
Chronicle of the GeorgianOssetian conflict Fact sheet

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In the Soviet times South Ossetia was an autonomous area within Georgia. In 1991 Georgