame for a negative outcome to “them.” As Tilly states, “on average, us-them boundaries add a presumption of blameworthiness to everyday interactions.”\textsuperscript{26} It is this persistent aggravation and blaming that often leads to conflict.

Us-them boundaries can also cause blame to operate in the opposite direction. While it is easy to blame “them” for a negative outcome, it may be equally as easy to refuse to acknowledge one’s own guilt.\textsuperscript{27} As Tilly explains,

“when national leaders deny that their troops could have committed genocide, when warring nations try to shift the blame for massacres to the other side, or when party leaders refuse to punish corrupt followers, us-them boundaries override the usual work of estimating competence and responsibility for some negative outcome. Loyalty overcomes justice.”\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{24} Tilly, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, p. 104.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, p. 104.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, p. 105.
Refusing to admit to genuine accusations of blame, therefore, is just as divisive as pointing fingers at the other side. When opposing sides fall into this epidemic of assigning and refusing blame, the ability to work together to find a cure will be next to impossible.

In some situations actors also play a double game of credit and blame. Competing sides not only desire to fix blame on the actor(s) that caused their pain (and punish them accordingly) but they also “seek recognition of their own merit, whether that merit consists of suffering borne bravely or of willingness to strike out at the rich and powerful. They ask for vindication. They ask for justice with regard to both blame and credit.”

Justice thus becomes more marked and demanding in blaming situations, as Tilly explains, because once people have assigned blame to a particular person or group, they always call for justice to be served. Seeking justice when a person feels that he or she has been wronged often consists of first fixing blame on the perceived perpetrator and then imposing punishments on the blamed. As a result, “assigning blame can easily become a persistent, destructive habit.”

Territorial and ethnic us-them divides that existed under Russian imperial and Soviet rule were inflamed by nationalism and politics as the Soviet Union collapsed. What used to be domestic borders became international ones. Georgia and South Ossetia were vying for their own independence and reasserting their identities in the post-Soviet space while excluding the other in their efforts. While Gamsakhurdia did not envision including the Ossetians (or the Abkhazians) in Georgia’s government, he still felt that their territory was part of Georgia. Consequently, the Ossetians (and Abkhazians), having been marginalized

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29 Tilly, p. 33.
31 Ibid, p. 119.
by the Georgian side, looked to Moscow for help. In the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse, this us-them divide led to violent clashes and war. South Ossetia became the battleground not just for the release of pent up tensions between Georgia and South Ossetia, but also for the more dangerous antagonisms between Georgia and Russia. Assertive Georgian, Russian, and South Ossetian leaders have continued to exacerbate these tensions, which ultimately led conflict in August 2008.

**Georgian – South Ossetian – Russian Relations from 1988 to 2003**

**Under the Rule of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union**

Even before Georgia’s push for independence from the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, Georgians’ had already experienced a period independence from Russian rule following the collapse of the Russian empire in 1917. Historian Ronald G. Suny notes that the ‘collectivization’ of Georgian lands during a century under the rule of the Russian empire had enabled Georgia “the possibility of shaping her own political future.” Additionally, this greater integration as well as “intellectual awakening stirred by the noble intelligentsia” had left Georgia with “many of the attributes of nationhood.”

After a brief time as part of the Democratic Federative Republic of Transcaucasia, along with Armenia and Azerbaijan, this union soon fell apart and Georgia declared independence in May 1918.

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33 Ibid, pp. 191-192. Suny notes that the Democratic Federative Republic of Transcaucasia was formed under Turkish pressure to separate the Caucasus from Russia. When the Turks attacked Armenia, the union disintegrated, leaving each republic to fend for itself. Responding to offers of German aid, Georgia declared independence on May 26, 1918.
Republic of Georgia, headed by the Georgian Mensheviks, maintained Georgia’s independence from 1918 until 1921, when Georgia fell to the Russian Bolsheviks.34

During this brief period of independence, the Menshevik government accused the Ossetians (and the Abkhazians) of cooperating with the Russian Bolsheviks. A series of Ossetian rebellions followed from 1918-1920 until the Georgian Mensheviks sent forces to Tskhinvali to violently suppress the uprisings. In 1921, the Bolshevik Red Army invaded Georgia, and South Ossetia was incorporated into the Soviet Union as the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR).35 In 1921, Abkhazia proclaimed itself the Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic, which was supported by the Bolsheviks. Eventually it would become part of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic and later an autonomous republic of the Georgian SSR, a significant downgrade from its independent republic status of 1921.36

Georgia was subsequently incorporated into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) as part of the Transcaucasian Federated Soviet Socialist Republic (ZSFSR) along with Armenia and Azerbaijan, a scheme devised by Iosif Stalin, an ethnic Georgian, to control nationalist sentiment, despite protests from Georgia to enter separately as its own

34 The Mensheviks were a wing of the Russian Social Democratic Party that split over war and social development from Lenin’s Bolshevik wing in 1903. During the October 1917 Russian Revolution, the Mensheviks supported the Provisional Government, which had taken power in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) after the abdication of Tsar Nicolas II, while the Bolsheviks attempted to overthrow it. The Georgian Mensheviks had earlier repelled Bolshevik soldiers following the Bolsheviks’ eventual overthrow of the Provisional Government in October 1917.


Lenin, however, did not approve of Stalin’s scheme and ordered his “abuses against the nationalities carried out in the name of unification be ended.”

Georgia was thus given the status of a separate republic until Stalin overruled Lenin’s plan and had Georgia incorporated into the USSR as part of the ZSFSR. In 1936, after the approval of a new USSR constitution, the ZSFSR was abolished and each of the three republics entered the USSR individually. The Georgian SSR would remain under Soviet control until 1991.

**Independence Movements, 1988-1991**

**Georgia**

The first opposition groups in Georgia began to appear in late 1987 as the liberating effects of Mikhail Gorbachev’s policies began to be felt across the weakening Soviet Union. As more radical groups formed, they organized mass demonstrations beginning in 1988 to protest changes to the Soviet constitution that limited the autonomy of Union Republics as well as made it more difficult for the Republics to secede from the Union. On April 9, 1989, ethnic Georgian demonstrators protesting a declaration made by Abkhazians requesting that their republic be made a full union republic, separate from Georgia, were...

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37 Suny, p. 216. Stalin, who had been the People’s Commissar for Nationalities’ Affairs, was nominated by Lenin to the position of General Secretary in April 1922. ZSFSR is a transliteration from the Russian title: Закавказская Советская Федеративная Социалистическая Республика – ЗСФСР.


38 Suny, p. 217.


41 Ibid, p. 42.
violently suppressed by Soviet authorities.\textsuperscript{42} Toxic gas and shovels/spades were used to brutally attack the protestors, 20 of whom were killed and another 200 hundred were injured.\textsuperscript{43} The event became known as the “Tbilisi Massacre.”

Jonathan Wheatley describes this vicious attack as a “defining moment in the history of modern Georgia,” undoubtedly reminiscent of the Bolshevik overthrow and suppression of an independent Georgia in 1921. Nationalist rhetoric after the event, he explains, could be “characterized both by a refusal to compromise and … by increasing intolerance toward non-Georgians,” presumably both ethnic minorities and Soviet authorities in Moscow.\textsuperscript{44} The immediate effect of the operation, therefore, was exactly the opposite of its intention. Instead of subduing the opposition groups, it further radicalized them and heightened the calls for Georgia’s full independence from the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{45} “This tragedy became a symbol for Georgian freedom fighters,” notes Irakly Areshidze.\textsuperscript{46} Georgia’s radical and intolerant nationalism infuriated Moscow and threatened the South Ossetians. Thus, the Tbilisi

\textsuperscript{42} Wheatley, p. 43. The protest originally began five days earlier when opposition demonstrators gathered to protest Abkhazia’s request that Moscow make it a full union republic, separate from Georgia. The protesters demanded Georgia’s full independence from the USSR, which would include the territory of Abkhazia. About 10,000 demonstrators had amassed in downtown Tbilisi by April 9, 1989 (O’Ballance, p. 94; Wheatley, p. 43).

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, p. 4. He notes that most of the dead were women and children.

\textsuperscript{44} Wheatley, p. 41.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, p. 44; Areshidze, p. 19; Zürcher, p. 122.

\textsuperscript{46} Areshidze, p. 19.
Massacre demonstrated the growing three-way conflict between Georgia, the separatist regions South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the Soviet Union (later Russia).

While Gamsakhurdia’s contempt for ethnic minorities, especially the South Ossetians, pushed him out of other opposition groups, it did not impede him from eventually being elected as Georgia’s first post-Soviet president. Gamsakhurdia formed his own group, the Round Table, and after two rounds of elections for the Georgian Supreme Congress in October and November 1990, Gamsakhurdia’s party won the majority. Notably, at this time, Gamsakhurdia declared that the autonomies of South Ossetia and Abkhazia would be preserved. In March 1991, however, Georgia boycotted Gorbachev’s all-Soviet Union referendum, an attempt to preserve the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and held its own referendum on independence, with 98 percent in favor. Gamsakhurdia was subsequently elected as the first President of Georgia with 87 percent of the vote. Despite declaring that South Ossetia and Abkhazia’s autonomy would be preserved, Gamsakhurdia’s subsequent policies as president would prove that this was a false promise.

South Ossetia

In the midst of Georgia’s secessionist movement from the Soviet Union, South Ossetia, officially an autonomous Soviet oblast, was trying to secede from Georgia. Protests

47 Wheatley, p. 47.


50 O’Ballance, p. 98. South Ossetia and Abkhazia did not participate in Georgia’s vote to boycott the Union referendum.

51 Ibid.
calling for greater independence for South Ossetia spread across the region and were often countered by Georgian groups. Notably, in the run up to the October 1990 Georgian parliamentary elections, the Georgian Supreme Soviet passed an election law that banned regional parties from running for election to the Georgian parliament, which was primarily aimed at preventing South Ossetian and Abkhazian candidates from entering the race.\(^{52}\) South Ossetia responded by declaring itself an independent republic and boycotted the October 1990 parliamentary elections.\(^{53}\) Therefore, the South Ossetians did not participate in the elections that brought Gamsakhurdia’s party to power.

In December 1990, South Ossetia reasserted its independence from Georgia to which the Georgian Supreme Assembly responded by stripping South Ossetia of its self-proclaimed autonomous status, notably contradicting Gamsakhurdia’s earlier promise of autonomy. This led to clashes in Tskhinvali, South Ossetia’s capital city, between Ossetian militants and Georgian police. Three Georgians and one Ossetian were killed with others injured.\(^{54}\) A Georgian blockade of South Ossetia also began in December 1990 and lasted until July 1992.\(^{55}\) Thus, the vicious cycle of tension, mistrust, and violence was reignited as Georgia and South Ossetia saw each other as one of the main obstacles to their respective independence movements.

\textit{Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Georgian Nationalism}

\(^{52}\) Zverev, pp. 42, 44. The law was passed in August 1990.

\(^{53}\) Ibid, p. 44.

\(^{54}\) O’Ballance, p. 100.

\(^{55}\) Zverev, p. 44.
Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the first president of post-Soviet Georgia, played prominently in creating the sharp us-them boundary between Georgians and South Ossetians that continues to this day. Notably, however, his role is often overlooked as one of the underlying causes of the 2008 conflict in South Ossetia. As Robert English explains,

“trying to understand the Ossetian, Abkhazian, and other minorities’ alienation from Georgia without reference to the extreme nationalism of Gamsakhurdia is like trying to explain Yugoslavia’s collapse and Kosovo’s secession from Serbia while ignoring the nationalist policies of Slobodan Milosevic. Yet in all the debate over the causes of the Russian-Georgian war, Gamsakhurdia is rarely even mentioned.”

Additionally, as Ghia Nodia explains, “both before and after coming to power, [Gamsakhurdia] appealed to populist nationalism and sowed suspicion of ethnic minorities.” His support of rallies denouncing South Ossetians and Abkhazians as “traitors,” his refusal to allow the participation of regional parties in Georgian elections, as well as his revocation of South Ossetia’s autonomy in 1990, sowed a deep divide, not to mention fear, among the Ossetians, which would eventually lead to violence and war.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Georgia’s independence movement focused more on the resurgence of Georgian nationalism, than on the democratic ideals that various parties, including Gamsakhurdia’s Round Table coalition, supposedly supported. While the primary goal of Georgia’s independence movement was to break away from the USSR, it was accompanied by the romanticized idea of a ‘Georgian national state,” notes English. “The dark side of this vision was a desire to settle scores with minorities, chiefly the Abkhazians and Ossetians, who were seen to have benefited at Georgia’s expense from a

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58 Ibid.
Kremlin policy of ‘divide and rule.’”  

Gamsakhurdia’s rhetoric and policies also reflected this dichotomy: he “claimed to share the liberal values of ethnic tolerance and the equality of all citizens irrespective of nationality” but “at the same time [he] did not hesitate to pronounce vehement threats against minorities who ‘would not behave in a proper manner.’”  

Additionally, Gamsakhurdia’s reforms were more autocratic than democratic. As Nodia explains, “Gamsakhurdia became the chairman of a parliament completely obedient to his personal will. He strengthened his power, partly at the expense of the democratic freedoms that had been introduced during perestroika.” He was intolerant of any opposition to his rule and gradually continued or restored old Soviet-style autocratic policies. While Gamsakhurdia was able to amass great personal power, it did not last for long. English and Nodia agree that while Gamsakhurdia was often considered a dictator by his opponents, he was not a very successful one. He knew how to create mass rallies and recruit supporters, but his own paranoid, radical, and divisive rhetoric eventually turned many of his supporters against him. When violent clashes broke out in Tbilisi in December 1991, following his suppression of opposition demonstrations, Gamsakhurdia was forced to flee Georgia in January 1992.

59 English.

60 Nodia, “Political Turmoil in Georgia,” pp. 77-78.

61 Ibid, p. 79.


63 In January 1992, Gamsakhurdia was ousted following clashes in Tbilisi between government forces and opposition militias. He fled to northern Georgia where he subsequently led a revolt against his replacement, Eduard Shevardnadze. Gamsakhurdia died in 1993 under unclear circumstances amidst fighting with Shevardnadze’s forces.
During the short time of his rule, Gamsakhurdia made a lasting impact on Georgia’s ethnic politics. His radical nationalism isolated Georgians from the South Ossetians, as well as the Abkhazians. As Nodia explains, the Ossetians were not seen by Georgians as fighting for their own rights but with siding with “them” (the Kremlin) against “us” (Georgians). The resurgence of Georgian national identity, which excluded the other ethnic minority groups living within the Georgian republic, often played a bigger role in Gamsakhurdia’s independence movement than creating a strong, unified, and independent state. As Wheatley argues, “the main point here is that there existed a situation within society in which a charismatic, demagogic and even mentally unstable leader was far more likely to become popular than a more moderate, stable and responsible one.” Gamsakhurdia’s “forceful personality” and “messianic vision of Georgia” captured the minds of a Georgian population beginning to see itself as separate from the Soviet Union. Thus, while Gamsakhurdia’s radical ethno-national mobilization afforded him great popularity and power; it also exacerbated the us-them divide between the Georgians and the South Ossetians and consequently led to war.

**Georgian – South Ossetian Civil War, December 1990 – July 1992**

Civil war broke out in Georgia after South Ossetia’s self-proclaimed independence was revoked in December 1990. Each side ethnically cleansed the villages of the other and Georgia imposed an economic blockade on South Ossetia. After several Georgians were

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64 Nodia, “Political Turmoil in Georgia,” p. 84.
65 Wheatley, p. 60.
66 Zürcher, p. 136.
67 Wheatley, p. 53; Zverev, p. 44.
shot and killed in Tskhinvali, the Georgian government declared a state of emergency in South Ossetia. In January 1991, Georgian troops entered Tskhinvali.\textsuperscript{68} By the end of January, Georgian police arrested the chairman of the South Ossetian parliament, Torez Kulumbekov, which led to a year and a half of civil war that killed hundreds and caused thousands living in South Ossetia to flee to Georgia and North Ossetia.\textsuperscript{69}

Journalist Edgar O’Ballance indicates that in 1991 it was reported that up to 500 people had died due to inter-ethnic clashes in South Ossetia.\textsuperscript{70} On January 5, 1992, a group of Georgian militiamen stormed Tskhinvali.\textsuperscript{71} Ossetian militants responded and many Ossetians began to flee to North Ossetia out of fear. Following Gamsakhurdia’s overthrow in January 1992, Kulumbekov was released by the Military Council of Georgia; an opportunity presented by the Georgian side for dialogue with South Ossetian leaders. South Ossetia rejected the offer, refusing to negotiate with the intermediary Georgian regime until troops were removed from the region and the blockade was ended.\textsuperscript{72} South Ossetians instead held a referendum on January 19, 1992, and 90 percent voted in favor of integration into the Russian Federation.\textsuperscript{73} As a result, Georgia began to amass troops near Tskhinvali, but later recalled them before any action was taken. In April 1992, Georgian artillery began daily

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\textsuperscript{68} Wheatley, p. 53.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid, p. 54. Georgians living in South Ossetia fled to Georgia, while South Ossetians fled to North Ossetia, in Russia..

\textsuperscript{70} O’Ballance, p. 117.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{72} Zverev, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
missile attacks on residential quarters of Tskhinvali. Ceasefires issued in the following months broke down amidst continuing violence.

*Moscow’s Role in the First Georgian – South Ossetian Conflict*

In April 1990, the Supreme Soviet passed a law strengthening the rights of autonomous regions throughout the USSR, which basically served to stir up trouble in multi-national Union republics, like Georgia. As Alexei Zverev explains, Moscow did not provide actual protection to the autonomies, but merely pitted them against the nationalistic currents within the republics, thus allowing for the Kremlin’s political and military meddling in the domestic affairs of Union Republics. Following an attack on Tskhinvali by Georgian police and paramilitary in January 1991, Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev intervened and attempted to end the fighting, but his efforts proved to be ineffective.

Gorbachev’s all-Union referendum proved to be another source of contention between all parties. Georgia boycotted the referendum and voted for independence, while South Ossetia voted in favor of the referendum and boycotted Georgia’s independence vote. As a result, violence increased, with both sides accusing the other of committing horrible atrocities. The Kremlin did nothing to quell the fighting.

Violence intensified in April 1992. Attempted ceasefire agreements issued in May and June failed, pressing the Russian region of North Ossetia to get involved. On June 15,

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74 Zverev, p. 46.
75 Ibid, p. 44.
76 Ibid, pp. 44-45.
77 Ibid, p. 45.
78 Ibid, p. 46.
1992, the chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov, warned that Russia might consider annexing South Ossetia. A few days later, Supreme Soviet Vice President, Aleksandr Rutskoi, accused Georgian authorities of genocide against Georgia’s Russian population.\(^7^9\) Eduard Shevardnadze, the intermediary leader of Georgia, retorted by accusing Russia of deliberately trying to stir up trouble in Georgia.\(^8^0\) Thus, Russian involvement added another complicating layer to the conflict in South Ossetia (and later Abkhazia).

**Eduard Shevardnadze Returns**

Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Foreign Minister of the USSR from 1985 to 1991, returned to Georgia following the ousting of Zviad Gamsakhurdia in January 1992.\(^8^1\) He served as Georgia’s intermediary leader until he was formally elected president of Georgia in 1995 and reelected in 2000. In many ways, Shevardnadze was Gamsakhurdia’s opposite. As Charles King explains, Shevardnadze, a trained Soviet bureaucrat, was more concerned with Georgia’s stability than its ‘national reawakening,’ and thus saw his primary task as consolidating Georgia’s statehood.\(^8^2\) “A politician cannot afford to stubbornly persist in his view simply out of pride. Politicians must adapt to circumstance,” Shevardnadze said as he

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\(^7^9\) O’Ballance, p. 119. Interestingly, similar claims were made during the August 2008 conflict. Rutskoi also threatened to attack Georgia but luckily this did not happen (Zverev, p. 47).

\(^8^0\) Ibid, p. 119.

\(^8^1\) Shevardnadze, an ethnic Georgian, served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev before he returned to Georgia in March 1992 and became Chairman of the newly created State Council that received its power from the Georgian Military Council, which had been in charge since Gamsakhurdia was ousted.

\(^8^2\) Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 228. While King assesses that Shevardnadze’s leadership style was “characterized by an effort to balance competing interests and to ensure that no single faction was able to challenge his authority as head of state, head of government, and head of the ruling party,” his political party “in effect became a mechanism for capturing the state rather than transforming it (King, p. 229).” His ruling style borrowed much from the Soviet era, including fusing the ruling party and the administrative system (King, p. 230).
worked to bring an end to the conflict that erupted in Abkhazia in 1992.\textsuperscript{83} Suny describes him as “a conciliator and negotiator.”\textsuperscript{84} Upon his return to Georgia in 1992, Shevardnadze’s negotiating skills were quickly put to the test in South Ossetia, and soon after, in Abkhazia.

\textit{Ceasefire Agreement in South Ossetia}

Shevardnadze arrived in South Ossetia in May 1992 to conduct three-party talks between Georgian, North Ossetian, and South Ossetian leaders. In June, as conditions worsened, he met with Russian President Boris Yeltsin in Ukraine to try to improve the situation. On June 22, 1992, they signed the Sochi Agreement for a ceasefire in South Ossetia, the withdrawal of Russian troops, and the establishment of a monitoring commission that would oversee the ceasefire.\textsuperscript{85} The official status of South Ossetia, however, was left unresolved.\textsuperscript{86} As Gearóid Ó Tuathail assesses,

\begin{quote}
\textquote{\textit{the Sochi agreement was a limited and imperfect instrument for handling the South Ossetian conflict. There were no procedures for investigating the war crimes and pillage that occurred, granting not only impunity for perpetrators but implicit license for future activities beyond the law.}}\textsuperscript{87}
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\textit{84} Suny, p. 328.
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\textit{85} O’Ballance, p. 119; Zverev, p. 47.
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\textit{86} Zverev, p. 47. It was agreed later in July 1992 that a 1,500-strong tri-national peacekeeping force would monitor the region and that the force should be made up of equal parts Russian, Georgian, and South Ossetian troops. The 500 Russian troops were quick to arrive. (O’Ballance, p. 119).
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It is estimated that 1,000 people were killed in South Ossetia during the conflict and another 60,000 people were displaced. While the ceasefire agreement held a fragile peace on the ground, no political progress was made regarding South Ossetia’s status and, as a result, the conflict “froze” until 2004.

In the years following the conflict, the Joint Control Commission (JCC), made up of representatives from Georgia, Russia, North and South Ossetia with the participation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), was tasked to supervise the observance of the ceasefire agreement as well as coordinate dialogue, conflict settlement agreements, economic reconstruction, and the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Additionally, the JCC would coordinate the Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPKF), which was also made up of Russian, Georgian, and Ossetian forces, and tasked with restoring and maintaining peace in the region as well as reestablishing the rule of law in the conflict zone. Leaving the warring parties to essentially police themselves, however, was a mistake that consequently led to more violence.

**Civil War in Abkhazia and the Role of Russia**

Fighting broke in Abkhazia just as it was ending in South Ossetia. In July 1992, Abkhazia declared independence and soon tensions escalated to a violent conflict that lasted until 1994. The Abkhazians were aided by volunteers from the North Caucasus in Russia.

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and Shevardnadze accused Moscow of supplying them with weapons and other support.\textsuperscript{91} Shevardnadze and Yeltsin met several times during the conflict to try to work out ceasefire agreements, but each leader came to the table with different intentions. O’Ballance explains that “Yeltsin wanted to bring Georgia fully into his orbit, while Shevardnadze…wanted a Russian friendship and cooperation treaty, after which he would be willing to enter the CIS on the best terms he could get.”\textsuperscript{92}

To further complicate matters for Shevardnadze, beginning in July 1993, ousted president Gamsakhurdia launched a rebellion against him in Mingrelia, a region of Georgia bordering Abkhazia. Facing dual conflicts in Abkhazia and Mingrelia, in October 1993, Shevardnadze asked Yeltsin for military aid and in return Georgia would join the CIS.\textsuperscript{93} With this additional equipment, Georgian forces managed to quell the revolt in Mingrelia.\textsuperscript{94}

In December 1993, under United Nations sponsorship, a Georgian-Abkhazian Agreement was signed, calling for the continuation of earlier ceasefires. The final status of Abkhazia was to be determined by the UN and the Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Additionally, in February 1994, Yeltsin and Shevardnadze signed a 10-

\textsuperscript{91} O’Ballance, p. 123.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid p. 130. Georgia was growing weaker under an economic blockade imposed by Russia as well as suffering heavy blows from Abkhazian forces, and therefore, Shevardnadze needed Russia’s help.

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was created in December 1991. It is a voluntary association that eventually came to include 12 former Soviet republics: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. The CIS declarations bound all member republics to cooperate “on an equal basis” in foreign, military, and economic policy. Russia, however, has come to dominate the CIS.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid, p.143.

\textsuperscript{94} In late December 1993, Gamsakhurdia dies, thus officially ending the Mingrelian revolt.
year “Georgian-Russian Friendship Treaty” as well as economic and trade agreements. It was also agreed that three Russian military bases would be established in Georgia, ostensibly for CIS security purposes. Many Georgians were not happy with these arrangements, for they once again allowed significant Russian influence into Georgia.

Peacekeeping

Russia continued to play a central role in Georgia, however, as part of the peacekeeping efforts following the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Contrary to Shevardnadze’s wishes, the United Nations did not send peacekeepers to Abkhazia but instead authorized the deployment of 1,500 Russian peacekeepers. This situation, argue Carolyn Ekedahl and Melvin Goodman, further reinforced Russia’s “sphere of influence” in Georgia. Despite accusations that Russian peacekeeping efforts were more to serve Russia’s own interests rather than mediate the conflicts in Georgia, and additionally in light of a request from Yeltsin to share the peacekeeping responsibility, the U.S. did not respond. As Svante Cornell explains, even as Moscow began to appoint Russian officials to both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, “these blatant interventions within Georgian territory were at most obliquely criticized by Western leaders, who did nothing to seek a transformation of the negotiation mechanisms, let alone of the peacekeeping forces.”

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95 O’Ballance, p.146.
96 Ibid, p. 146.
97 Ekedahl and Goodman, p. 272. Yeltsin wanted the international community to recognize Moscow’s ‘special role’ as peacekeeper in the former Soviet republics; insisting that Russian peacekeepers were “performing a service to the world.”
Thus, the peacekeeping situation put Shevardnadze in an undesirable and disadvantaged situation of having to depend on Russian forces to mediate the conflict zones, on top of having also requested Russian assistance to end the violence. The UN had no interest in sending its own peacekeepers to the region. Therefore, since Shevardnadze did not have the military force to patrol and secure the regions on his own and without U.S. support, as a member of the UN Security Council, to call for UN peacekeepers, the job was left to the Russians. Thousands of Russian troops streamed into Georgia, stationed along borders, ports, and at four military bases. Not only did Russian domination of peacekeeping efforts reinforce tensions between the Georgians and the South Ossetians (and the Abkhazians) but it also created a situation of two (Russia and South Ossetia/Abkhazia) against one (Georgia).

Lost Opportunity for Peaceful Reintegration

While a shaky peace managed to hold in South Ossetia, there were some signs of improved relations between the Georgian and South Ossetian sides. As Ekedahl and Goodman note, Shevardnadze had never been a Georgian nationalist and was even willing to grant autonomy to South Ossetia (unlike his predecessor). The election of Lyudvig Chibirov, a relative moderate open to negotiations with Georgia, as de facto president of South Ossetia in 1996 opened the possibility of improved relations. Wheatley argues,

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100 Ekedahl and Goodman, p. 274. The UN sent “observers” to the region, but not peacekeepers.

101 Ibid, p. 288. The four Russian military bases were located in Abkhazia (Gudauta), Adjara (Batumi), near Armenia (Akhalkalaki), and just outside Tbilisi (Vaziane). Eventually, Russians were forced to withdraw from these bases, but after the 2008 conflict in South Ossetia, it has been reported that they might be returning to the Gudauta base in Abkhazia.

102 Ibid, p. 264.
however, that Georgians and South Ossetians “failed to take advantage of the window of opportunity provided by the somewhat warmer relations between their communities” during Chibirov’s rule.\textsuperscript{103} The International Crisis Group (ICG) explains that the two leaders met several times in the mid to late 1990s and that by 2000 “it seemed that Chibirov and Shevardnadze might ultimately agree on re-integration.” \textsuperscript{104}

While economic relations improved during this time, a political settlement on the status of South Ossetia stalled and eventually stalemated after Chibirov was defeated in the November 2001 South Ossetian presidential elections by Eduard Kokoity, a Moscow-supported former wrestling champion.\textsuperscript{105} Kokoity, a firm supporter of South Ossetia’s right to self-determination, took a tougher line toward Tbilisi than his predecessor. \textit{Kommersant} reported that Kokoity would not resume negotiations with Georgia unless Shevardnadze apologized to the South Ossetians for the “genocide” that was committed during the 1989-1992 conflicts.\textsuperscript{106} Additionally, he called for South Ossetia’s integration into the Russian Federation, most likely for economic reasons and protection as well as other aid not being given by Georgia.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{103} Wheatley, p. 122.

\textsuperscript{104} ICG, “Avoiding War in South Ossetia,” p. 8.

\textsuperscript{105} Wheatley, p. 122. Kokoity holds both Russian and South Ossetian citizenship.


\textsuperscript{107} ICG reports that Ossetians claim that since the end of the conflict in 1992, they have received direct financial assistance from Russia but not from Georgia. Russia has also rebuilt infrastructure as well as provided humanitarian aid to South Ossetians (ICG, “Avoiding War in South Ossetia,” p. 8). Wheatley also describes the booming illegal trade network between Russia and South Ossetia that may have come under threat if Chibirov came closer to a resettlement agreement with Georgian authorities (p. 122). Additionally, authorities in North and South Ossetia argue that the region was artificially split under Soviet rule between the Russian SSR and Georgian SSR and this division has become exacerbated after the Soviet Union’s collapse. South Ossetia should thus be reintegrated with its northern neighbor.
with Russia…we would prefer an arrangement in which South Ossetia has associate membership with Russia and equal, treaty-based relations with Georgia,” Kokoity said after his election in December 2001.\textsuperscript{108} While talks between Chibirov and Shevardnadze may have signaled an improved relationship in rhetoric, the lack of action on the Georgian side to provide aid and other assistance to the South Ossetians ultimately gave Kokoity the support he needed for a campaign promoting closer ties with Russia as well as his refusal to negotiate with Georgia unless South Ossetia was considered an independent state.\textsuperscript{109}

\textit{Russian Passports}

Following the end of the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Moscow notably began to offer Russian passports to South Ossetians (and Abkhazians), which further complicated the situation and undermined Georgian authority.\textsuperscript{110} Russian efforts intensified in 2002 after Russia passed a new citizenship law.\textsuperscript{111} Kommersant reported that the law stated:

“citizens of the former USSR who live in so-called unrecognized states (including Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and who refuse to recognize the authority of the mother country (and are therefore stateless) may exchange their Soviet passports for Russian ones.”\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{108} Sysoyev, p. 92.


\textsuperscript{110} Email exchange with Alexander Rondeli, President of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies in Tbilisi, Georgia, January 24, 2009.

\textsuperscript{111} Email exchange with Stephen F. Jones, Professor of Russian and Eurasian Studies at Mount Holyoke College, January 25, 2009.

\textsuperscript{112} Georgy Dvali, “Georgia Condemns Russian Citizenship Law,” Kommersant, June 14, 2002, p. 11; in Countdown to War in Georgia, p. 100.
In June 2002, Shevardnadze angrily accused Russia of “covert annexation of Georgian territory.”

“This is not a friendly step from the Russian side. Each country has a right to consider its own migration policy but this policy must not jeopardize other countries’ sovereignty,” Shevardnadze said. Notably, by July 2002, Civil Georgia reported that authorities in Abkhazia stated that up to 60 percent of its population were Russian citizens.

While these passports ostensibly gave South Ossetians citizenship and the ability to travel, they also gave Russia a reason to intervene in any future fighting between South Ossetia and Georgia in order to protect “its citizens.” Consequently, this rationale was used by Russia when it decided to invade Georgia in August 2008, following Georgia’s attack on South Ossetia.

**Leading up to the 2003 Rose Revolution**

Following Shevardnadze’s re-election in April 2000, Georgia’s relationship with Russia began to sour as it took a tougher stance with Moscow and received more attention from the West. In late 2000, Georgia was angered by new Russian visa requirements for Georgians that were not applied to Abkhazians and South Ossetians. In 2001, as the

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113 Dvali, p. 100.


117 Georgy Dvali, “Georgia Repays Russia—for Requiring Visas,” Komsomant, November 16, 2000, p. 2 and Valeria Sychova, “Exceptions to the Rule—Residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia Can Travel to Russia Without Visas,” Sevodnya, December 6, 2000, p. 4 in Countdown to War in Georgia, pp. 83-85. Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister, Merab Antadze, said that Russia’s simplified visa procedures for Abkhazians and South Ossetians were a “flagrant violation of its sovereign rights” and that criminal elements could still get into Russia through these two regions, to which Russian Foreign Ministry Officials responded by saying there were
situation in Abkhazia worsened, Georgia notably received more Western attention. At a UN Security Council meeting addressing the situation in Abkhazia, U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, assured Georgia that it could count on the friendship and support of the U.S. in the face of Russian pressure. Relations between Russia and Georgia continued to worsen in 2002, however, when Russia claimed that Georgia was harboring Chechen terrorists in the Pankisi Gorge region of Georgia. Russia tried to use these accusations as justification for preemptive strikes on Georgian territory—a violation of Georgia’s sovereignty. Not long after making these claims, however, Russia saw the arrival of U.S. Special Forces in Georgia to help train the Georgian military to fight terrorism under Georgian Train and Equip (GTEP) Program. Russia interpreted this as a threat to its sphere of influence. Additionally, the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Pipeline, which began the following year, dealt another blow to Russia’s prominence in the region. But it was not until later in 2003 that Russia would meet its biggest challenge: revolution in Georgia and the election of a fiery, pro-Western leader.

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118 Georgy Dvali and Boris Volkhonsky, “Secretary of State Powell Will Liberate Georgia From Russia,” Kommersant, March 22, 2001, p. 11 in Countdown to War in Georgia, p. 87.


121 The BTC Pipeline was strategically designed to bypass both Russia and Iran, thus providing the West with a more secure and reliable route to bring oil from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. See Appendix III.
Conclusion

Thus, the seeds of the 2008 conflict were sown over two decades ago and even earlier under Russian imperial and Soviet rule. As the Soviet Union collapsed in the late 1980s, it was clear that strong nationalist fervor in Georgia could not be easily suppressed. While this revitalized nationalism worked in Georgia’s favor in terms of gaining independence from the Soviet Union, its increasingly radical nature isolated Georgia from the minority populations in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, causing them to reach out to Moscow. Shevardnadze also turned to Moscow for help in order to end the conflicts in these regions as well as negotiate ceasefires and peacekeeping arrangements. Thus, Russian influence returned to Georgia, ironically, not long after the country tried to rid itself of Russian/Soviet domination.

Poor relations between Russia, Georgia, and the separatist regions were further exacerbated by Russia’s issuance of Russian passports to the residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as well as growing tensions between Russia and Georgia over the latter’s closer relationship with the West. While a relative peace held for over a decade in South Ossetia following the signing of the Sochi Agreement, the 2003 Rose Revolution and subsequent election of Mikhail Saakashvili, however, renewed tensions and violence in the region and ultimately led the August 2008 conflict.
CHAPTER 3
THE ROSE REVOLUTION TO THE AUGUST 2008 CONFLICT IN SOUTH OSSETIA

“The most frequent complaint I have heard from Russians is that Georgian leaders are prone to blame them for their own disastrous policies, so they are bad-mouthing Russia just to re-channel their people’s wrath... Georgians argue that the Russians are stuck in 19th century-style geopolitical thinking. Russia’s outlook is all about the wounded self-esteem of a fallen empire: a failure to control Georgia causes it to experience phantom pains, as if missing a limb.”122 Ghia Nodia, Tbilisi

Introduction

While relations between Georgian and South Ossetian leaders seemed to improve in the late 1990s and early 2000s, under Georgian President, Eduard Shevardnadze, and South Ossetian leader, Lyudvig Chibirov, progress stalemated, however, when two nationalistic and fiery leaders were elected as their replacements. The South Ossetians elected Eduard Kokoity in 2001 and the Georgians elected Mikhail Saakashvili after the dramatic 2003 Rose Revolution forced Shevardnadze to resign. By this point, Russia’s new president, Vladimir Putin, elected in 2000 after Yeltsin resigned, had just enough time to move out of the shadows and on to center stage to meet his new Georgian foe. The resulting triangle of three charismatic and nationalist leaders proved to be a volatile combination, which ultimately exploded in South Ossetia in August 2008.

Saakashvili’s election in 2004 dramatically shifted the power dynamic that had existed between Shevardnadze and Yeltsin. Shevardnadze was in a disadvantaged position

122 Ghia Nodia, “Have Russian-Georgian Relations Hit Bottom or Will They Continue to Deteriorate?” Russian Analytical Digest, 13 (2007), p. 15.
where he had to rely on Russian assistance to end Georgia’s civil wars in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Additionally, he needed Russian help to establish a peacekeeping force to monitor the conflict zones, as discussed in the previous chapter. Yeltsin’s successor, Vladimir Putin, has thus tried to preserve Russian influence in Georgia, while Shevardnadze’s successor, Mikhail Saakashvili has tried to reassert Georgian independence and strength against Russian authority by orienting Georgia more closely with the West. Both leaders frequently blamed each other for various problems and often exacted a penalty, in the form of harsh rhetoric or punitive actions, in an attempt to hurt the other’s prestige. Additionally, Saakashvili’s escalation of the conflict from a domestic issue to an international battle against Russia, as well as Putin’s willingness to play along, increased the stakes not only for the warring parties but also for the international community’s response. This brinkmanship helped set the stage for conflict in South Ossetia in August 2008.

**Georgian – South Ossetian – Russian Relations from 2003 to 2008**

*The 2003 Rose Revolution and the Election of Mikhail Saakashvili*

As with Georgia’s previous president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, initial promises of democracy waned under Shevardnadze’s rule and so did his popularity. After claims of election-rigging following the parliamentary elections held in November 2003, Mikhail Saakashvili, the young, western-educated leader of the opposition group the “National Movement,” led protestors into the Georgian parliament and forced Shevardnadze to resign. The peaceful Rose Revolution led to Saakashvili’s election as Georgia’s third post-Soviet
president in January 2004.\textsuperscript{123} While Georgians applauded Saakashvili’s victory, Russian leaders knew they had a new threat on their borders.

\textit{First Adjara, Next South Ossetia?}

One of Saakashvili’s primary goals as president was the restoration of the territorial integrity of Georgia.\textsuperscript{124} This was to be done quickly, but without the use of military force. Saakashvili envisioned bringing Adjara, followed by South Ossetia and Abkhazia, under Georgian control by the end of his first term as president.\textsuperscript{125} While his campaign in Adjara proved successful; in South Ossetia, it backfired. As ICG argues, Saakashvili failed to understand the politics and culture of the region as well as the tensions and grievances that still existed from the previous conflict and thus further exacerbated the divide between the Georgians and South Ossetians by trying to bring South Ossetia under Georgian control on his own terms rather than through dialogue or genuine assistance to the region.\textsuperscript{126}

\textit{Saakashvili’s Attempt to Bring South Ossetia under Georgian Control: Renewed Fighting}

Following Saakashvili’s successful ousting of Adjaran President Aslan Abashidze, and the reincorporation of Adjara to Georgian central control, he then set his sights on South

\textsuperscript{121} It became known as the “Rose” Revolution because the protests were peaceful, with demonstrators handing out roses to the soldiers deployed by Shevardnadze. Additionally, when Saakashvili and his supporters stormed the parliament building, he raised a rose and shouted for Shevardnadze to resign. For more information, see: “How the Rose Revolution Happened,” \textit{BBC}, May 10, 2005, \url{http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr//2/hi/europe/4532539.stm}, (accessed on April 1, 2008).

\textsuperscript{123} ICG, “Avoiding War in South Ossetia,” p. 1.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid. See Appendix IV for map of these regions.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid, pp. i, 12-13.
Ossetia.\textsuperscript{127} His original plan was to incite the South Ossetian population against the regional government; the same idea that worked in Adjara.\textsuperscript{128} As ICG explains, in May 2004, Georgian decision-makers “believed their Adjaran success could easily be repeated. They considered that South Ossetia’s de facto president, Eduard Kokoity, had little democratic legitimacy or popular support and that, as in Adjara, the people would rapidly switch loyalty from Tskhinvali to Tbilisi.”\textsuperscript{129} Saakashvili offered various incentives to the South Ossetian population in an effort to bring them to his side.\textsuperscript{130} At the same time, however, he also stationed a large number of Georgian troops in four villages near the South Ossetian-Georgian border under the guise of cracking down illegal trading.\textsuperscript{131}

As Wheatley argues, the Georgian government under Saakashvili was wrong to think that it could incite a popular uprising in South Ossetia as it had done in Adjara, because unlike the Adjarans, the South Ossetians did not desire to be a part of Georgia and were

\textsuperscript{127} Saakashvili managed to oust Adjara’s authoritarian and rebellious leader, Aslan Abashidze, and return control of this southeastern region of Georgia to Tbilisi. Angered by Abashidze’s defiance of his rule, Saakashvili ordered military exercises to be carried out in April 2004 near the port city of Poti close to the Adjaran region. Fearing an attack, Abashidze ordered the bridges connecting Adjara to the rest of Georgia to be blown up and partially destroyed a rail line leading out of the area (Wheatley, p. 196). His plan backfired when popular protests mounted and Abashidze was forced to flee to Russia. Tbilisi was quick to consolidate its gains in Adjara and soon the self-declared “autonomous republic” was effectively under the control of the Georgian government (Wheatley, 196-197).

\textsuperscript{128} Wheatley, p. 197.

\textsuperscript{129} ICG, “Avoiding War in South Ossetia,” p. i.

\textsuperscript{130} Wheatley, p. 197. Saakashvili arranged for fertilizers to be delivered to South Ossetian villages and pledged to rehabilitate the railroad to Tskhinvali as well as promised to pay pensions to residents, start and ambulance service in Tskhinvali, and begin television broadcasts in Ossetian language.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, p. 197. A popular market near Tskhinvali selling Russian goods was closed by Saakashvili, which was a heavy blow to the local economy, and incited strong resentment amongst the local Ossetian population (ICG, “Avoiding War in South Ossetia,” p. i).
therefore less likely to be tempted by Saakashvili’s disingenuous offers.\footnote{Wheatley, p. 197.} Saakashvili’s plan soon began to backfire as ICG describes,

“Ossetian de facto authorities successfully portrayed Georgian moves as aggressive first steps towards a remilitarization of the conflict that had enjoyed a ceasefire since 1992. Kokoity’s popular support rose as he described himself as the only leader capable of guaranteeing Ossetians’ security, as well as their political, economic and cultural interests. Assistance sent by Tbilisi was portrayed as a cheap attempt to buy support.”\footnote{ICG, “Avoiding War in South Ossetia,” p. i.}

Additionally, as Tuathail explains, Kokoity “was able to portray…Georgian actions as an attack on Ossetians and not on criminality, as Saakashvili claimed.\footnote{Tuathial, p. 680.}

In July 2004, the volatile region began to heat up again as supplies of arms and mercenaries began to arrive in South Ossetia from Russia. Georgia accused Russia of supplying weapons to the South Ossetians. Russia countered by stating that the supplies were authorized as part of a Joint Controls Commission (JCC) Agreement.\footnote{ICG, “Avoiding War in South Ossetia,” p. 14.} When Georgian peacekeepers stopped a convoy of Russian peacekeeper trucks on their way to Tskhinvali from Russia and seized their arms and ammunition, however, the Ossetians retaliated by detaining 50 Georgian peacekeepers and opening fire on Georgian checkpoints. The Georgians responded by moving their troops further in to South Ossetia. A low level conflict began, reaching its peak in August 2004. Having received intelligence that Russian troops were conducting exercises in North Ossetia, Georgia withdrew its troops, which were not part of the peacekeeping force, from the region.\footnote{Wheatley, p. 198.}
**A New Ceasefire Agreement**

Luckily, the JCC managed to facilitate a ceasefire agreement on August 19, 2004 before the violence led to another war.\(^{137}\) The following November, Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania and South Ossetian leader Eduard Kokoity met in Sochi and signed an agreement on the demilitarization of the zone of conflict. ICG assesses that “the greatest lesson from the May-August period is that attempts to resolve the conflict swiftly will lead to war.”\(^{138}\) ICG also warned that unless the grievances that developed during the early 1990s war were addressed, “efforts to re-integrate South Ossetia into Georgia are almost certain to lead again to violence.” The close call in August 2004 was yet another hopeless warning of the potential for another war. Unfortunately, the Georgians, South Ossetians, and Russians did not heed this warning in August 2008, almost exactly four years after war in South Ossetia was avoided.

**From Internal to International Conflict in South Ossetia, Summer 2004**

The conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia was generally considered by Georgian officials to be an internal affair. But in mid-summer 2004, this stance changed when Saakashvili’s administration elevated the conflict to an international dispute between Georgia and Russia, presumably in hopes of gaining Western support for Georgia.\(^{139}\) At a rally in July 2004, Saakashvili explained that the “crisis in South Ossetia is not a problem


\(^{138}\) Ibid, p. ii.

\(^{139}\) Ibid, p. 16.
between Georgians and Ossetians. This is a problem between Georgia and Russia.” 140 The Georgian government accused Russia of providing military support to South Ossetia (both equipment and personnel), inconsistent border closures (the South Ossetian-Russian border remains open while other Georgian-Russian borders are closed), and installing senior officials in the South Ossetian government that have close ties to Moscow, among other allegations. 141 Russia countered Georgia’s allegations, claiming that it was protecting its citizens in South Ossetia, and providing financial assistance to and developing economic ties with the region. 142 Additionally, to further complicate matters that year, South Ossetia’s de facto president, Eduard Kokoity, repeatedly called for South Ossetia’s integration into the Russian Federation. 143

While Russian leaders have long played a complicating role in the tense relationship between Georgia and South Ossetia, Saakashvili’s escalation of the conflict from a domestic to international issue, paved the way for an eventual showdown between the two countries. As the 2004 escalation in violence in South Ossetia highlights, both countries blamed each other for the problems in the region, instead of trying to work together to resolve the situation (as they were supposed to do as part of the peacekeeping agreement signed after the previous conflict in the early 1990s). After Saakashvili came to power, there was a constant battle between Saakashvili and Putin to see which side could provoke the other into performing a


141 ICG, “Avoiding War in South Ossetia,” pp. 16-17.

142 Ibid, p. 17-18. Russia could make this claim due to the Russian passports it gave to many South Ossetian residents.

143 Ibid, p. 8.
rash and reckless move on the international stage. In an attempt to justify their own actions against the other, both sides unleashed a stream of belligerent rhetoric as well as refused to admit to any wrongdoing. The 2004 crisis in South Ossetia was just the beginning of the problems that would result from Saakashvili’s and Putin’s unaccommodating and uncompromising stance on resolving the conflict in South Ossetia.

Failed Peace Plans

The ceasefire of August 2004 held a fragile peace for four more years. While there was no large-scale outbreak of violence, the region was still quite volatile, with frequent exchanges of fire and occasional deaths.\(^\text{144}\) Since 2004, both the Georgian and \textit{de facto} South Ossetian governments have come up with proposals for resolving the conflict, but on their own terms. Georgia insisted that South Ossetia must first accept that it is part of Georgia and then it would be possible to discuss other issues. Conversely, South Ossetia rejected discussions of its status within Georgia and put forward its own proposals for development and rehabilitation.\(^\text{145}\) Both Saakashvili and Kokoity presented their own three-step peace plans in 2005, which while having some common features, failed to get off the ground due to differing perceived timelines, mutual distrust, and lack of genuine political will, according to ICG.\(^\text{146}\) Thus, peace negotiations, while active, were fruitless.

Dueling Governments


\(^{145}\) Ibid, p. 11.

\(^{146}\) Ibid, p. 12.
Interestingly, since 2006, the Georgian government has supported an alternate de facto administration in South Ossetia led by Dmitri Sanakoev, a former official in South Ossetia’s government before Kokoity’s election as president. In November 2006, there were notably two separate presidential elections held in South Ossetia. In Tskhinvali, Kokoity was reelected and in the Georgian-administered village of Eredvi, Sanakoev was elected. Kokoity’s government supported independence from Georgia, whereas Sanakoev’s promoted closer ties to Tbilisi. Both Kokoity and Sanakoev won by overwhelming majorities in their own regions, each of which also held a referendum on the status of South Ossetia, where voters in Kokoity’s region voted, not surprisingly, for independence and voters in Sanakoev’s region voted in favor of working on a federal arrangement with Georgia.

Here we see yet another dividing factor impeding Georgians and South Ossetians from ever reaching a comprehensive peace settlement. Instead of trying to work with the South Ossetian government, Tbilisi set up its own, effectively, shadow government and rival leader, a situation that continues to reinforce the divide between the Georgian and South Ossetian governments.

*The Pre-War Showdown: Georgia Versus Russia 2005-2008*

Following Saakashvili’s failed attempt to bring South Ossetia under Georgian control, more Russian officials were appointed to leading positions in the *de facto* governments of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia in early 2005, further reinforcing the ties between these

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149 For more information and specific voter figures, see ICG, “Make Haste Slowly,” pp. 2-3.
two regions and Moscow while undermining Georgian authority. A series of highly contentious events would further plague Georgian-Russian relations over the next several years before finally exploding into conflict in August 2008.

**Mysterious Pipeline Explosions**

In January 2006, the mysterious explosions of two pipelines carrying natural gas from Russia to Georgia brought the two countries to a heated exchange of words. Georgian officials described the explosions as an “act of [Russian] vandalism.” Saakashvili claimed that “Russia tried to force Georgia’s handover of its main gas pipeline and its other gas infrastructure,” and refused to engage in Russia’s “blackmailing.” The Russian foreign ministry responded by terming Georgia’s sabotage charges as “hysteria.” The Foreign Ministry accused Georgia of trying to gain the support of “anti-Russian policy in the West” through a “mix of dependency, double standards and depraved behavior…” While the circumstances behind the explosions were not clear, each side quickly declared the other to be at fault while absolving itself of any responsibility.

**Import Embargo on Georgian Wine and Mineral Water and the Espionage Row**

Tensions between the two countries escalated dramatically in spring 2006 when Russia declared an import embargo on Georgian wine and its popular Borjormi mineral water

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152 Ibid.
(Georgia’s two leading export products) citing health concerns.\(^{153}\) Officials in Tbilisi were furious, and said that the ban was politically motivated.\(^{154}\) Vasili Rukhadze agreed that “few believed that the issue was food safety. Most analysts say Moscow was simply punishing Georgia for its pro-Western and reformist stand and its rapidly developing economy.”\(^{155}\)

To further add to the brewing mix of hostilities between the two countries that year, Georgia arrested a handful of Russian military officers working in Georgia, accusing them of espionage. “We had information that a serious provocation was planned by this group so we have decided to promptly capture these persons in order to avoid provocations,” Georgian Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili explained.\(^{156}\) Moscow responded by calling for the issue to be taken to the UN Security Council, recalled its ambassador from Georgia, announced that the Russian embassy in Tbilisi would not issue visas to Georgian citizens, blocked ground transportation between the countries, and finally, began deporting Georgians from Russia. Sergei Ivanov, Russia’s defense minister, interestingly, called Georgia’s actions “completely wild and hysterical” and compared the arrests to Stalin’s repressions.\(^{157}\) Ivanov continued by explaining that “all of this is aimed at provoking the situation and raising the degree of escalation to the maximum level in order to deflect attention from the problems


that exist in Georgia.”¹⁵⁸ Both sides, however, were in fact guilty of “provoking” and “escalating the degree” of the situation for their own gain and the other’s loss.

**Missile Landing**

In August 2007, tensions flared again when an undetonated missile landed on Georgian territory. Saakashvili claimed the missile came from a Russian fighter plane that had violated Georgian airspace.¹⁵⁹ “All this provocation is aimed at stirring up panic to weaken the stability of Georgia and to change the country’s policies,” Saakashvili said.¹⁶⁰ Moscow denied these accusations and its military officials said that Russia did not violate Georgia’s borders. South Ossetia’s leader, Eduard Kokoity, chimed in in defense of Russia, claiming that Georgian planes fired the missile to discredit Russia. “This is a well-planned provocation,” he said.¹⁶¹

**Protests against Saakashvili**

While Georgia began to see many improvements under Saakashvili, there was one glaring problem: the lack of institution building and the poor development checks and balances left a disproportional amount of power in the hands of the president.¹⁶² Within the first one hundred days of his presidency, Saakashvili managed to alter the constitution to give

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¹⁵⁸ Mainville.


¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. Article notes that the missile landed near a village not far from South Ossetia.

more power to the executive. As one observer reported, the “new constitution reinforces Saakashvili’s hold still further: the president may dismiss parliament for any action deemed unconstitutional or after three successive failures to pass the state budget.” G. Areshidze and Lanskoy argue that Saakashvili effectively created “a ‘superpresidential’ system,” where the president could dissolve parliament but the parliament was not “compensated with any new means of exerting itself against expanded presidential authority.”

Growing complaints about Saakashvili’s regime culminated in November 2007 when 50,000 Georgians, disgruntled by poverty, rising prices, and a sense of injustice, took to the streets in protest. Much to the dismay of the West, Saakashvili ordered the protests of November 7, 2007 to be violently suppressed by riot police armed with truncheons, water cannons, and tear-gas. Saakashvili made no apologies and stated that the use of harsh force was necessary to prevent a violent coup. A snap presidential election was called, catching the opposition off guard and at a clear disadvantage. In the hasty election held on January 5, 2008, Saakashvili barely won a majority, gaining just 52 percent of the vote.

Instead of acknowledging the people’s discontent with his rule, Saakashvili accused Russia of promoting the mass protests against him in order to create instability in Georgia.

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166 Ibid.

He explained on Georgian television that this would create an advantageous situation for Russia. “Consider the fact that this situation is taking place on the eve of elections in Russia, and the goal — to foment disorder in the country — is as clear as day,” he said.\textsuperscript{168} The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov, however, dismissed the charges as absurd, stating, that “the farce that accompanied the Georgian leadership’s actions is obvious to all.”\textsuperscript{169}

\textit{Kosovo Declares Independence}

Another factor that incited tension over the status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was Kosovo’s declaration of independence in February 2008. President Putin warned that if Western states recognized Kosovo’s independence, it would set a precedent for other regions desiring independence, especially South Ossetia and Abkhazia.\textsuperscript{170} South Ossetia’s de-facto government, led by Eduard Kokoity, issued a declaration asserting that “the Kosovo precedent presents a convincing argument” for the recognition of South Ossetia’s independence.\textsuperscript{171} The Georgian government dismissed South Ossetia’s declaration stating that “the so-called South Ossetian parliament is not a legitimate body, and its declarations cannot have any consequences.”\textsuperscript{172}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{170}] Cornell, Nilsson, and Popjanevski, p. 7.
\item[\textsuperscript{171}] “Georgia: South Ossetian Call For Recognition Cites ‘Kosovo Precedent,’” \textit{RFE/RL}, March 5, 2008, \url{http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1079593.html}, accessed November 26, 2008.
\item[\textsuperscript{172}] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Perhaps the central source of antagonism between Russia and Georgia is the latter’s bid to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the strong support it received from the United States and some European countries. However, at the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, despite heavy backing from the U.S., Georgia and Ukraine were denied a Membership Action Plan (MAP). Russia strongly opposed NATO membership for the two countries stating that the organization’s promise of eventual membership was “a huge strategic mistake.” Germany and France also opposed offering a MAP to Georgia and Ukraine, citing concerns over Russia and Georgia’s unresolved territorial disputes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Georgia expressed concern that NATO’s denial of a MAP would be seen as a victory for Russia.

Therefore, as time passed, relations between Georgia and Russia continued to worsen as Putin and Saakashvili tried increase their influence, prestige, and power over each other. By blaming the other side for a particular problem, these leaders could absolve themselves of any responsibility for the negativity of an outcome; while at the same time justify their stance with belligerent rhetoric or aggressive actions. Thus, Putin and Saakashvili’s relationship proves that Tilly is correct when he says that “assigning blame can easily become a persistent, destructive habit,” because as accusations of these leaders continued and intensified, so did the potential for conflict.

The August 2008 Conflict in South Ossetia

As the summer of 2008 approached, so did the renewed potential for conflict. Tensions reached a breaking point in early August 2008 after skirmishes along the South Ossetian-Georgian border provoked Saakashvili to launch an attack on South Ossetia’s capital, Tskhinvali. Contrary to its role in previous conflicts in the region, Russia launched a massive counter-offensive against Georgia in order to “protect its citizens” in South Ossetia. After five days of fighting, the European Union, under the leadership of French President Nicolas Sarkozy, managed to broker a ceasefire and peace agreement. Confusion over who started the conflict as well as questions about when the conflict officially began stirred intense debates among the Western media outlets, scholars, heads of state, and the public, which will be examined in the following chapters.

Conclusion

While relative peace held for over a decade in South Ossetia following the end of the civil war in 1992, the election of Mikhail Saakashvili brought renewed tensions and violence to the region. Saakashvili’s elevation of the conflict from an internal one to an international one, blaming Russia in addition to the South Ossetians, made the region increasingly volatile. Saakashvili and former Russian President Putin provided excellent target practice for each other. Both sought to blame each other for problems that arose while at the same time seek credit from the international community; justifying that they were right and the other side was wrong. With limited intervention by the international community, the three warring parties, Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia were left to police themselves, making it virtually impossible to hold any side accountable for instigating violence, let alone trying to conduct thoughtful peace discussions. As a result, past conflicts remained unresolved and grievances
were not effectively addressed. Thus, the potential for conflict still existed, as proven quite clearly by the August 2008 conflict in South Ossetia.
CHAPTER 4
WHO STARTED IT?

“It took three months for the media to realize that Georgia launched the first attack against both the peaceful citizens of Tskhinvali and Russian peacekeepers, thereby compelling Russia to send its forces into Georgian territory,” therefore, “if most of the Western media misled the public for so long over the simple question of who attacked whom in the Georgian conflict, then what guarantee do we have that the rest of the information they are reporting is reliable?”

Alexei Pankin

Introduction

The August 2008 conflict between Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia was a violent manifestation of many deeply rooted antagonisms and unreconciled grievances. Russia and Georgia fought not only to protect their citizens in South Ossetia, but they were also fighting over territory, history, influence, culture, Soviet legacy, military might, popular support, and so on. While Russian, Georgian, and South Ossetian forces clashed for five days in August, a fierce battle also took place in the media and amongst regional scholars trying to answer the deceivingly complicated question, “who started it?” While it is clear how the Georgian, Russian, and Ossetian governments would respond, the international community and area scholars began their own war of words to try to prove who was really to blame.

In this chapter, I will argue that much of the media as well as Western scholars poured far too much time and effort into answering an unanswerable question: “who started the 2008 conflict in South Ossetia?” This question is overly simplistic and too broad to be

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answered definitively without any further specifications or limitations on the question. Given the confusion behind the events that took place on the ground, combined with the intricate and complex history of the region, there is enough “evidence” to make a first-rate argument that Russia “started it” or that Georgia “started it,” depending upon which events are included as well as how far back in time the answer goes. Therefore, this question is more a provocation to take sides in support of Russia or Georgia, rather than an attempt to understand this complicated conflict. In other words, the important question is not “who started it?” but “who is to blame?”

Additionally, the other problem with the “who started it” question is that it was posed with only two possible answers: Russia or Georgia? Not only is this far too simplistic, but it also ignores the role that other parties, such as the South Ossetians and the international community, played in provoking the outbreak of violence in August 2008. For example, the South Ossetians are just as guilty for attacking Georgian villages in South Ossetia as the Georgians are for attacking Ossetian villages, but interestingly, the role of South Ossetian forces and militias was often overlooked.\(^\text{175}\) Additionally, the international community’s failure to mediate the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia effectively, as discussed in Chapter 2, could also be considered one of many causes of this most recent conflict.\(^\text{176}\)


\(^{176}\) The United Nations notably decided to send “observers” and not peacekeepers to Georgia following the conflicts during the early 1990s in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Peacekeeping was left to Russian forces, which often worsened matters instead of improving them (Ekedahl and Goodman, pp. 272-275).
Therefore, more attention needs to be paid to understanding the conflict and its history, as well as the role of key actors, instead of focusing so much attention on figuring out “who started it?” because even if we could answer that question, does it really help resolve the situation?

**Outcome, Agency, Competence, and Responsibility**

Assigning credit and blame happens so often in everyday life that we might not think about its deeper implications for both the giver and the recipient. As Tilly explains, the assignment of credit and blame involves making judgments of outcome, agency, competence, and responsibility. In the case of blame, those judging a particular situation

“identify bad things that happened, look for their agents, decide whether the agents had the competence to produce the bad outcomes, and ask further whether the agents bear the responsibility for those outcomes because they acted with knowledge of the likely consequences.”

Therefore, blaming implies that the recipient (the blamed) is the agent who caused a particular negative outcome. Blaming also implies that the agent is responsible for the outcome, which means that that he or she performed a particular act deliberately and was aware of the possible consequences. It is difficult to blame someone, for example, if they did something accidentally or unintentionally.

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177 Tilly, p. 11.

Competence and responsibility also play an important role in the amount or degree of blame received by the agent. As Tilly explains, if the agent’s action produces no change in the current situation, no one is blamed (or credited). If an act produces a negative change, the agent is blamed. The greater the negative value, the greater the blame, but only to the extent that the agent exercised competent responsibility for the act. 179 If the agent’s role in the outcome is slight, the agent is incompetent, or the outcome is an accident, blame decreases or disappears. 180

Additionally, and importantly for our purposes, Tilly notes that “responsibility does not necessarily equal cause.” He explains that when assigning credit or blame, cause-effect relationships “usually play only a secondary and contingent part in determination of responsibility.” 181 Judgments of intent and competence are more important. Therefore, in some cases, the agent, or the person who caused a particular outcome, may not always be the person who is blamed.

As we will see in this chapter, it was very difficult to determine who started the 2008 Georgia-Russia-South Ossetia conflict. Numerous conflicting timelines were produced and scholars intensely debated who the agent responsible for the outbreak of violence was. But, as we will see in the next chapter, the international community did not seem to have a problem identifying who was to blame, at least initially.

**The Trouble with Timelines**

179 Tilly, p. 15.

180 Ibid, p. 103.

**Official Government Timelines**

When comparing the official conflict timelines released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia it is clear who is going to be held responsible for instigating the conflict in each government’s rendering of the events. The titles of these timelines give the reader a clear indication of which side is believed to be the competent agent responsible for provoking the war. The Russian MFA titled its timeline “Peacekeeping Operation to Force Georgia to Peace,” while the Georgian MFA’s timeline was entitled “Timeline of Events in the Russians [sic] Invasion & Occupation of Georgia.” Looking at just the day before the conflict, August 7, 2008, and the first day of the official start of the war on August 8, 2008, we see clearly biased views of the events. Russia, on the one hand, portrays the lead up to the conflict as a series of incidents of Georgian aggression and violence in South Ossetia, which easily justifies Russia’s response to send in reinforcements. Russia also claims on its timeline that its forces entered South Ossetia around 10 p.m. on August 8, 2008.182 Georgia, on the other hand, begins its timeline entry for August 7, 2008 with and entry that accuses the South Ossetian separatist government leader of threatening to ethnically cleanse Georgians and indicates that Russian military jet dropped bombs near Georgian military radar.183 Georgia claims that it sent its military into the region for the first time early in the morning of August 8th and this

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was “in response” to the entry of Russian armed forces on Georgia’s territory, which Georgia claimed occurred at 11:30 p.m. on August 7th. 184

Who actually initiated the violence and the exact timing of when Russian troops entered South Ossetia was a major point of contention between scholars, researchers, the media, heads of state, and international organizations. The presumption being that whoever started the conflict should also be the one to blame. However, this may not always be the case. As Tilly states, “responsibility does not necessarily equal cause.” 185 One of the most important aspects of blame is that its assignment is subjective and that there is always an underlying judgment of competence and responsibility for an outcome, which may be different from a series of cause and effect events. Therefore, the real question behind the debate over who started the conflict is “who is responsible?” and therefore, “who is to blame?”

The Russian and Georgian MFA timelines represent narratives constructed by each side to explain how the war started, under the general presumption that proving that the other side started it meant that it had also acted competently and was aware of the possible consequences, and thus was responsible for the outcome (war). Through these timelines, both Russia and Georgia sought to justify their actions in the eyes of the international community; they sought credit for their own “defensive” actions, while blaming the other side for starting the conflict. 186

184 “Timeline of Events in the Russians Invasion & Occupation of Georgia.”

185 Tilly, p. 13.

186 For additional information on Georgia and Russia’s competing storylines, see Appendix VIII.
Scholarly Timelines

While the above timeline discrepancies are to be expected considering their sources, there was also a serious scholarly battle that took place on Johnson’s Russia List (JRL) over the accuracy or “correctness” of various conflict timelines. Gordon Hahn, Professor at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, posted a timeline on JRL that sparked a battle. Hahn explained that the

“purpose of compiling this [his] timeline is to provide an organizing aide in our efforts to determine what responsibility the Georgian, Ossetian, Russian, and Western parties involved in the crisis bear for the escalation in tension and violence that led to the outbreak of the five-day August war in Georgia … It is very likely that the August Five Day War was stumbled into or provoked by both sides. Readers can decide for themselves.”

Hahn’s timeline certainly attempts to be more objective than those from the Russian and Georgian governments. He used a variety of different sources with the intent of portraying an accurate and balanced chronology of events. The result, when looking at August 7th and 8th on Hahn’s timeline, is that there is a greater mix of instances of aggression and violence by all sides; Georgians, Russians, and South Ossetians. His emphasis on instances of Georgian aggression, which was largely ignored in the Western media immediately following the conflict, drew heated responses from other JRL subscribers. Hahn, while trying to be objective by showing the culpability of all sides, was depict as a Russia supporter by some JRL readers commenting on his timeline. Amidst all of the arguing, which eventually deteriorated into nasty personal attacks instead of contributing new insight to the conflict,

187 Johnson’s Russia List (JRL) is an English-language email newsletter containing news and analysis related to Russia, compiled from a variety of news sources as well as comments from readers/contributors. It is edited by David Johnson and supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and JRL readers. JRL is a World Security Institute project. For more information, please visit: http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/default.cfm.

this heated discussion highlights the complexities and confusion of determining who did what to whom when, not to mention which side was ultimately responsible. Each JRL contributor presented convincing arguments and facts that would easily sway others readers from blaming one side to blaming the other, thus making it clear that without an independent investigation, the argument was more about responsibility and blame than cause.

**Key Points of Contention**

*Georgia’s Intercepted Russian Cell Phone Conversations*

One of the biggest sources of contention, were the transcripts of intercepted Russian cell phone conversations that Georgia presented to the *New York Times* in mid-September. Georgia claimed that these conversations indicate that Russian troops entered South Ossetia through Roki Tunnel much earlier than originally thought, thus proving that Georgia’s actions were defensive.\(^{189}\) Russia rebuffed such claims. While admitting that this “new intelligence” was “inconclusive on its own,” the *Times* noted that it “paint[ed] a more complicated picture of the critical last hours before war broke out.”\(^{190}\)

The issue was also debated on JRL. Gordon Hahn argued that the cell phone intercepts were not conclusive evidence, though they may have appeared to be genuine, and that full investigation of all cell phone audio gathered by the Georgians was needed.\(^{191}\)

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The Roki Tunnel passes through the greater Caucasus mountain range and is the only road connecting South Ossetia to North Ossetia in Russia. See map in Appendix IV.

\(^{190}\) Ibid.

Another contributor to the debate, Patrick Worms, pointed out that “the authenticity of the telephone intercepts which Dr Hahn finds so suspicious has not been denied by Russian officials contacted by Western media … [t]hey merely dispute their importance.”\(^{192}\) Robert Hamilton agrees with Mr. Worms, citing evidence from Russian newspapers that Russian troops were already in or ordered to move to South Ossetia on August 7, 2008.\(^{193}\)

The problem with these phone transcripts, however, was that Georgia released them over a month after the start of the war.\(^{194}\) Without further investigation, they remained inconclusive and ultimately became overshadowed by new developments. However, the flurry of excitement, debate, and finger-pointing they caused highlights the initial confusion and complexity about the start of the conflict and the need for an independent investigation.

**Allegations of Genocide and Ethnic Discrimination**

Both Russia and Georgia accused each other of committing acts of genocide in South Ossetia. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov explained that there was “clear evidence of atrocities having been committed – so serious and systematic that they constitute acts of


\(^{193}\) Robert Hamilton, “A Response to Professor Hahn/JRL #172,” September 29, 2008, JRL 177 # 35, September 30, 2008. Hamilton noted that *Permskiye Novosti* reported a Russian soldier saying his unit was in S. Ossetia on August 7, 2008 and *Krasnaya Zvezda* interviewed a captain who said he received orders to move toward Tskhinvali from North Ossetia on August 7th. Lieutenant Colonel Robert Hamilton is a U.S. Army Fellow at Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.

\(^{194}\) Vano Merabishvili, Georgia’s Minister of the Interior, explained that “the file with the recordings was lost during the war when the surveillance team moved operations from Tbilisi … to the central city of Gori. Georgian intelligence officers later sifted through 6,000 files to retrieve copies, he said (C.J. Chivers, “Georgia Offers Fresh Evidence on War’s Start”).”
“genocide,” thus justifying Russia’s attack as defensive action taken to protect its citizens.\textsuperscript{195} Georgia responded by filing a lawsuit against Russia in the International Criminal Court, claiming that Russia violated the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination during its interventions in South Ossetia and Abkhazia since 1990.\textsuperscript{196} Initial high figures of civilian deaths were eventually disproven, but all sides, Georgia, Russia, and South Ossetia were eventually accused of human rights violations.\textsuperscript{197}

On JRL, both Worms and Hamilton support the claim that Georgian villages were ethnically cleansed and cite Human Rights Watch reports as evidence.\textsuperscript{198} Hahn responded by commenting that “the use of the term ‘ethnic cleansing’ is often arbitrary. It is useful for mobilizing Western and other liberals, invoking the image of ‘hate crimes,’ etc.”\textsuperscript{199} While Georgian, Russian, and Ossetian civilians were killed, accusations of “genocide” seemed to be exaggerated and not based on substantiated evidence. Instead, these accusations were used to draw Western attention to Georgia’s victimization and to justify Russia’s intervention.

\textit{Amassing of Troops on South Ossetia’s Border}


\textsuperscript{197} AI, “Civilians in the Line of Fire, The Georgia-Russia Conflict,” p. 56.


\textsuperscript{199} Hahn, “A Final Response to Col. Hamilton (and an aside or two on Mr Worms),” October 2, 2008, JRL 180 #39, October 3, 2008.
Another possible indicator of who started the fighting was which side moved troops to the region first. Hahn noted that Georgian forces had moved into the conflict zone “far ahead of any Russian intervention and that by the morning of August 7th Saakashvili had deployed 12,000 troops into the conflict zone and/or on the South Ossetian border.”

Worms countered with the idea that “if the Georgian army really did move 12,000 troops to the border of the conflict zone … they were moving on their own sovereign territory. One of the attributes of statehood is the right to move your security forces within your state.”

Hamilton explained that Georgia did not have 12,000 troops to move: “the idea that 12,000 Georgian troops had been ‘amassed’ by then on the border with South Ossetia is at best a wild exaggeration. The total strength of the units permanently garrisoned in Gori (not including bulk of the 1st Brigade, which was in Iraq when the war began) is about 3,500.”

Not only was it hard to pin down specific numbers, but interpreting the intent behind certain events was also a source of confusion and contention.

Evacuation of Women and Children from South Ossetia to North Ossetia

An incident that caught my attention while interning with the U.S. Embassy in Moscow during the summer of 2008 was the evacuation of women and children from South Ossetia to North Ossetia just a few days before all-out war broke out on August 8, 2008. The serious outbreak of violence between Georgia and South Ossetia actually began on August 1-

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201 Worms, JRL 176 #24 While this is not a very substantive comment, it shows to what lengths these debaters would go to try to prove the others wrong, including making ridiculous comments.

202 Hamilton, JRL 177 # 35.

203 Jessica Golliday, internship report, U.S. Embassy Moscow, Russia, compiled from news reports, primarily Interfax and UNHCR-Russia’s website.
2, 2008. South Ossetia accused Georgian forces of shelling its capital, Tskhinvali, while Georgia blamed the separatists in South Ossetia for provoking armed clashes along the border with Georgia. As a result of the conflict, the South Ossetian government decided to evacuate children from the region to North Ossetia in the Russian Federation from August 3-5, 2008. Estimates of the number of evacuees from South Ossetia varied from 1,000 to 2,500 women and children. Was this evacuation really a result of the border clashes, which were not infrequent in recent years, or did the South Ossetians expect something the Georgians did not? Perhaps by accusing the Georgians for attacking them, the South Ossetians were able to evacuate women and children under the cover of blame before a larger operation involving Russia began just a few days later.

The Role of the United States and the West

Another source of contention in trying to figure out who started the conflict was the role of the United States and the West. Is the U.S. at fault for training and supplying the Georgian army but not guaranteeing that its training and weapons would not be used against the South Ossetians or Abkhazians? Was Georgia fed false promises of protection from the West? What was the role of NATO in provoking this conflict? These are all questions that were debated on JRL and indeed, in the media. Hahn, while emphasizing that Georgia, Russia, and South Ossetia all mutually provoked each other, suggests that the U.S.’s role may have also contributed to the conflict, “certainly the U.S. carries some of the responsibility for the war because of its policy of NATO expansion, its courtship of Georgia and providing a ‘krisha’ for Tbilisi while it rejected a no use of force agreement and amassed weapons.”

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LTC Hamilton defends the U.S. led Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP), which began in 2002 to fight Chechen terrorists hiding in the Pankisi Gorge region of Georgia, as “far from being reckless, this program was benign in its intentions and limited in its scope…”\(^{205}\)

Another JRL contributor, Gene Ostrovsky, doubts the U.S. role was as benign as Hamilton seems to suggest. He questions whether the U.S. and its allies gave Georgia no other “advice” aside from these training programs, especially given all of the military hardware that “was being shipped to Georgia by America's allies - the very hardware which they appear to have relied on in planning and (badly) executing their South Ossetian operation…”

Additionally, Ostrovsky questions the role of the U.S. State Department, who likely knew of Saakashvili’s intentions to retake South Ossetia “given his re-election time utterances on the subject” and noted that the August 2008 conflict did not “blossom from ‘zero to full-scale war’ overnight.” Therefore, “what does this say about the State Department, especially given America’s re-commitment of support to Saakashvili's regime after this...fiasco?\(^{206}\)

While the U.S. and other international actors may not have directly taken part in the fighting, this discussion highlights that they did play an indirect role in provoking this conflict, which needs to be considered along with Russian, Georgian, and South Ossetian actions. Additionally, as Worms and Hahn notably agree, the role of NATO was of “central importance…in this war.”\(^{207}\)

Putting Georgia on the fast track for NATO membership, on the one hand, sent a threatening message to Russia while, on the other hand, gave Georgia

\(^{205}\) Robert Hamilton, “A Response to Professor Hahn/JRL #172,” September 29, 2008, JRL 177 #35, September 30, 2008. Hamilton says the intentions and scope of U.S. training were to lessen tensions between Russia and Georgia and to train Georgia in only those skills needed to deal with the Pankisi Gorge issue.


the false impression it would be protected. These confusing and ambiguous messages from the West certainly contributed to provoking both Georgia and Russia.

**Conclusion**

In the months following the conflict, a plethora of timelines and reports emerged, some more biased than others, but without an official independent investigation, it was impossible to verify certain events and information. Thus, observers were left to use the information they had to discern which side they thought was the agent responsible for starting the conflict. Initially, Russia was considered by many in the West to be the one that erred. Given its standing in the international community, Russia surely was cognizant of the possible consequences it would face for attacking Georgia so aggressively. As a result, Russia was blamed even though Saakashvili ordered the attack on Tskhinvali that brought Russian forces to the region.\(^{208}\)

But before I, too, make the mistake of oversimplifying the context of this conflict, I want to highlight that the real problem with the question “who started it?” is that it cannot be answered definitively. It is not a question that asks us to look deeper and more closely into the underlying and complicated root causes of this conflict. In reality it is a question of “whose side are you on?” or, in other words, “who is to blame?” Unfortunately, the debate over this question drew the international community’s attention away from what actually

\(^{208}\) Saakashvili later “admitted” that he initiated military action in the region. “The matter is not about why Georgia started the military actions. We admit that we started those actions, but did we have another choice while our citizens were being killed? We tried to curb the intervention and were fighting in our own territory, and not a single Georgian soldier set foot on foreign soil. Therefore, it is wrong to ask whether we had the right to defend our citizens,” Saakashvili said at a session of the parliamentary commission investigating the August crisis in the Caucasus. “Saakashvili Admits that Georgia Started August Conflict,” *Interfax*, AVN, November 28, 2008, JRL 217 #7, December 1, 2008. The *AFP* also reported similar remarks in an article entitled “Saakashvili Defends Decision to Attack South Ossetia,” November 28, 2008, JRL 216 #6, December 28, 2008.
happened and confused efforts over how to respond. It is far too simple to say that it was Russia’s fault or Georgia’s fault because this conclusion completely ignores the decades of deeply rooted antagonisms that served to fuel the fire that was lit in August 2008, just as it had been in 2004 and in the early 1990s, and even before. No single party can take all of the blame, as they all (Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia) fed off of each other and continued to perpetuate the conflict.

The danger of this blame game, therefore, is that it prevents us from taking the time to better understand the conflict. In other words, blame is often seen as a way of resolving the conflict. If it can be determined that one side is responsible, then we have the solution to why the conflict started in the first place; what more is there to understand? The problem is that blame is infectious and divisive; once the blaming starts it easily spreads through multiple levels of society, from heads of state, to the media, to average citizens—as we will see in the next chapter—causing people to take sides without really understanding why, which further perpetuates divisions, tensions, and stereotypes. In order to effectively address this conflict, the blaming needs to stop and instead, attention must be focused on mediation efforts. Without strong and serious intervention from the international community, which has the ability to hold all sides accountable and encourage dialogue and reconciliation, violence could easily flare up again.
CHAPTER 5
WHO’S TO BLAME?

“Nothing the Russians were doing on August 6-8 was very much different from what the Georgians were doing, and the fact that Saakashvili began to mass forces along South Ossetia’s border in July trumps everything else in terms of the validity of the view that only the Russians were planning for war and that the peaceful democrat Saakashvili was a mere victim of the Russian imperial bear. This a nice storyline that plays well on FOX, CNN etc., but it does not square with the facts. I’ll say it again: There’s enough blame to go around for everyone on this war: Georgia, Russia, the US and the West, and the breakaway republics. Of course, this conclusion does not sit well with any of the parties…”

Gordon Hahn

Introduction

The 2008 Georgia-Russia-South Ossetia conflict provoked not only arguments and debates about “who started it?” but also stories about who was ultimately to blame. These stories are significant because they radically simplify the complex tensions and events leading up to the conflict into dramatic and relatable narratives, which make it much easier to understand who was responsible for provoking the conflict. In this chapter, I will focus on the responses of the United States and the European Union. The U.S., as a firm supporter of Georgia, had vested interests in this conflict, but ultimately failed to take any direct action. The EU, having witnessed an attack in its own “neighborhood,” immediately took action to try to mediate it. In fact, the EU was the only active third party, as Michael Emerson argues,

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given the absence of the U.S. and ineffectiveness of other institutions like the United Nations and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).\textsuperscript{210}

Initially, both the U.S. and many of the EU member countries, like much of the Western media, blamed Russia for the conflict, mainly due to its disproportionate use of force in Georgia. This interpretation was easily supported by stories characterizing Russia as a giant bear attacking poor, little, and innocent Georgia. Consequently, Russia suffered the brunt of harsh criticism from both U.S. and European leaders while Georgia’s violent aggression was ignored…or covered up. In November 2008, just a few months after the conflict ended, however, these stories interestingly began to change. As more reports were released indicating that Georgia’s actions were more offensive, than defensive (as they had claimed), the U.S. and EU also began to change their rhetoric and their policies. The U.S. took a tougher line with Georgia by withdrawing its support for Georgia’s speedy entry into NATO while the EU agreed to restart its partnership talks with Russia.

In this chapter, I will argue that blame plays an important role in explaining the initial responses of the international community as well as why their responses changed just a few short months after the conflict. The changing stories told by the U.S. and EU are important because they highlight the dangerous and infectious nature of blame, both as a foreign policy tool as well as a scapegoat for effective conflict mediation. The danger is that the initial responses of the U.S. administration and the EU member states were not based on a deep understanding of the conflict nor were they substantiated by evidence from an independent investigation, but rather on the fact that Russia was the one who was perceived and judged to be at fault. In other words, it fit the U.S. and EU’s foreign policy interests to initially depict

\textsuperscript{210} Emerson, “Post-mortem on Europe’s First War of the 21st Century,” p. 7.
a newly resurgent and aggressive Russia as the bully, while ignoring Georgia’s role.
Additionally, blame not only impedes efforts of the international community to gain an
informed and unbiased understanding of the conflict but it also hampers mediation efforts by
creating a divisive environment of taking sides. The constant back and forth about who
started the conflict and who was to blame infected leaders, their governments, the media as
well as the public. These disputes not only gave the false and inane impression that only one
side, Georgia or Russia, could be responsible for instigating this conflict but they also
distracted the international community (the U.S. and EU), not to mention the public, from
understanding the complexity of situation and instead sucked them into the blame game. As
a result, while Russia, and later Georgia, and to some extent South Ossetia were blamed,
none of the warring parties were held accountable, i.e. punished, on a commensurate level for
the atrocities they committed. Therefore, the conflict remains unresolved and the potential
for more violence still exists.

Why Do We Tell Stories?

The creation of stories plays a crucial role in credit and blame situations. Often,
without even realizing it, agents and observers create stories in order to explain how and why
a particular event happened. As Tilly explains, “people assigning credit and blame usually
embed their accounts in recognizable stories that neatly bundle together agency,
responsibility, competence, and outcome.”

Thus, in telling a story, it becomes clear who
the blamer believes is the agent responsible for a certain outcome. As Tilly sums up, “stories

\[211\] Tilly, p, 34.
lend themselves beautifully to judgment of the actors and to assignment of responsibility. They provide marvelous vehicles for credit and blame.”

Stories play a significant role in credit and blame situations for several reasons. First, they simplify the events in order to make a complicated situation easier to understand. As Tilly explains, people often justify the assignment of credit and blame through “simplified cause-effect sequences involving well-defined agents and outcomes. They ignore many complications. They tell stories.” Simplifying a complex series of events thus makes it easier to identify agency, competence, and responsibility. Stories “rework and simplify social processes so that the processes become available for the telling; ‘X did Y to Z’ conveys a memorable image of what happened.” As Tilly describes, if scientific accounts or independent investigations are compared to “everyday stories,” the latter “radically simplif[ies] cause-effect connections.” In other words, stories minimize the complex webs of cause and effect that led to an outcome.” For example, blamers may omit key historical, cultural, or political background that explains why A attacked B because it is too confusing or complicated. Thus, including only the information that supports who you believe is responsible and should be blamed for a negative outcome produces a dramatically different picture from what an independent observer might report. As Tilly notes, the very simplicity of stories increases their power.

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212 Tilly, p. 22.
Second, after the events have been simplified, stories clearly indicate who is responsible for a particular outcome and thus deserves to be blamed. As Tilly describes, stories carry strong imputations of responsibility and therefore lend themselves to moral evaluations and judgments.\(^{216}\) Looking at the 2008 conflict in Georgia, we have seen that, clearly, all sides played a role in the escalation of tensions and were all responsible, to some degree, for the outcome. *But*, the history and motivations behind this conflict are very complex and difficult to explain, as we have learned in Chapters 2 and 3. It is much easier, therefore, to decide who is responsible and point out what that actor did wrong than to try to explain all of the intricate details and root causes leading to a particular outcome, in our case war, as exemplified by the “who started it?” debate described in the previous chapter.

Additionally, Tilly explains that the underlying moral evaluation in stories makes them very valuable as an evaluation of an event after the fact, as we have seen in the previous chapter and will continue to examine in this chapter. Tilly notes that this aspect of stories also helps explain why stories change over time especially when an actor has “behaved less than heroically.”\(^{217}\) More a judgment than an accurate account, stories are fluid and changeable.

Thirdly, stories are significant because it is not just the events themselves that are important but the way these events are described, or the way a story is told, that often gains the most attention. Depending on the intended audience or the bias of the person recounting a certain situation or series of events, the overall “picture” or impression of what happened will vary. For example, the media often reports news stories a particular way in order to gain the audience’s attention, but as a result, the audience may not get an objective view of the

\(^{216}\) Tilly, p. 21.

\(^{217}\) Ibid.

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events. Additionally, the media, politicians, lawyers, and other “judges” frequently turn important actors into “characters” in a dramatic story, describing the way in which an actor’s perceived qualities or characteristics make that actor more likely to be responsible for an outcome than another. As Tilly explains, the retelling of the events often takes on the stylized form of melodramas, dividing agents into “good guys” and “bad guys” where the good guy receives credit and the bad guy is blamed. Narratives about the 2008 conflict often characterized the big “Russian bear” as the bad guy, whereas little “democratic Georgia” was the good guy who was unjustly attacked. While dramatic storytelling calls attention to a particular outcome, it disguises the complicated causes behind it.

Finally, stories about credit and blame are particularly significant because they are relatable and easily invoke empathy, even if the person listening to the story was not directly involved. Crediting and blaming is a social interaction that occurs on all levels, from blaming your little brother for breaking your favorite toy, to crediting top notch students with scholarships, to blaming the Israelis for attacking the Palestinians or the Palestinians for attacking the Israelis. Everyone has heard as well as created such stories. As Tilly explains,

“stories about credit and blame don’t simply spark the passing interest of stories about newly discovered dinosaurs, the latest movie star romance, or antique automobiles seen on the street. They call up empathy. They resonate because they raise issues in our own lives, whether or not we have any direct connection with the people involved…in war, peace, politics, economics, and everyday social life, people care greatly about the proper assignment of credit and blame.”

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218 Tilly, p. 38.
219 Ibid, p. 4.
220 Ibid, pp. 4-5.
The danger, however, behind the “relatability” of credit and blame stories is perhaps that they are so common that we often do not realize how such stories are created and are not fully aware of their impact. As we have seen, stories are often dramatically oversimplified, impart responsibility for an outcome to a particular actor, and are told in such a way as to attract the attention of an audience. They affect not only how the events are understood but also who is to be awarded and who is to be punished. The manipulative and empathetic qualities of these simple stories thus make them much more influential and powerful than they seem.  

The initial responses and stories told by the U.S. and the EU to explain who was responsible for the 2008 conflict in South Ossetia are intriguing examples that highlight the significant role stories play in the interpretation of a conflict. These stories clearly simplify the events to answer the question, “who started it?” which indicates the side that the U.S. and EU believe was responsible for the conflict. The U.S. example, in particular, demonstrates how stories of blame not only radically simplify complex histories and events, but are also told in a dramatic way so as to make these esoteric conflicts understandable and relatable to the public. The stories of both the U.S. and EU also show the fluidity of their interpretations, which initially characterized Russia as the aggressor, while ignoring the violent acts perpetrated by Georgia and South Ossetia, only to see their stories change just a few short months after the conflict had ended. The change in U.S. and EU rhetoric and actions thus demonstrates the role of blame as a foreign policy tool that may initially be helpful in promoting one’s interests, but ultimately hampers effective mediation efforts.

The Initial Response of the United States and European Union

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221 For information on the competing Georgian and Russian storylines on the 2008 conflict, see Appendix VIII.
As small-scale border fighting between the Georgians and South Ossetians snowballed into all out war in early August 2008 and an avalanche-like Russian attack crashed down onto Georgian troops soon after, the international community was left to figure out not only what it would do but also what it would say. How would the U.S. and EU, the two international actors most able to halt the hostilities, interpret what happened? And how would their interpretations affect their policy statements and actions regarding Georgia and Russia? The nature of blame is an important factor in understanding the initial U.S. and EU responses as well as why their responses began to change during the months following the conflict. As we will see, not just Russia and Georgia, but also the U.S. and EU fell into the tempting and destructive trap of pointing fingers before understanding what had actually happened and why. Failure to understand the roots of the conflict as well the intentions, desires, and grievances of the three parties involved (Russia, Georgia, South Ossetia) has left the U.S. and EU with a big mess to sort out and clean up.

The United States

As the conflict broke out during the start of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, China, U.S. President George W. Bush gave an interview with Bob Costas of NBC Sports. He told Costas that “this violence is unacceptable… I expressed my grave concern about the disproportionate response of Russia and that we strongly condemn bombing outside of South Ossetia. It was just interesting to me that here we are trying to promote peace and harmony and we're witnessing a conflict take place…”222 While there was already a tinge of blame in

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his statement, as time passed and the violence escalated, U.S. statements became harsher and
the cause of the war, which was the result of complex and deep-rooted tensions, was
simplified. From the perspective of the Bush administration, Russia was clearly at fault. On
August 13, 2008, President Bush declared that the U.S. was on Georgia’s side, “I have
directed a series of steps to demonstrate our solidarity with the Georgian people and bring
about a peaceful resolution to this conflict.” President Bush continued his story on August
15, 2008, when he addressed the public from the White House:

“The American people listening today may wonder why events taking place in a small
country halfway around the world matter to the United States. In the years since it’s
gained independence after the Soviet Union’s collapse, Georgia has become a
courageous democracy. Its people are making the tough choices that are required of
free societies. … The people of Georgia have cast their lot with the free world, and
we will not cast them aside.”

Bush’s statement not only simplified the conflict to highlight the struggle of “small” but
“courageous” Georgia (who was unfairly pitted against Russia), but it also tried to make the
conflict relatable and easy for the American public to understand. In other words, why
should the American people care about what is happening “half way around the world” in a
small country like Georgia?

President Bush continued by condemning Russia’s attacks, “with its actions in recent
days Russia has damaged its credibility and its relations with the nations of the free world.
Bullying and intimidation are not acceptable ways to conduct foreign policy in the 21st
century.” Bush made it clear that Russia was responsible for this conflict and therefore must

223 Transcript of “President Bush Discusses Situation in Georgia, Urges Russia to Cease Military Operations,”
The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 11:10 A.M. EDT, August 13, 2008,

224 Transcript of “Statement By The President On The Situation In Georgia,” The White House, Office of the
seek to redeem itself. “To begin to repair its relations with the United States and Europe and other nations, and to begin restoring its place in the world, Russia must respect the freedom of its neighbors.” In the eyes of the U.S. leadership, it was clearly Russia who was to blame, at least initially.

U.S. Vice President, Dick Cheney, and U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, also reinforced President Bush’s statements. On August 10, 2008 Cheney called Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili to express the U.S.’s solidarity with Georgia and he told Saakashvili that “Russian aggression must not go unanswered.” This statement clearly invokes the us versus them divide discussed in Chapter 2 that sets Georgia on the side of “right” and Russia on the side of “wrong.” Additionally, Cheney’s statement characterized Russia as the bully and Georgia as the victim. In a further display of Georgian favoritism, the Office of the Vice President’s also issued a statement saying that Cheney praised President Saakashvili for his government's restraint, offers of cease-fire, and disengagement of Georgian forces from the zone of conflict in South Ossetia. With this statement and others, the Bush administration made it clear that Georgia was absolved of any responsibility for the outbreak of violence.

Following the end of the conflict, Rice said Russian troops’ violations of a French-brokered ceasefire agreement “only served to deepen the isolation into which Russia is moving” and that there is a “very strong, growing sense that Russia is not behaving like the

225 “Statement By The President On The Situation In Georgia” August 15, 2008.


227 Ibid.
kind of international partner that it has said that it wants to be.” While not explicitly blaming Russia, Rice’s comments did carry a tone of superiority, a sense of “I’m right and you’re wrong,” which implied that Russia was not living up to America’s standards of “democracy” and “freedom” as well as hinting that Russia could be punished with isolation from the international community.

The 2008 U.S. presidential candidates, Senator John McCain and Senator Barack Obama also weighed in on the conflict. Their initial responses, however, were very different. McCain took a harsh stance against Russia, while Obama was more conciliatory. *TIME* reported that “both camps issued press releases trying to out-tough each other on what the proper response to the Kremlin should be. And both sides are questioning each other’s judgment and response.” McCain accused Obama of being soft on Russia and “bizarrely in synch with Moscow.” During the second presidential debate in October 2008, McCain stated that “we want to bring international pressures to bear on Russia in hopes that that will modify and eventually change their behavior.” He added that “the Russians must understand that these kinds of actions and activities are unacceptable.”

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232 Cincotta.
and Rice, evoked a moral high ground in his statements and also played into the simplified and melodramatic David versus Goliath story that began to circulate in the U.S. following the conflict. McCain told audiences that he talked to Saakashvili on August 12, 2008 and reassured him that “the thoughts and the prayers and support of the American people are with that brave little nation as they struggle for their freedom and independence.”

McCain also repeated at presidential debates and rallies that he told Saakashvili “I know I speak for every American when I say…, ‘Today we are all Georgians.'” Not only did McCain simplify and dramatize the conflict, but by proclaiming that “we are all Georgians,” he tried to make this esoteric web of history, culture, and politics surrounding the conflict one to which the American people could understand and relate, though with a clear bias against Russia.

While McCain’s statements may have been a bit more harsh and dramatic at the start, Obama eventually joined in the blame game. Obama’s initial response, notably, was much more reserved, however, avoiding blaming either side. “Now is the time for Georgia and Russia to show restraint, and to avoid an escalation to full-scale war,” he said on August 8, 2008. Later that day, however, Obama toughened his stance, still calling both sides for restraint but blaming Russia for attacking Georgia. “Russia has escalated the crisis in Georgia through its clear and continued violation of Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity,” Obama declared. His rhetoric continued to grow harsher. During the

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234 Ibid.


236 Ibid.
September 26, 2008 Presidential debate, Obama said that Russia “cannot be a 21st-century power and act like a 20th-century dictatorship.” Clearly, this conflict provided the U.S. with the opportunity to critique not only Russia’s disproportionate actions, but also the U.S.’s dislike of what it perceived as an increasingly authoritarian leadership. During the second presidential debate in October, Obama stated that “it is important that we understand they’re not the old Soviet Union, but they still have nationalist impulses that I think are very dangerous.” Here Obama used the conflict to pass critical judgment on Russia’s domestic policies. Thus, as Tilly described, Obama, McCain, Rice, Cheney and Bush’s statements all neatly packaged their judgments of outcome, agency, competence, and responsibility for the conflict in simple stories.

Additionally, the 2008 Presidential campaigns highlight another problem that blame creates: it is often used as a political tool to justify one’s position and policies against a competitor, rather than one that effectively resolves a complicated situation. “The presidential campaigns of Barack Obama and John McCain have seen the crisis largely as an occasion for political sniping, as they are perhaps more eager to gain an edge in the race for the White House than seek solutions,” TIME reported. Thus, blame is often used as a political tool to win votes in an election campaign, demonstrating that what actually happened is not as important as how it is interpreted or told. Realizing that his moderate policies left him out of the blame game, Obama changed his stance and toughened his rhetoric, which only added to the overall negative perception of Russia in the West.

237 Cincotta.

238 Ibid.

239 Calabresi.
Obama’s initial objective stance, which sought to understand the role that both Russia and Georgia played before determining who was to blame, would have been much more helpful, however, in trying to effectively address and mediate the conflict.

The U.S.’s continued support of Georgia’s membership in NATO also indicated that Russia was to blame for provoking the 2008 conflict. Notably, before, during, and after the conflict, the U.S. strongly supported offering a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia. Russia’s attack clearly showed that Georgia needed to be protected from Russia’s aggressive and unpredictable behavior. As U.S. Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, stated on October 9, 2008, “we have sought a constructive relationship with Russia, but unfortunately their behavior has undermined security in the region and raised real concerns about their intentions.” Russia’s attack on “small-but-courageous” Georgia therefore lent further support to the U.S. position. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, Daniel Fried, reiterated at a meeting in Tbilisi in October 2008 “that the United States supports Georgia’s aspiration to join NATO and become integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures.” Thus, the U.S. still supported Georgia’s entry into NATO’s collective security structure, even though it had just been attacked by Russia.

The story told by the State Department in Moscow was a little different. U.S. Ambassador to Russia, John Beyrle, tried to clarify claims criticizing the U.S.’s unequivocal support of Georgia. “Our [U.S.] support for Georgia is not unconditional. We made very clear to Georgia that we did not support the use of force to resolve the status of S. Ossetia

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and Abkhazia and we consider that the Georgian leadership made a mistake in using force in the way they did to try to resolve that issue.” But, he countered, the U.S. “continue[s] to support Georgia’s democratic ambitions, we do not see that in a zero-sum relationship to Georgia’s relationship with Russia.”

Given Beylre’s position, it is clear that his statements regarding Russia’s role in and responsibility for the conflict would be a bit more reserved than other U.S. government representatives, but here was also see the U.S.’s story begin to change. Beyrle’s statement shows the underlying hypocrisy of U.S. policy by acknowledging that Georgia “made a mistake” in using force but that the U.S. still supported Georgia’s “democratic ambitions,” which, in reality, have been sliding under Saakashvili.

As discussed in the previous chapter, trying to answer the question, “who started it?” (which really means “who is to blame?”) in a conflict as complicated and deeply rooted as this one is virtually impossible, but that did not stop the U.S. from trying. Instead of holding all sides—Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia—accountable, the U.S. further inflamed the existing tensions by radically oversimplifying the conflict so as to blame Russia while essentially absolving Georgia from any responsibility. The conflict also proved to be an excellent vehicle for the U.S. to reinforce its foreign policy interests through its judgments of agency, competency, and responsibility. By taking a harsh and critical stance against Russia and blaming it for starting the conflict, the U.S. was able to reinforce its disapproval of Russia’s domestic policies, namely its backsliding on democracy, while at the same time

242 “U.S. Ambassador Beyrle: U.S. Has No Intention To Punish Russia for August Crisis In Caucasus” Interfax Interview, October 22, 2008, JRL 192 #38, October 22, 2008.

243 Saakashvili violently suppressed opposition demonstrations in November 2007, which was criticized by the U.S. but did not create a change in policy.

For more information see, Economist, “Misha Bounces Back,” and “Getting out of a Mess in Georgia.”

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emphasize its own foreign policy interests. Specifically, in the months leading up to the
collision in August 2008, the U.S. had supported Kosovo’s independence, sought swift NATO
membership for Georgia, and pushed for the installation of a missile defense shield in Czech
Republic and Poland. While these foreign policy objectives were not aimed, per se, directly
at Russia, they certainly irked Moscow, and sent a strong message that while the U.S. did not
see Russia as a threat, it also did not see it as a partner.

As Stephen Sestanovich notes, however, U.S. foreign policy toward Russia in the late
1990s and early 2000s was not much better than it was in 2008. By 2002, he explains, Putin
had witnessed the U.S. bombing of Serbia and occupation of Kosovo, faced criticism for its
wars in Chechnya, saw the U.S. begin to train and equip Georgian forces, and witnessed
NATO expand to include former the Soviet republics of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. At
this time however, both Bush and Putin agreed that relations were good. The difference
between the situation in 2002 and 2008, however, was the nature of the relationship as well
as changing perceptions. In 2002, “it was the two sides’ shared conviction that the two
countries saw major goals and major problems in broadly compatible terms—and that, more
than ever before, they could deal with each other as equals,” describes Sestanovich.244 Since
then, relations have worsened, as Sestanovich describes, due to Russia’s interpretation of
events that have happened since then, including the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the “colored
revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine, as well as rising energy prices. From these events,
Sestanovich explains, “Putin and his colleagues seem to have drawn very different
conclusions from those of 2002—namely, that Russia’s relations with the United States (and

244 Stephen Sestanovich, “What Has Moscow Done? Rebuilding U.S.-Russian Relations,” Foreign Affairs,
the West in general) were inherently unequal and conflictual and that Russia would better serve its interests if it followed its own course.”

The problem is that, in turn, Russia’s new course of aggressive rhetoric, proclaimed “sovereign democracy,” manipulation of energy supplies, and, finally, its attack on Georgia, made it a target of negative U.S. political rhetoric even before the 2008 conflict ended.

Therefore, it follows that the U.S. administration would blame Russia for attacking Georgia. In other words, blaming Russia was not based on an in-depth understanding of the situation or in light of evidence from an independent investigation, but on which side the U.S. perceived and judged to be wrong. Blame is thus a reflection of the dynamic of the current political relationship between the U.S. and Russia. As a result, U.S. leaders formulated simplified and dramatized stories to support their political stance against Russia’s aggressive and manipulative tendencies, rather than seeking a more objective interpretation of the conflict.

The European Union

The other key international player in the Georgia-Russia-South Ossetia conflict was the European Union. Given the U.S.’s strong support for Georgia before the conflict, the EU was, arguably, a less biased peace broker as well as the only international actor to actively try to mediate the conflict. The challenge for the EU, however, was to get all 27 member

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245 Sestanovich.

246 “Sovereign democracy,” is a term espoused most famously by Vladislav Surkov, the First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office of Russia. As Eugene Ivanov explained on JRL, the concept generally reflects what “President Putin had said on numerous occasions: in its transition to democracy, it is Russia and Russia alone that will choose the path of this transition and its pace (Ivanov, “Sovereign democracy”: is it United Russia’s ideology?,” January 21, 2007, JRL 16 #25, http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/2007-15-25.cfm, accessed February 20, 2009).” Thus, Russia is not subject to outside criticism of its “democratic path.”
countries to agree on a unified response. The formulation of a common EU foreign policy on any issue is notably challenge in and of itself, and the EU’s relationship with Russia serves as a striking example of this difficulty.\textsuperscript{247} As I have alluded to earlier in this paper, blame is in the eyes of the beholder, as highlighted by the differing interpretations held by the EU member countries. Their initial responses to the conflict could be divided into three camps: those who were wary of blaming Russia and favored a softer EU policy response, those who blamed Russia and favored a harsher policy response, and those who tried to stay somewhere in the middle.\textsuperscript{248} The EU, a collective body, unlike the U.S., a single actor, had to take all of these varying interpretations into account when formulating its policy. While there was initially a lot of sharp criticism of Russia’s disproportionate use of force, the EU ultimately followed a much milder policy line toward Russia.

\textit{Differing Interpretations}

\textit{Italy}

Italy was the one of the strongest supporters of a softer EU policy response toward Russia due to its important trade and economic relations with Russia as well as the close personal ties between Russia’s Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, and Italy’s Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi.\textsuperscript{249} Italian Foreign Minister, Franco Frattini said on August 11, 2008, “We cannot create an anti-Russia coalition in Europe, and on this point we are close to Putin’s

\textsuperscript{247} Margot Light, “Russia and the EU: Strategic Partners or Strategic Rivals?” \textit{Journal of Common Market Studies} 46 s1 (2008), pp. 7-27.

\textsuperscript{248} “The View From Europe” \textit{RFE/RL}, August 27, 2008, \url{http://www.rferl.org/content/The_View_From_Europe/1194356.html}, accessed December 31, 2008.

\textsuperscript{249} “Italy Will Remain Silent In Showdown With Russia,” \textit{RFE/RL}, August 27, 2008, \url{http://www.rferl.org/Content/Italy_Will_Remain_Silent_In_Showdown_With_Russia/1194338.html}, accessed December 31, 2008.
position.” He also stated that “this war has pushed Georgia further away” from Europe.\(^{250}\)

Additionally, Berlusconi emphasized in early September 2008, “that Russia had to remain a part of the ‘West.’” Russia and Europe “are both part of the West, not two separate parts, but one,” he explained.\(^{251}\) After meeting with U.S. Vice President Cheney in September, Berlusconi noted that Italy “helped make this an isolated incident instead of a detonator” that could have started a new “Cold War.” Thus, Italy’s stance was one that supported rather than blamed Russia and instead viewed Georgia’s actions more critically.

**France**

France and Germany, however, tried to remain neutral. French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who also held the rotating EU presidency at the time of the conflict, refused to condemn one side over the other. In August 2008, Sarkozy explained during a meeting at the Kremlin as he tried to work out a ceasefire agreement, that “it is perfectly normal that Russia wants to defend its own interests and the interests of Russians inside Russia, as well as Russian speakers outside Russia.” But, he added, “it is equally important that we – I mean the international community – want to guarantee the integrity, sovereignty, and independence of Georgia.”\(^{252}\) Additionally, in October 2008, following a meeting with members of the European Parliament, Sarkozy explained that “We saw the war as a completely


disproportionate reaction from the Russians in the case of the conflict with Georgia,” he said. “And I use this word – disproportionate – because it was disproportionate to intervene as the Russians did in Georgia. And I also use the word ‘reaction’, because [Russia’s] reaction was disproportionate but that was because there was a preceding inappropriate action, and Europe has to be fair. Europe shouldn’t hesitate to step out of the ideological framework to put across a message of peace.” Therefore, according to Sarkozy, both Russia and Georgia were each due their fair share of the blame.

Additionally, in an interview with RFE/RL, Philippe Moreau Defarges, researcher at the French Institute for International Relations, explained that France was caught between two contradictory points of view. One the one hand, Russia’s actions in Georgia were unacceptable and a violation of international law and on the other hand, it is important to keep Russia engaged and “not to commit to a new Cold War.” Defarges also commented that EU’s objective was “not to have a tough policy” but “to have a united European Union.”

Germany

Germany’s position also fluctuates in its support of Georgia and Russia. In the lead up to the 2008 conflict German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, was skeptical of Saakashvili’s regime. At the April NATO summit in Bucharest, she stated, “countries that are directly

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involved in regional conflicts cannot, in my opinion, become members of NATO.” 255

Following the August 2008 conflict, however, Merkel changed her stance. After meeting with Saakashvili, she stated,

“I think that a clear political statement is once again very important in this situation: Georgia is a free and independent country, and every free and independent country can decide together with the members of NATO when and how it joins NATO. In December, there will be an initial assessment of the situation, and we are clearly on track for a NATO membership.” 256

As Der Spiegel assessed, “Merkel wants to show that the German government stands at Georgia’s side. Likewise, she wants to endeavor within the EU and NATO to maintain an open dialogue with Russia.” 257 Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the German Minister for Foreign Affairs, however, remained skeptical over speeding up the NATO membership process for Georgia. 258 Therefore, even within the top German leadership, the ambiguity and fickleness of Merkel’s stance keeps Germany from blaming one side over the other.

Additionally, German foreign-policy analyst, Jan Techau, of the German Council on Foreign Relations commented that while Germany’s government had initially made strong statements against Russia’s attack and had been very strict on Russia’s troop withdrawal from Georgia, the only way to create “a common, unified European stance” is to tone “down the very, very tough rhetoric.” He assessed the EU’s challenge as the following: “the Russians have all the short-term leverage, and can play us, we have only long-term leverage


256 Ibid.

257 Ibid.

258 Ibid.
and find it hard to agree on anything in the long term. That is the real problem of the situation in strategic terms.”

**UK/Britain**

At the other end of the spectrum, along with the Baltic countries and Poland, the British Foreign Ministry condemned Russia’s actions and called for a tougher EU policy response. The British Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, said “over Georgia, Russia has moved from support for territorial integrity to breaking up the country in three weeks, and relied entirely on military force to do so.” He said that the West must now “raise the costs to Russia of disregarding its responsibilities and that “Europe needs to act as one when dealing with third parties like Russia.” As the *BBC* reported, Miliband argued that the EU must stand by its newer members as well as send Russia the message: “that force is not the right way to take forward these difficult issues.”

**Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland**

The leaders of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland, as well as Ukraine, traveled to Tbilisi following the conflict to express their solidarity with Georgia. They issued a joint

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259 “Forging Unity ‘Among The Powerless,’” *RFE/RL*, August 27, 2008, [http://www.rferl.org/Content/Forging_Unity_Among_The_Powerless/1194329.html](http://www.rferl.org/Content/Forging_Unity_Among_The_Powerless/1194329.html), accessed December 31, 2008. In the short term, Russia has significant energy leverage over the EU, due to the EU’s increasing dependency on natural gas imports from Russia. In the long term, the EU could perhaps use other trade agreements with Russia or other economic, cultural, or education agreements as leverage.


statement urging the European Union and NATO to “stand up against the spread of imperialist and revisionist policy” by Russia. Additionally, Estonian president Thomas Ilves called for a suspension of the EU-Russia partnership talks and the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry said the EU should halt its assistance to Moscow and cancel talks on simplifying Russian applications for EU visas. Polish President Lech Kaczynski declared that “Russia has again shown its true face.”

_Toward a Unified EU Response?_

The wide range of responses described above reflects the different national interests of each of the EU member countries. Thus, in forming a collective policy stance, EU member states were faced with the decision of taking a harsh policy response against Russia, which might have the negative effect of isolating Moscow, or to take a softer policy in order to keep Russia engaged, in hopes of maintaining a cooperative partnership. What these differing stories tell us, however, is that each EU member country, like the U.S., perceived and judged the conflict according to their own foreign policy interests. Given Italy’s close economic ties with Russia, it makes sense that Italy would not want to blame Russia for the conflict. France and Germany also have strong economic relations with Russia, mainly concerning the import of Russian oil and especially gas, which would keep them from blaming Russia. The Baltic countries and Poland, however, have a longstanding dislike

262 Bennhold.


264 Bennhold.

and mistrust of Russia due to the Soviet legacy of invasion and occupation of their countries, which would lead them to perceive Russia as the instigator of the conflict in Georgia.

Britain’s harsh stance toward Russia is rooted in part due to anger and frustration over the death of Alexander Litvinenko, a former KGB officer turned Kremlin critic, living in London, who died after mysteriously being poisoned with polonium, a radioactive isotope, in November 2006. Britain accused Russia of orchestrating the plot. Additionally, Britain was irked when Russia ordered the British Council, a state-funded organization promoting British culture and language abroad, to shut down its regional offices by January 1, 2008.

The interesting similarity between all of these responses, however, is that, like the United States, many European leaders also seemed to avoid holding Saakashvili accountable, at least initially. Most of the West’s immediate attention was focused on Russia’s disproportionate use of force in Georgia, which led lead to the seemingly logical and reasonable conclusion that Russia was to blame. Thus, Saakashvili was often able to get away with being the innocent victim in the eyes of many U.S. and European leaders.

**Emergency EU Meeting**

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who at the time held the EU Presidency, reacted quickly to facilitate a ceasefire and negotiated a six-point peace plan. As Michael Emerson

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267 “Moscow Orders Closure of British Council Branches,” *RFE/RL*, December 13, 2007, [http://www.rferl.org/content/Article/1079259.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Article/1079259.html), accessed February 20, 2009. Preceding this event, the UK had expelled four Russian diplomats in response to Russia’s refusal to extradite the main suspect in the Litvinenko murder. Russia responded by expelling four British diplomats.

268 See Appendix I for map of Russia’s attacks on Georgian cities and ports.
explains, “all but one point are sensible.”  The problem, as Emerson highlights, was that Sarkozy permitted Russia to add a second part to point five, which had originally read “Russian military forces should withdraw to the lines preceding the outbreak of hostilities.” Russia then insisted on adding the ambiguous phrase: “while waiting for an international mechanism, Russian peacekeeping forces will put into effect additional security measures.” This addition to point five, however, ultimately gave Russia the rational to keep its troops in the region for much longer than Sarkozy intended.

In response to Russia’s failure to fully withdraw its troops from Georgia, Sarkozy announced on August 24, 2008, that the European Council would hold an emergency meeting on September 1, 2008, to discuss the situation. As the International Herald Tribune summed up,

“the rare four-hour crisis meeting in Brussels produced blunt criticism of Moscow’s military offensive in Georgia but proposed few concrete measures that might deter Russia from similar action. The leaders did, however, offer firm support for Georgia, promising reconstruction aid and civilian monitors.”

The closing point of the Council’s presidency conclusions, however, contained a statement that amounted to the closest the EU would get to punishing Russia, “until troops have withdrawn to the positions held prior to 7 August, meetings on the negotiation of the Partnership Agreement will be postponed.” Negotiations remained in limbo, however, for

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269 Emerson, “Post-mortem on Europe’s First War of the 21st Century,” p. 3.

270 English translation of the Six-Point Peace Plan and the original French version, please see Appendix IX.


just over two months, when building pressure among some EU leaders called for talks to
reopen in November 2008. Thus, the EU’s feeble “punishment” ultimately had little impact.

While the EU member countries condemned “the disproportionate reaction of Russia”
and stated that “military action of this kind is not a solution and is not acceptable,” there was,
interestingly, absolutely no mention of Georgia’s attacks on Tskhinvali or any other acts of
violence perpetrated by Georgia. Additionally, while EU leaders had substantial reasons to
upbraid Russia, they failed to also hold Georgia accountable for its share of the brutality and
instead simply offered to “supply aid for reconstruction in Georgia” and to “step up its
relations with Georgia, including visa facilitation measures and the possible establishment of
a full and comprehensive free trade area…” without requiring anything in return.273

Focusing blame on Russia and ignoring Georgia and South Ossetia’s role in provoking the
conflict and perpetrating acts of violence not only reinforced the tensions and divisions
between the three warring parties, but also likely contributed to Russian President Dmitri
Medvedev’s decision to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which
could be perceived as a way for Russia to get back at the West for its one-sided interpretation
of the conflict.

The US and EU in Agreement?

While the U.S. and the EU member countries offered several different interpretations
of who was responsible for the conflict, it seems that most leaders could agree that Russia’s
disproportionate use of force as well as its subsequent recognition of the independence of

273 Ibid.
South Ossetia and Abkhazia were unacceptable. After the emergency EU meeting on September 1, 2008, Sarkozy announced that Europe was united in its concern over Russia’s aggressive actions.\textsuperscript{274} The EU stated that Russia’s recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was “unacceptable” and called on other states not to recognize their independence.\textsuperscript{275} “The question is what does Russia want?” said Sarkozy. “Does it want confidence and co-operation, or does it want distrust and an increasing tension? The EU would welcome a real partnership with Russia which is in the interest of all. But you have to be two to tango; you have to be two to have a partnership.”\textsuperscript{276} The U.S. also condemned Russia’s recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. President Bush stated, “Russia’s action only exacerbates tensions and complicates diplomatic negotiations.”\textsuperscript{277}

While Russia certainly deserved to be rebuked by the international community for its excessive use of force in Georgia, not to mention the fact that it attacked another sovereign state and then recognized portions of that country’s territory as independent countries, it was not, however, the only to one blame. The U.S. and EU’s failure to hold Georgia and South Ossetia accountable not only shows a lack of understanding of the underlying root causes of the problem but also further exacerbates it. As Gordon Hahn explained,

“my own view is that there is blame to go around - to the Georgians, Russians, the U.S. and its allies …, and the breakaway regions. Unfortunately, the Western media


\textsuperscript{275} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{276} Ibid.

and think tank circles insist on focusing and digging up evidence to prove only
Russia’s part in the this tragedy.”\textsuperscript{278}

It did not take long, however, for the West to start taking a more critical look at Georgia’s
role in the conflict. As new information became available, there was an interesting shift in
U.S. and EU policy toward Russia and Georgia in November 2008.

\textbf{How and Why the U.S. and EU Responses Changed}

As I have argued, a key point that was absent from many of the initial Western
interpretations of the conflict was Georgia’s attack on Tskhinvali as well as the violent role
of South Ossetian militias. But these interpretations would soon change as more
international organizations released reports and NGO representatives began to speak up
about what they saw on the ground. Eventually the stories would change from blaming
Russia to looking more critically at Georgia. The irony of it all, however, was that much of
this “new” information was known all along.

\textbf{“New” Reports Highlight Georgia’s Culpability, Emphasize That All Parties Responsible}

The reports analyzing the 2008 Russia-Georgia-South Ossetia conflict released by
several prominent NGOs, such as the International Crisis Group (ICG) and Amnesty
International, as well as reports from OSCE monitors came to seemingly new conclusions,
namely that Georgia was just as much at fault as Russia. Additionally, many reports stated
that \textit{all} parties needed to be held accountable for the acts of violence they committed. While
it took some time, eventually the international community admitted that Russia was not the
only one to blame.

ICG released a report on August 22, 2008, notably not long after the conflict, describing “Moscow’s initial moves into South Ossetia” as part of a response “to a disastrous miscalculation by a Georgian leadership that was impatient with gradual confidence building and a Russian-dominated negotiations process.” The ICG report also stated that “all sides bear responsibility for the humanitarian consequences of the violence, as tens of thousands of civilians in South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and the rest of Georgia have been displaced amid disturbing reports of atrocities.” ICG also implicates the U.S. and EU for “failing to adequately press President Saakashvili to abandon a quick-fix approach toward restoring Georgian control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia.” With regard to NATO membership for Georgia, ICG warned that a “decision on MAP or membership status should not be taken in the heat of the current crisis,” a warning that NATO and even the U.S. heeded, in the end. ICG’s report is significant because as early as August, they indicated (and had indicated much earlier) that all sides were responsible, while the U.S. and EU continued to blame Russia.

Despite the release of ICG’s thorough report, the stories about the war’s start did not really begin to change in the West until November 2008. The tide began to turn on Georgia when international monitors working under the mandate of the OSCE concluded that Georgia had acted offensively rather than defensively—as it had claimed. Two former British


280 Ibid.

281 Ibid, p. ii.

282 Ibid.
military officers, both senior level representatives with the OSCE at the time of the conflict, reported that Georgian rockets and artillery were hitting civilian targets in South Ossetia before the Russians attacked. “It was clear to me that the [Georgian] attack was completely indiscriminate and disproportionate to any, if indeed there had been any, provocation,” one of the OSCE representatives said. The reports given by these OSCE monitors and officials cast serious doubt on Georgia’s side of the story and contributed, at least in part, I believe, to the West’s change in perception of the conflict, because as more attention was placed on Georgia’s role, Western leaders would be forced to address the discrepancies in their rhetoric, which, up this point, had focused mostly on blaming Russia.

Georgia’s role was further questioned with the release of a report by Amnesty International (AI), entitled “Civilians in the Line of Fire, The Georgia-Russia Conflict,” on November 18, 2008. The report concluded that the information collected and presented by AI together with that of other sources, “indicates that serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law were committed by all parties, both during the course of the conflict and in its aftermath.” The report received much attention for holding not just Russia responsible but also Georgia and significantly South Ossetia.

“New” Information Versus “Ignored” Information

The accounts from the OSCE representatives published in the New York Times, the Amnesty International report, and other Western news media reports that came out in November claimed to have discovered “new” evidence of the atrocities committed by


284 AI, “Civilians in the Line of Fire,” p. 56.
Georgia and many media outlets dramatically concluded that it was in fact Georgia that started the war. Who knew? Apparently only those of us who had been listening to the news all along and understood even an inkling of the complexity of this conflict as well as were aware of Saakashvili’s increasing undemocratic agenda in Georgia. As highlighted by several articles by journalists, academics, and bloggers on Johnson’s Russia List (JRL), much of the Western media either purposefully or stupidly ignored Georgia’s responsibility for the conflict. The danger is that the West focused its attention not on trying to understand the conflict, but on trying to figure out who started it. First it was Russia. Then it was Georgia. Everyone, including the media, the public, and most significantly, Western leaders, were distracted by trying to figure out who was to blame and creating stories to backup their assertions instead of realizing that in a conflict as complex and deeply rooted as this one, fixing blame on one party is not going to resolve anything, in fact, it makes the situation worse. Thus, while the stories circulating in the West changed from blaming Russia to blaming Georgia in November, this “new” information seemed to merely open another entertaining but petty and unhelpful debate that brought the international community no closer to effectively resolving the conflict.

An entry from Sean’s Russia Blog (SRB) included on JRL’s coverage of the conflict summarizes the growing change in perspective in the Western media. While the war may have ended, the contention surrounding its story was still raging on in November:

“The Ossetian War is now three months past, but the battle over the war’s narrative continues. There has been a turnaround in the Western media over the last few weeks. Whereas Russia was lambasted during the war as the evil villain and poor little Georgia the innocent victim…Georgia is now blamed for a reckless attack, and
even war crimes. To suggest anything of the sort three months ago would have been considered madness and laughed off as Putinist apologia.”

Sean continues by commenting that while the release of the Amnesty International report played a significant role in changing Western rhetoric about the war, as a whole the report “doesn’t reveal any new information but rather corroborates what was already known with more testimony” and that “the real truth was that those ‘civilian accounts’ and ‘facts’ were always there.” Additionally, Sean’s entry highlights Tilly’s argument that stories provide excellent vehicles for blame as they package who was judged to be responsible. What makes the media’s change in perspective interesting, however, is that the rhetoric of U.S. and EU leaders seemed to change around the same time, that is, away from solely blaming Russia and toward holding Saakashvili accountable for his aggressive actions.

As Charles King, professor at Georgetown University, pointed out in November 2008, “it’s time for the West to realize that Mikhail Saakashvili is no saint and that Georgia is not quite an innocent victim.” He explains that the West bought Saakashvili’s “story line of a small democratic ally being bullied by a rogue superpower” and that Russia’s version of the story, that “an unbalanced and power-hungry Georgian president was preparing genocide against the ethnic Ossetians, sold well at home but didn’t resonate so well internationally.” He chastised the U.S. for “the same simplistic thinking that helped cause the war” by overemphasizing “Georgia’s interests solely in the context of Russia’s nefarious gambits on

285 “Media’s Samokritika Over Ossetian War,” November 18, 2008 (The author is a graduate student in the History Department at UCLA), http://seansrussiablog.org, JRL 212 #38, November 19, 2008.

286 Ibid.


288 Ibid.
Eurasia’s strategic chessboard” and warned that the U.S. must base its policies on Georgia’s real needs and interests not just on “one man’s savvy marketing campaign.” 289

Anne Applebaum, journalist and author, commented in an Op-ed piece for the Washington Post, on the investigative reports from the New York Times, BBC, National Public Radio (NPR), European monitors, and others that offered seemingly “new” information on the start of August conflict. “Their most important conclusion?” she asked, that “Georgia started it and killed civilians in the process. My conclusion? We knew that already.” 290 Applebaum points to the fact that we “have known for some time, that Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili is susceptible to extreme bouts of criminal foolhardiness … We knew that about him –and so did the Russians.” 291 While it could be argued that Georgia ‘fired the first shot’ in this conflict, as Applebaum rightly points out, “it is important to focus, not just once but again and again, on the nuances, complications and layers of this story; it is one whose retelling has recently become an important propaganda tool in an ongoing transatlantic war of words.” As we have discussed, the underlying history behind and causes of this conflict are far too complex to be boiled down to Russia started it or Georgia started it. These simplified stories, as Applebaum indicates, are designed for dramatic effect and to back up the foreign policy interests of the countries telling them. As Tilly warned us, the power (and danger) of blame stories is their very simplicity, for it is a way to attempt to hide the real motivations behind an accusation of blame. In our case, the West’s focus on blaming Russia while selectively ignoring Georgia’s role in the conflict was reflective of its own

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289 Ibid.


291 Ibid.
foreign policy interests rather than providing any real insight or understanding of the history behind or implications of the conflict.

**The U.S. Story Changes**

In November 2008, just a few months after the end the August conflict, the U.S. stance on the August 2008 conflict began to change dramatically. Initially, as we have discussed, the U.S. was an outspoken supporter of Georgia and largely critical of Russia. Following the publication of the *New York Times* article citing the reports from international monitors with the OSCE that questioned Georgia’s telling of the events, State Department Deputy Spokesman, Robert Wood, said that while the Georgia attack was a mistake, it did not justify the Russian response. Wood said that the important thing now is not assigning blame, but returning stability to the region.292 “I think we need to get away from looking at who did what first, because, as I said, I don’t think we’ll ever really get to the bottom of that,” said Wood. “The important thing is for us to move forward, and that’s what we’re trying to do, in terms of trying to reconstruct Georgia…”293 *Voice of America* also reported a senior U.S. State Department official as saying that the Bush administration did not want to fix blame for the war because it could inflame matters.294 This is clearly a dramatic change in rhetoric from the stories that were told during and immediately after the conflict. While Wood’s comment about not focusing on who started it seems objective and fair, in reality the U.S. administration realized that its original story no longer held up and thus “moving

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293 Ibid.

294 Ibid.
forward” meant ignoring the complications of the conflict and returning to “normalcy” as quickly as possible.

The most dramatic change in U.S. policy, however, came in late November 2008 when the U.S. administration announced that it was no longer supporting a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Georgia. The news was especially surprising given the fact that the U.S. continued to support a MAP for Georgia during and immediately after the 2008 conflict despite the concerns of some other NATO member countries. On November 26, 2008, Condoleezza Rice tabled the plan to offer Georgia (and Ukraine) a NATO MAP at the following week’s NATO meeting in Brussels. Rice insisted the move did not signal a policy shift, but that her statement was made in light of European concerns that both countries are far from ready to join the alliance. “Georgia and Ukraine are not ready for membership. That is very clear,” Rice said. An article by the Associated Press stated that in the face of continued opposition from France and Germany, U.S. officials said they would abandon the push to get the action plans next week and would try to assist the two countries in joining via different means. Additionally, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, Daniel Fried, stated on November 25, 2008, “I think it’s fair to predict there would be no NATO membership offer for some years to come…they [Georgia and Ukraine] have a lot of work to do and we will help them.” Fried conceded, however, that the MAP “was never an end in itself,” but only one possible path to membership. “We want to keep that process in motion,


even though the circumstances have changed…” Fried said. Russia applauded the U.S. decision to delay Georgia’s NATO membership. “I am pleased that reason has prevailed, unfortunately only at the end of the current U.S. administration,” Russian President Dmitri Medvedev said during a broadcast on Russian television on November 28, 2008.

While the U.S. administration’s more critical assessment of Georgia’s role as well as its decision to hold off further support for Georgia’s immediate membership in NATO showed constraint and more thoughtful consideration of the international situation in the aftermath of the conflict, the dramatic shift in its rhetoric and unclear polices seemed to send a mixed message to Russia. In suddenly trying to be more objective, the U.S. (and EU as we will see) not only revealed that its original assessment of the situation was incorrect and based on preconceived notions of who was to blame, but also seemingly gave the U.S. an excuse to shy away from enacting any strict penalties against Russia and Georgia. The result is that not only does the conflict remain unresolved and the perpetrators of violence unpunished (as was notably also the case in 1992 and 2004), but the potential for yet another conflict is a serious possibility.

The EU Story Changes

Just as “new” information was being released about Georgia’s role in the conflict, the EU’s position toward Russia also began to change. In early November 2008, the European Commission called on EU member states to unfreeze partnership talks with Russia, which

\[298\] McKeeby.

\[299\] Gutterman.
were suspended following the conflict in Georgia. \(^{300}\) According to a statement released by Brussels, the Commission argued for renewed Partnership and Cooperation talks for two reasons: “first because this would allow the EU to pursue its own interests with Russia, and secondly because this is the best way to engage with Russia on the basis of a unified position.” \(^{301}\) A spokesperson for the Commission also emphasized that this does not mean a return to business as usual, though many East European members argued it would be viewed that way by Russia. \(^{302}\) On November 10, 2008, however, the EU announced it would resume partnership talks with Russia. \(^{303}\) All EU member countries, except for Lithuania, seemed to be in agreement that it would be in the EU’s interests for talks to resume, but more wary members, such as Britain and Sweden, emphasized that EU-Russia relations must kept under tight review and that the EU must emphasize that it was not simply “turning the page on the conflict in Georgia.” \(^{304}\)

In the end, after much debate, many EU member countries decided that it was more important to keep Russia engaged than to isolate it with harsh policies or severe punishment. While the EU statements emphasized that resuming talks with Moscow was not a return to business as usual, the EU’s policies have not done enough to make this clear to the Russian leadership. The *Moscow Times* reported that Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, said

\[^{300}\] “European Commission Calls for Talks With Russia,” *Spiegel Online*, November 6, 2008, [http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,588908,00.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,588908,00.html), accessed December 31, 2008.

\[^{301}\] Ibid.

\[^{302}\] Ibid.


\[^{304}\] Ibid.
“we ... express our wish to turn the page and increase mutual activities.” By failing to enact more severe repercussions against the warring parties, the EU sent the message to Russia, Georgia, and the rest of the international community that it was more important to get things back to normal and move past this horrible conflict, as if it never happened. The EU, like the U.S., has effectively let Russia and Georgia get away with serious atrocities without any consequences other than verbal reprimanding and the temporary suspension of partnership talks.

Conclusion

The shifting Western stories about who was to blame for the 2008 conflict in Georgia are excellent examples of how stories simplify complicated situations into easy-to-understand cause and effect scenarios, often dramatizing the events into relatable stories such as “good versus evil” or “David versus Goliath,” in order to clearly and easily incriminate one side over the other. Obviously, these stories merely served to backup the U.S. and EU’s foreign policy interests. Both the U.S. and EU were facing problems with how to deal with a more aggressive Russia and the U.S. had the additional vested interest in supporting Saakashvili’s regime in Georgia. Thus, blaming Russia “made sense.” The challenge for the international community was to frame the conflict in such a way that Russia looked like the “bad guy.” Russia’s disproportionate use of force gave the West something on which to focus attention and blame, thus enabling them to ignore and/or cover up Georgia’s role, not to mention the South Ossetians, who never seemed to be blamed, but certainly contributed to the outbreak of

305 Brunnstrom, and John.
violence. Therefore, when the Western media began to point to “new evidence” of Georgia’s role in the conflict, the West had to revise its story. In reality, the information was not really new; so much as it was probably ignored. Reports released not long after the conflict ended indicated that Saakashvili attacked Tskhinvali before the Russians sent in their troops. Not to mention that ICG, as early as August, implicated all sides, including the West, in contributing to this conflict. Therefore, U.S. and EU leaders also began reevaluate not only their rhetoric but also their policies. The U.S. notably backed off its push to get Georgia into NATO and the EU reopened partnership talks with Russia.

There are two problems with the outcome of the U.S. and EU responses. First, the constant back and forth about who started the conflict and who was to blame not only gave the ridiculous impression that only side could be responsible for this conflict but also distracted the international community, not to mention the public, from the complexity of situation, thus sucking them into the never-ending blame game that ultimately says a lot but does nothing. Secondly, the trend of trying to get things back to normal without holding the warring parties accountable by means of tough punishments, or at least penalties, for the atrocities they committed, which included the murder and displacement of innocent civilians, is extremely dangerous because it sends the message that such acts are permissible and will not punished. In fact, it seems that rather than being punished, Russia and Georgia were practically “rewarded” with new partnership agreements. The EU reopened PCA talks with Russia in late 2008 and in January 2009, the U.S. signed a strategic partnership agreement

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306 For more information on South Ossetia’s role in provoking the August 2008 conflict, please see ICG, “The Fallout,” pp. 1-2.
with Georgia to cooperate in areas of defense, trade, energy security, cultural exchanges and strengthening democratic institutions.\textsuperscript{307}

While the war between Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia was relatively small and quick, its magnitude and consequences will be large and long-lasting. Emerson dramatically described it as “Europe’s first war of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.” The problem is, however, that judging from the U.S. and EU’s unwillingness to hold any of the parties accountable, as evidence by their failing to exact any substantive penalties or repercussions, shows that the war, unfortunately, was not understood to be as significant as it in fact it was.

Thus, the international community has once again proven that it is unable to prevent conflicts in vulnerable areas, despite clear signs of persistent provocation by the involved parties. Yet again, warning signs were ignored and violence escalated to war. This is, of course, not the first time this has happened in South Ossetia, which makes the 2008 conflict between Georgia, Russia, and South Ossetia not only the most tragic but also the most embarrassing for the international community.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

“The war over South Ossetia lasted only one week, but will have devastating consequences for civilians for generations to come...Focusing on who started the war or who committed worse atrocities, as some observers are, misses the point, which is the urgent need to hold all who are responsible accountable and to allow displaced people to return home safely.” Rachel Denber, *Human Rights Watch*

The 2008 conflict between Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia lasted for only five days, but its implications for future international conflict prevention and mediation efforts as well as for international relations will last for years to come. The most important objective, however, is to address the needs of victims, which means that the blaming needs to stop and the perpetrators of violence must be held accountable. Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia have once again confirmed that they are unable to resolve this conflict themselves and thus it is of the utmost importance that the international community remains engaged and dedicated to resolving this conflict in order to prevent another outbreak of violence that could have far worse consequences.

The Real Victims

In the aftermath of the August 2008 conflict, it is important to remember that the real victims were not Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, or Russian President Dmitri Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, or South Ossetian de-facto President

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Eduard Kokoity, or their governments, but the innocent civilians who were violently attacked, displaced, or killed. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Georgia estimated that as of September 12, 2008, a total of 192,000 people were displaced as a result of the most recent conflict. Of that total, 127,000 people were displaced in Georgia, 30,000 in South Ossetia, and 35,000 in Russia. Additionally, UNHCR reports that Georgia is also dealing with 222,000 cases of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from previous conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the early 1990s. The precise number of civilians who were killed during the August conflict, however, is unclear. Just one day after the conflict started, high-level Russian government officials and authorities in South Ossetia, estimated there were between 1,500 to 2,000 civilian casualties. These estimates seem exaggerated and doubtful according to organizations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the International Crisis Group (ICG) who have reported various figures from governments, hospitals, and other sources, in the low to mid one-hundreds.

As HRW explains,

“The issue of civilian casualty figures has been enormously controversial, in part due to the acute propaganda war that has surrounded this conflict. Countless officials, journalists, and the like have asked us how many civilians were killed in the conflict. In response to these queries Human Rights Watch has emphasized that we do not have the capacity to make a definitive determination of civilian casualties. We have questioned the initial 1,500-2,000 figure and the methodology used to arrive at it. We have emphasized that these were not reliable figures because it was not clear how


such figures were compiled so quickly, as early as August 8 and 9, since many of the 
dead in South Ossetia and throughout the region were initially buried in the 
courtyards by relatives or neighbors, and that therefore the task of gathering such 
figures is difficult and time-consuming. “312

Whether one, one hundred, or one thousand people were killed, any number of civilian 
causalities is unjustified and inexcusable. The fact that hundreds of civilians were killed and 
almost 200,000 people were displaced indicates the gravity of this conflict and the serious 
need for not only international mediation, but also international aid to help those displaced to 
return to their homes as soon as possible as well as to rebuild infrastructure that was damaged 
or destroyed during the fighting. All sides, Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia, are 
responsible for the death and displacement of civilians. Therefore, each of these actors must 
be held accountable not only for the outbreak of violence but also for ensuring that victims 
receive the aid they need. Additionally, the governments of Russia, Georgia, and South 
Ossetia must be held responsible for ensuring that those who perpetrated acts of violence 
against innocent civilians are prosecuted and held accountable for the crimes they committed.

**Repercussions and Punishment**

In situations where blame has been assigned, a punishment usually follows, indicating 
that the blamed must now face the consequences of its actions. As Tilly explains, the greater 
the estimated decrease in value caused by a particular outcome, the larger the punishment 
will be to the person or party that was blamed.313 In other words, just as amount of blame 
received depends on extent that the agent was deemed competent and responsible for an act,

312 “Letter to Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili Regarding Civilian Casualty Figures in South Ossetia.”

313 Tilly, p. 40.
typically the level of punishment is equal to the level of severity of the outcome of that act. Therefore, the goal is to “make the punishment fit the crime,” thus ensuring that justice was served and that victims are compensated for their loss. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 1, blamers usually try to calculate the precise role an actor played in bringing about a negative outcome and in turn demand that the perpetrator’s penalty match the loss closely. Tilly notes that this sounds reasonable because “it follows a set of rules that evolution has wired into human brains: Do unto others as they have done to you.” Thus, if we follow this rubric, Russia especially, but also Georgia and South Ossetia, are due to face some severe repercussions for their actions in August.

The 2008 conflict in South Ossetia, however, does not seem to follow this rule of assigning punishments. Presumably, war would be one of the worst outcomes on a scale of severity, negativity, and loss; thus, it would follow, that a similarly severe punishment, or at least harsh consequences, should be exacted on the three warring parties. This was not the case. The international community’s response, in terms of its actions, has been fairly mild compared to the destruction of infrastructure, displacement of people, and loss of life as a result of this conflict. While the international community made many threats of punishment, none of them were carried out in 2008 other than the suspension of EU partnership talks with Russia and the U.S. backing off from its strong support of NATO membership to Georgia.

Initially, however, there were threats and warnings from the U.S. and some members of the EU, including the possibility of suspending Russia from the G8 group of the world’s leading industrialized countries, blocking Russia’s entry in the World Trade Organization (WTO), and calling on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to take away the 2014

314 Tilly, p. 107.
Olympics awarded to the Russian city of Sochi, on the Black Sea coast, not far (roughly 15-20 miles) from Russia’s border with Abkhazia. The U.S. and UK hinted that Russia could be kicked out of the G8 following the conflict in August. Additionally, the G7 (all the G8 members except Russia) issued statements condemning both Russia’s disproportionate use of force in Georgia as well as its recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. “We deplore Russia’s excessive use of military force in Georgia...” and “Russia’s recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia violates the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia and is contrary to UN Security Council resolutions supported by Russia,” the joint statement said. A spokeswoman for the British Foreign Office commented, “This is an unprecedented step. This is believed to be the first time fellow members have all come out so strongly against the actions of another member.”

Another possible punishment that was tossed around was blocking Russia’s WTO membership. U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez told Der Spiegel, that the U.S. has “welcomed them [Russia] into the group of the leading industrial nations. We welcomed Russia’s desire to join the World Trade Organization” but “they are putting all that at risk,” after the war in Georgia. While Gutierrez backed off from saying that Russia should be kicked out of the G8 and not allowed to join the WTO, he did suggest that the U.S. could

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317 Ibid.
“stop being an advocate for Russia’s entry into the world community.” ICG agrees that Russia should face repercussions: “Moscow must be made to understand the advantages for its prestige, power and economy of being a partner in ensuring security in Europe rather than an outlier, subject to threats of exclusion from such institutions as the G8 and World Trade Organization (WTO).” Ultimately, however, Russia was not suspended from the G8 or from WTO membership, just reprimanded.

Another potential punishment that was considered more heavily in the U.S. was revoking the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games from Russia. U.S. Representatives Allyson Schwartz (D-Pa.) and Bill Shuster (R-Pa.) announced their intention to introduce a resolution calling on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to find a new venue for the 2014 Winter Olympics. “Russia must realize that its actions in Georgia will not be ignored by the international community. We stand by Georgia, our friend and ally, and call on the IOC to designate a new venue for the Russian Olympics,” said Schwartz. “Russia’s belligerence against the people of Georgia and their democratically elected government cannot go unpunished by the international community,” said Shuster. “The Olympics are a time honored event that allows the nations of the world to put their differences aside for the purity of sport. Russia’s blatant violation of the long respected ‘Olympic truce’ should be enough for the IOC to join with us in choosing a more worthy venue for the 2014 Winter Olympics.”

Notably, Georgia’s “belligerence” against the people of South Ossetia was not

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319 ICG, “The Fallout,” p. i.

mentioned, nor was its contribution to the “blatant violation” of the ‘Olympic truce’ with its attack on Tskhinvali. While there was a concerted effort in the U.S. Congress to push for the revocation of the Sochi Olympics from Russia, this also did not happen, and preparations are moving ahead for the games.  

Michael Emerson highlighted that in addition to the EU’s statements condemning Russia’s actions, the suspension of partnership talks, and boycotting of the Sochi Olympics, the EU has additional repercussions it could invoke against Russia. These included the revocation of visa facilitation for Russians, suspension of cooperative programs with Russia, as well as joint economic sanctions with the U.S., which could be aimed at banning Russian direct and real estate investment in the EU and/or freezing the financial assets of Russian companies and individuals. Similarly to the U.S., the EU did not exact any harsh punishments against Russia in an effort to keep Russia engaged as a partner. Additionally, neither the U.S. nor the EU discussed tough consequences for the Georgians or South Ossetians, most likely because they were usually seen as the victims.  

Initially, U.S. and EU rhetoric and threats of punishment were severe, as we have seen above and in Chapter 5. Ultimately, however, both sides backed down, acknowledging that blaming was not helpful in resolving the situation. Consequently, Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia faced very mild, almost negligible repercussions. The fact that these three warring parties were not punished on a level commensurate with the atrocities they committed could be attributed to the nature of the international system. International  


321 For more information, see the IOC’s Sochi page: http://www.olympic.org/uk/games/sochi/index_uk.asp.

relations theory stipulates that since there is no international policeman or enforceable international governing order, it is difficult if not impossible for states, as sovereign actors in an anarchical system, to punish each other because there is no higher authority that can effectively determine and enforce such punishments on sovereign states. While various international organizations and institutions, such as the United Nations and the International Criminal Court (ICC), have been developed in an attempt to establish and international governing system, most of these organizations do not have “teeth” and are ultimately subordinate to state sovereignty.

Thus, this situation leaves us with several important questions to consider. First, if it was decided that punishments were necessary, who would be responsible for devising and enforcing these punishments or penalties? Given the nature of the international system, is it possible for one state to effectively punish another? Additionally, is Russia, a “big” state, who sits on the UN Security Council and is an important strategic partner of the U.S. and EU, “immune” to the effects of potential repercussions? Second, how could the possible punishments described above be enforced without further worsening the relationships between Georgia, Russia, and South Ossetia as well as their relationships with the international community? The act of punishing reinforces blame and could possibly encourage further divisiveness between the blamer/punisher and the blamed, i.e. the international community and the warring parties. Third, and perhaps most importantly, does a lack of punishment imply impunity? In other words, by not punishing any of the warring parties, is the international community sending the message that their actions were permissible? As well as give the green light for them to be repeated? Not exacting penalties against Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia additionally makes the international community
look weak and not willing to “get their hands dirty.” Establishing appropriate repercussions is not easy, of course, as it would require the EU to unite not only its own members but also, most likely, with the United States. However, taking punishments too far or “disproportionately” punishing Russia could make matters worse by encouraging divisiveness rather than cohesiveness.

The Role of Blame

As discussed in this paper, assigning blame is the way in which people, whether they are siblings, parents, friends, journalists, lawyers, or heads of state interpret as well as respond to complicated events and situations. Highly contentious events, such as conflict and war, are often not only battlegrounds for soldiers, but also for blame. As Tilly explains, war leads to the collective assignment of credit and blame more often than any other human activity. “Even revolutions, bungled natural disasters, political corruption, and economic crises produce less collective pointing of fingers at villains and heroes.”323 The assignment of blame in these situations is significant because the agent, or actor who is blamed, as well as the level of blame that the agent receives will often dictate what action, usually a form of punishment, will be taken against it. The problem is that the assignment of blame depends on how the events are interpreted, which will vary from person to person and state to state, based on bias, whether conscious or unconscious, underlying motives, interests, and so on. Therefore, the actor that is responsible may not always be the one that is blamed and subsequently punished.

323 Tilly, p. 127.
The other problem that the assignment of blame presents is that it divides actors into very distinct groups of “right” and “wrong.” Does this mean that if two actors get in a fight (or cause a war) then one has to be at fault while the other must be the victim? Is it not possible that both actors are at fault, but perhaps for different reasons? Blame often distracts and impedes observers from taking into account these smaller, but still important details that may indicate that both actors are to blame and therefore specific punishments must be determined for each actor based on each specific outcome.

Assigning blame also asks for justice to be served. If an actor is blamed, it means that he or she did something wrong and must pay a price, often in the form of compensation to the victims of the agent’s action. But who determines an appropriate punishment or ensures adequate compensation? On the civilian level, these decisions are decided in courtrooms by a jury and a judge, but in instances of international conflict and war, there is not always a judge and a jury to try the offenders. Thus, on the international level, the question of how justice will be served and how victims will be compensated is difficult to determine and, as a result, may lead to none of the offenders being held accountable.

The 2008 conflict in South Ossetia highlights these problems and leaves us with a difficult situation. Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia were not held adequately accountable for the outcome of their actions, but then again, even if they were, it may have just made matters worse. In fact, as of March 2009, the U.S. has offered to push the “reset button” on its relationship with Russia.324 Additionally, it seems that the options for effective mediation by the international community are limited and have thus far proved unsuccessful. Efforts to

engage Russian, Georgian, South Ossetian, and Abkhazian leaders in dialogue at a series of conventions held in Geneva, Switzerland under EU, UN, and OSCE mediation has made little or no progress due to continued arguments over the status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia’s unilateral recognition of these two regions not only undermined Georgia’s territorial integrity, which Russia supposedly claimed it supported, it also makes international mediation efforts that much more difficult.

Blaming further impedes these efforts by turning a complex conflict into a competition over which side was more responsible for starting the conflict or which side caused more death and destruction, the “winner” of which would then be awarded with international condemnation and blame. Therefore, blame forces members of the international community to take the side of one country over another and subsequently get caught up in justifying why they picked that side, when in reality, the international community should not be fighting for one aggressor over the other, but for the rights and protection of innocent civilians. The conflict between Georgia, Russia, and South Ossetia, is indeed a difficult one that is steeped in a history of deep tensions and antagonisms, but it is not one that can or will ever be solved by violence. I firmly believe that this conflict could have been prevented, had the international community paid more attention to it following the conflicts in the early 1990s. If nothing else, I hope that this conflict serves as a serious learning tool to improve conflict prevention and mediation efforts in the future.

Thus, the most important question we need to ask ourselves in the aftermath of this conflict is not “who is to blame?” but “how do we keep this conflict from happening again?”

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APPENDIX I:
August 2008 Georgia-Russia-South Ossetia Conflict
Battle Sites

APPENDIX II:

Map of Georgia and Eastern Europe

http://www.mytravelguide.com/g/maps/Eastern-Europe-map.gif.
APPENDIX III:

Map of Attacks with Reference to Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Pipeline


APPENDIX IV:

Map of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Adjara, and the North Caucasus

Map of Roki Tunnel


APPENDIX V:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Timeline

Ministry Of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
September 30, 2008
SHORT CHRONOLOGY 331
Peacekeeping Operation to Force Georgia to Peace

7 August 2008

00.40 - 00.57 - Georgian side opens cannon artillery fire on the SARABUKI and DMENISI area.

01.00 - Georgian armed forces command takes a decision to muster militiamen.

02.13 - Georgian artillery opens fire from the KERE area at TSKHINVALI.

09.40 - UBIATI comes under mortar shelling.


14.45 - Mortar shelling of NULI and AVNEVI.

15.43 - 16.15 - Georgian armed forces units in AVNEVI fire from cannon artillery, tanks and IFVs towards KHETAGUROVO; fire attacks delivered on the SVERI and ZEMO-NIKOZI area and on the southeastern outskirts of TSKHINVALI.

19.00 - Shelling of TSKHINVALI.

23.30 - Commander of peacekeeping operations at the Joint Staff of Georgian Armed Forces Brig. Gen. MAMUKA KURASHVILI announces the start of combat operations against “Ossetian separatists.”

23.40 - A massive fire attack on TSKHINVALI begins.

8 August 2008

02.30 - Georgian AF units capture MUGUTI and start an offensive operation in two directions: MUGUTI, AVNEVI and KHETAGUROVO and MUGUTI, ZEMO-NIKOZI and TSKHINVALI.

04.15 - Firing on TSKHINVALI begins. Georgian armed forces (tank units) fired by direct laying at the JPKF CHQ and peacekeeping battalion locations.

06.00 - Georgian units assume the offensive on the city’s southern outskirts.

07.40 - Georgian air force delivers an air strike on the DZHAVA cantonment and DIDI GUPTA Village.

11.00 - The Security Council of South Ossetia asks Russia for help.

11.54 - General mobilization declared in Georgia. In TSKHINVALI Georgian AF units, having seized the Yuzhny peacekeeping battalion cantonment, fought for the cantonment Severny.

The Russian PKF battalion at Severny (upper) cantonment beat off 5 attacks and continued to fight. Its losses were: 2 men killed and 5 men wounded. The Government House of the Republic of South Ossetia destroyed, and the state command center moved to the JPKF CHQ area.

14.30 - Under these conditions the Russian Federation was compelled to reinforce its peacekeeping troops within the JPKF in order to carry out the peacekeeping tasks laid upon Russia, as well as to defend Russian citizens in South Ossetia.

22.00 - Reinforcement units advance toward the blocked peacekeepers in the DZHAVA-TSKHINVALI sector, and engage Georgian units six km northeast of TSKHINVALI; units of Russian peacekeepers dig in on TSKHINVALI’s northern outskirts. A task force in the DZHAVA area formed to relieve the peacekeeping battalion.
APPENDIX VI:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Timeline
საქართველოს საგარეო საქმეთა სამინისტრო
Ministry Of Foreign Affairs Of Georgia
Timeline of Events in the Russians Invasion & Occupation of Georgia

The information below is accurate to the best of our knowledge, but is subject to verification.

7 August

- **09:00.** South Ossetian separatist government leader threatens to “clean Georgians out” from the region. In a morning interview with Russian news agencies, South Ossetian de facto president Eduard Kokoity declares that if the Georgian government does not withdraw its military forces from the region, he would start “to clean them out.” The Georgian military forces to which he refers are peacekeepers who are legally present in the South Ossetia conflict zone.

- **09:45.** A Russian military jet drops bombs near a Georgian military radar based 30 kilometers outside of the conflict zone. According to local civilian witnesses, at about 09.45, a fighter plane, presumed to be Russian (it enters Georgia from the South Ossetian conflict zone) drops 3-5 bombs near the village of Shavshvebi, approximately 300-500 meters from the location of a Georgian military radar.

- **15:00.** For the second time in two days, the separatist government of South Ossetia refuses to negotiate with Georgian envoy Temur Yakobashvili, who again travels to Tskhinvali to plead for peace. Yakobashvili visits the conflict zone in the morning of August 7 to meet with representatives of the separatist government. The separatists refuse to meet or negotiate with him. Instead, Yakobashvili confers in Tskhinvali with Marat Kulakhmetov, commander of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces.

- **16:00.** Three Georgian servicemen from the Georgian peacekeeping battalion are injured by paramilitary troops. Separatist militia resume shelling the Georgian villages of Nuli and Avnevi. Three Georgian servicemen are injured after the South Ossetian separatist forces blow up an infantry combat vehicle belonging to the Georgian peacekeeping battalion in Avnevi. Georgian police respond by firing towards the separatist militia in the village of Khetagurovo, where two separatist militiamen are killed and two more wounded. Later, the Georgian peacekeeping checkpoint in Avnevi is bombed and several Georgian servicemen and civilians are killed.

- **18:30.** The President of Georgia announces a unilateral cease fire. Georgia announces a unilateral ceasefire in an attempt by the Government to defuse tensions. Temur Yakobashvili, the Georgian state minister for reintegration and envoy for conflict resolution, says at a press conference at 18:40 that he is continually seeking to contact the separatist authorities, but without success.

- **20:00.** President Saakashvili calls on Russia to recall those of its officials who are members of the South Ossetia separatist government. President Saakashvili, speaking with journalists at the military hospital in Gori (where he is visiting two injured Georgian servicemen), reaffirms that despite the deadly attacks on Georgian villages, the Government of Georgia is showing maximum restraint. The President also calls on Russia to “to recall its officials” from South Ossetia, who are members of the so-called South Ossetian government.

- **20:30.** Despite Georgia’s unilateral cease-fire, the village of Avnevi in the South Ossetia conflict

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zone— inhabited by ethnic Georgians— is totally destroyed by mortar fire. Despite Georgia’s unilateral ceasefire, the Georgian village of Avnevi again comes under fire from South Ossetian militiamen. The village is totally destroyed.

- **21:00.** The Security Council of the separatist government threatens to employ Russian Cossack mercenary troops fight Georgian peacekeepers. The chairman of the separatist republic’s Security Council, Anatoly Barankevich, says that armed Cossack militia from North Ossetia are heading towards South Ossetia to fight Georgian peacekeepers.

- **22:30.** Separatist paramilitaries attack the Georgian-controlled village of Prisi, leaving several civilians wounded.

- **23:30.** Heavy shelling by separatist forces destroy Georgian police stations on the administrative border of South Ossetia. Separatist authorities open fire on all Georgian checkpoints around the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali at about 23:30, including those located near the villages of Tamarasheni and Kurta. The police stations in the Georgian Kurta is destroyed as a result of heavy shelling.

- **23:30.** 100 Russian armored vehicles and Russian troops invade Georgia, crossing the Roki Tunnel from Russia into Georgia. The Government of Georgia receives reliable information from three separate sources that approximately 100 armored vehicles and trucks of the Russian armed forces, filled with Russian soldiers, are passing from Russia over the border of Georgia through the Roki Tunnel and are heading towards Tskhinvali. The Russian Federation is thus directly violating the sovereignty of Georgia, as these new forces are regular Russian military and not peacekeepers.

**8 August**

- **Early morning.** South Ossetian paramilitaries and Russian peacekeepers direct heavy fire on Georgian peacekeepers. Intensive fire emanates from the Ossetian villages of Khetagurovo, Dmenisi, Sarabuki, and Ubiat. Separatist authorities continue shelling Georgian police and peacekeeping units with mortars and artillery. The Government of Georgia orders its forces to return only limited fire in order to defend their positions.

- **04:28.** For the first time, and in response to the entry of Russian armed forces into Georgian sovereign territory, Georgian military (as opposed to Georgian peacekeepers) enter the conflict zone. Georgian government forces take control of six villages in the Tskhinvali region: Muguti, Dmenisi, Didmukha, Okona, Akut, and Kohati and enter the village of Khetagurovo.

- **05:30.** Additional Russian troops enter Georgia through the Roki Tunnel in South Ossetia. They pass Java, cross the Gufta Bridge, and advance one the Dzara road towards Tskhinvali.

- **08:00.** Russian troops on the Gufta Bridge, connecting Djava and Tskhinvali, are the targets of a Georgian aerial bombardment. Later, two more groups of Russian troops enter South Ossetia through the Roki Tunnel, which connects Russia and Georgia, but cannot cross the Gufta Bridge, which has been destroyed; they advance instead by the Geri-Dmenisi road.

- **09:00.** Georgian forces control the villages of Gromi, Artsevi, Tsinagara, Znauri, Sarabuki, Khetagurovo, Atotsi, Kvemo Okuna, Dmenisi, Muguti, and Didmukha.

- **09:45.** A Russian military fighter plane bombs a Georgian military radar that lies 30 kilometers outside of the conflict zone.

- **10.30.** Seven civilians are injured by bombs dropped by Russian Su-24 fighter jets on the village of Variani in the Kareli district, 75 kilometers west of Tbilisi and 20 kilometers outside of the conflict zone.

- **10:50.** Six Russian Su-24 fighter jets enter Georgia from the Russian Federation.

- **10:57.** Russian aircraft drop three bombs on the town of Gori, well outside of the conflict zone. One bomb falls near the Gori stadium, a second near the Gorijvari slope, and a third near an artillery brigade.

- **11:45.** The emergency service of the Civil Aviation Authority reports receiving a signal from
what is presumed to be a Russian fighter plane that has crashed near the Iuri range, 17 kilometers south of Gori.

- **11:45.** Four Su-24 Russian fighter jets enter Georgia. Four Su-24 Russian fighter jet enter Georgia from the direction of Stepantsminda (Kazbeg), northeast of the Roki Tunnel and outside of the conflict zone. Two of them pass Tbilisi and circle around Marneuli, south of Tbilisi. The other two circle above Gudauri, north of Tbilisi.

- **12:05.** A Russian Su-24 fighter jet enters Georgian airspace from Russia and remains over Tskhinvali until 12:15.

- **13:00.** Part of Tskhinvali comes under the control of the Georgian army and fighting continues in the center of the city.

- **14:15.** The Government of Georgia announces a three-hour ceasefire. The Georgian government announces a ceasefire from 15:00 till 18:00 to allow civilians to leave Tskhinvali. The Government of Georgia offers the separatists full amnesty and humanitarian aid if they surrender.

- **14:30.** Georgian government forces control Tskhinvali; resistance comes from small militia groups.

- **15:05.** A Russian airplane bombs Vaziani airfield on the outskirts of Tbilisi. A Russian bomber enters Georgia from the direction of Tedzami, just south of Gori, and drops two bombs on the Vaziani military airport.

- **16:00.** Georgian servicemen surround the village of Znauri near Tskhinvali. About 40 police officers and reservists are trapped in Znauri school.

- **16:30.** Russia bombs Georgian airfields south of Tbilisi. Russian planes bomb the Marneuli and Bolnisi military airbases, 20 kilometers and 35 kilometers south of Tbilisi respectively. Two Georgian aircraft are destroyed on ground, as are several buildings. There are numerous casualties.

- **17:00.** The Georgian airbase at Marneuli, 20 kilometers from Tbilisi and outside the conflict zones, is bombed again, causing casualties.

- **17:35.** Marneuli airbase bombed for a third time. The Marneuli airbase is bombed for a third time, resulting in 1 death and 4 injured. As a result of the three bombings, three AN-2 type planes and several military vehicles are destroyed.

- **18:32.** Georgian villages come under Russian aerial and artillery fire. From Gorge, northeast of Tskhinvali, comes under intensive artillery fire from Russian forces. The villages of Avnevi and Phrisi, in the Tskhinvali region, are bombarded by Russian military aircraft.

- **18:44.** Russian ground forces of the 58th Army attack Tskhinvali. A column of Russian tanks, armored vehicles, and trucks reach Tskhinvali by the Dzara bypass road, 2 kilometers west of Tskhinvali. Russian forces open intensive fire on Georgian forces located in Tskhinvali and on neighboring heights. A second column, also having come from Russia via the Roki Tunnel, is stopped near the Georgian government-controlled area of Dmenisi, 7 kilometers north of Tskhinvali. Russian forces open heavy fire on Georgian forces.

- **18:45.** Five Russian airplanes bomb Georgian artillery brigade in Gori.

- **19:18.** Georgian forces down Russian jet near Tskhinvali, one of 5 planes shot down during the day.

- **19:20.** Russian jets pass over the town of Ambrolauri, outside of the conflict zone, 170 kilometers northwest of Tbilisi.

- **20:30.** Georgian troops withdraw from Tskhinvali. After severe clashes, Georgian forces start to withdraw from the center of the town, holding their positions at its southern outskirts. Russian tanks enter the eastern part of Tskhinvali.

- **22:40.** According to the data of the Ministry of Defense of Georgia Russian planes violated Georgian airspace a total of 22 times during the day.
APPENDIX VII:

Timeline by Gordon Hahn

AUGUST 7

By the morning of August 7 Georgia had amassed 12,000 troops on its border to South Ossetia, and 75 tanks and armored personnel carriers were positioned near Gori, according to Western observers interviewed after the war. [Manfred Ertel, Uwe Klussmann, Susanne Koebl, Walter Mayr, Matthias Schepp, Holger Stark and Alexander Szandar, “Road to War in Georgia,” Der Spiegel, 25 August 2008, posted on Johnson’s Russia List, #162, 31 August 2008, www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/ (accessed 31 August 2008)].

South Ossetia president Kokoity states that “a large part of Georgia’s armed forces are located in the conflict zone” and that on the previous day Georgia brought up from Gori 26 152-millimeter howitzers, 20 tanks, and a large number self-propelled ordnance to level fire on the Prisi highground, which Georgian forces tried to take. According to Kokoity, the Georgians were stopped by Ossetian forces. [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226737.html citing RIA ‘Novosoti’ and www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226738.html]

The South Ossetian side reports weapons fire directed from the Georgian-controlled village of Erdevi aimed at the village of the Ossetian village of Dmenis beginning at 00:05am and intensifying as the night went on. Some time later Russian news agency ‘Interfax’ reports the sound of large caliber ordnance exploding on Tskhinvali’s north side. [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226717.html]

[At 9:45am a Russian military jet drops bombs near a Georgian military radar based 30 kilometers outside of the conflict zone. According to local civilian witnesses, at about 9:45am, a fighter plane, presumed to be Russian (it enters Georgia from the South Ossetian conflict zone) drops 3-5 bombs near the village of Shavshvebi, approximately 300-500 meters from the location of a Georgian military radar.]

South Ossetian MVD chief Medoev claims Ossetian forces have retaken the highground near Nul. [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226717.html] [[Separatist militia resume shelling the Georgian villages of Nuli.]]

Citing South Ossetian Deputy Defense Minister Gassaev, ‘Interfax’ reports: Georgian “armour, artillery, and troops” are concentrating around the village of Dmenis and that it is under heavy fire with casualties and 20 percent of its houses destroyed; the villages of Sarabuk and Satikar are also under fire; and Georgian forces are firing and advancing on the Prisi highground. The South Ossetian authorities claim that their forces withheld return fire for a while, but now Ossetian forces have begun to respond in kind. [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226720.html]

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Tskhinvali states that the number of wounded on the Ossetian side as a result of heavy caliber artillery and mortar fire on Tskhinvalkli coming from the Georgian villages of Ergneti and Nikozi is eight. [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226742.html]

Georgian Reintegration Minister Yakobashvili says the overnight fighting occurred as Georgian forces responded to fire from the Ossetian side which fired thinking Georgian forces had taken the Nul highground. He calls on the Ossetian side to cease firing on Georgian villages. [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226735.html] -- Georgia’s Rustavi-2 television reports that the Ossetian side directed “intensive fire” on the Georgian villages of Eredvi and Prisi all night and later fired on the Sarabuk strategic highground wounding two. [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226737.html]

Georgian fire (from the Prednulskii district) resumes at 10am after a lull on Ubiati. [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226739.html]

Interfax reports eyewitnesses seeing 20 trucks of soldiers, 20 Toyota jeeps, 3 APCs, 3 rapid-fire artillery systems, 3 artillery canons and all together some 200 soldiers moving from Kutaisi to Gori. [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226757.html]

South Ossetia Security Council chairman Anatolii Barankevich accuses Georgia of moving large columns of troops towards South Ossetia, positioning 27 rapid-fire artillery systems ‘Grad’ in Gori raion, positioning forces all along South Ossetia’s border, and “beginning large-scale military aggression” against the breakaway republic. He states the village of Khetagurovo and its surroundings was subjected to two hours of heavy bombardment by Georgian 150-millimeter guns and that “the village is burning.” JPF spokesman Cpt. Ivanov reports that at 3:45pm local time the JCC’s Georgian military observers abandoned their post and at 3:50pm Georgian forces began firing on Khetagurovo. The JFP reports the area is quiet at 5:00pm. [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226765.html citing Gazeta.ru and Itar-Tass]

[[Separatist militia resume shelling the Georgian villages of Avnevi. Three Georgian servicemen are injured after the South Ossetian separatist forces blow up an infantry combat vehicle belonging to the Georgian peacekeeping battalion in Avnevi. Georgian police respond by firing towards the separatist militia in the village of Khetagurovo, where two separatist militiamen are killed and two more wounded. Later, the Georgian peacekeeping checkpoint in Avnevi is bombed and several Georgian servicemen and civilians are killed.] Georgian MVD official Shota Khizanoshvili reports that the Ossetian side subjected the Georgian village of Avnevi to ninety minutes of “intensive fire” and that two Georgian peacekeeping soldiers were wounded when their military transport vehicle exploded. Georgian Rustavi-2 television reported that near a vehicle carrying journalists was fired upon near Ergneti. [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226765.html citing ‘Novosti-Gruzia’]]

NATO and the EU urge Georgia and South Ossetia “not to resort to violence and show restraint.” [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226768.html]

[[At 6:30pm Georgian president Saakashvili announces a unilateral ceasefire in an attempt by the Government to defuse tensions. Temur Yakobashvili, the Georgian state minister for reintegration and envoy for conflict resolution, says at a press conference at 6:40pm that he is continually seeking to contact the separatist authorities, but without success.]]

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Kavkaz-uzel reports, without citing any source, that the Georgian and Ossetian sides have agreed to a ceasefire until a meeting between Georgian Integration Minister and South Ossetian JCC co-chairman Chochiev scheduled for August 8 under Russian sponsorship but outside the JCC framework. [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226771.html]

[[At 8:30pm, the village of Avnevi in the South Ossetia conflict zone inhabited by ethnic Georgians is totally destroyed by mortar fire.]]

At 8:30pm Western intelligence reports that Georgian artillery opens fire on Tskhinvali. [Ertel, Klussmann, Koelbl, Mayr, Schepp, Stark and Szandar, “Road to War in Georgia,” Der Spiegel, 25 August 2008.]

[[At 9:00pm South Ossetia Security Council chairman Barankevich threatens to employ Russian Cossack mercenary troops from North Ossetia heading towards South Ossetia to fight Georgian peacekeepers.]]


[[At 10:30pm South Ossetia paramilitaries attack the Georgian-controlled village of Prisi, leaving several civilians wounded.]]


At 11:30pm heavy shelling of Tskhinvali resumes directed from the Georgian villages of Ergneti and Nikozi using ‘Grad’ rapid-fire artillery systems. Georgian and Ossetian forces are engaged in battle at the edge of Tskhinvali [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226774.html citing Itas-Tass and the South Ossetian Press and Information Committee]

[[At 11:30pm heavy shelling by South Ossetian forces open fire on all Georgian checkpoints around the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali, including those located near the villages of Tamarasheni and Kurta. The police stations in the Georgian Kurta is destroyed as a result of heavy shelling.]]

Georgian MVD analytical department chief Shotashvili states there were 10 killed and more than 50 wounded by the alleged Ossetian shelling of Georgian villages that day. [www.kavkazuzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226772.html]

**AUGUST 8**

At 2:45am Georgia states its forces have occupied three villages in South Ossetia. [Petro, “Crisis in the Caucasus: A Unified Timeline” citing “Timeline by 13
At 4:45am Georgian reintegration Minister Yakobashvili states that Tskhinvali is nearly surrounded and that Georgian forces control two-thirds of South Ossetia. [Petro, “Crisis in the Caucasus: A Unified Timeline”]

In early morning Georgian warplanes bomb Tskhinvali. [Uwe Klussmann, “Georgian Tanks Vs. Ossetian Teenagers,” Der Spiegel, August 26, 2008.]

At 5:30am the Georgian Foreign Ministry issues its first report that Russian forces are crossing the Georgian border into South Ossetia through the Roki Tunnel. [Petro, “Crisis in the Caucasus: A Unified Timeline” citing the Georgian Foreign Ministry’s “Timeline by 13 August 16:20”] After three days, all Georgian official statements and a new official Georgian Foreign Ministry timeline indicate that the crossing began six hours earlier at 11:30pm. [Petro, “Crisis in the Caucasus: A Unified Timeline” citing “Timeline of Events in the Russian Invasion and Occupation of Georgia, August 16, 2008, www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=461&info_id=7484 (accessed August 26, 2008)]

The official Georgian timeline states: [[At 11:30pm the Government of Georgia receives reliable information from three separate sources that approximately 100 armored vehicles and trucks of the Russian armed forces, filled with Russian soldiers, are passing from Russia over the border of Georgia through the Roki Tunnel and are heading towards Tskhinvali. The Russian Federation is thus directly violating the sovereignty of Georgia, as these new forces are regular Russian military and not peacekeepers.]]

At 9:00am South Ossetia requests Russia’s military support in the war and reports continued heavy shelling from ‘Grad’ artillery. [Petro, “Crisis in the Caucasus: A Unified Timeline” and www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226778.html]
## APPENDIX VIII:

Competing Georgian and Russian Federation Storylines on the August 2008 War

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storyline Features</th>
<th>Georgian Government Storyline</th>
<th>Russian Government Storyline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situation Description</strong></td>
<td>Russian invasion. Unprovoked attack on the West, freedom, civilized values, democracy. Cutting the bloodlines of the economy.</td>
<td>Humanitarian action to prevent genocide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description of Other</strong></td>
<td>People with KGB backgrounds; return of Soviet system. Twenty-first century barbarians.</td>
<td>NATO ally. American stooge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geopolitical Metaphors</strong></td>
<td>(Westernizing) Not “a faraway place” (Chamberlain) but a modern normal country that loves America.</td>
<td>(Localizing) Area of privileged interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explaining Discordant Information</strong></td>
<td>(that Georgia started it): Big powers lie and use minorities to serve pre-established aims.</td>
<td>(that Russia is the aggressor): The West uses double standards to judge the behavior of Russia. Their actions are cynical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Triggering Event</strong></td>
<td>Russian build-up and tanks moving through Roki Tunnel.</td>
<td>Georgian attack on Tskhinvali and murder of Russian peacekeepers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attribution of Motives</strong></td>
<td>Regime change; reassertion of Soviet/Russian Empire. Desire to extinguish vibrant democracy on the border. “They need control of energy routes. They need sea ports.”</td>
<td>Desperate attempt to get into NATO and acquire Western aid. Distraction from domestic problems. Actions of a bloodthirsty lunatic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning of Crisis</strong></td>
<td>Invasion of a sovereign country. Wake-up call to new Cold War between freedom-loving peoples and restored KGB regime/evil empire. Ukraine next.</td>
<td>War against states that violate international law. Responsibility to protect. Need for new security architecture for Europe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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APPENDIX IX:

European Union Six-Point Peace Plan
Negotiated by the President of France, Nikolas Sarkozy\(^\text{336}\)

*Protocole d’accord*

1 – *Ne pas recourir à la force.*
2 – *Cesser les hostilités de façon définitive.*
3 – *Donner libre accès à l’aide humanitaire.*
4 – *Les forces militaires géorgiennes devront se retirer dan leurs lieux habituels de cantonnement.*
5 – *Les forces militaires russes devront se retirer sure les lignes antérieures au déclenchement des hostilités. Dans l’attente d’un mécanisme international, les forces de paix russes mettront en œuvre des mesures additionnelles de sécurité.*
6 – *Ouverture de discussions internationales sur les modalités de sécurité et de stabilité en Abkhazie et en Ossétie de Sud.*

Unofficial English Translation of Six Point Peace Plan\(^\text{337}\)

Protocol of Accord

1 – Not to use force.
2 – Cease hostilities in a conclusive manner.
3 – Provide free access to humanitarian aid.
4 – The Georgian armed forces must withdraw to their habitual places of cantonment.
5 – The Russian armed forces must withdraw to the line where they were stationed prior to the beginning of hostilities. Awaiting the establishment of an international mechanisms, the Russian peacekeeping forces will implement additional security measures.
6 – The opening of international discussions on the modalities of security and stability in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

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\(^{337}\) Ibid, p. 38.
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Jones, Stephen F. Professor of Russian and Eurasian Studies, Mount Holyoke College.

Olich, Jacqueline. Associate Director, Center for Slavic, Eurasian, and East European Studies, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

Robertson, Graeme. Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.


Wheatley, Jonathan. Research Fellow, Aarau Centre for Democracy, Switzerland.

**Journal Articles**


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New York Sun
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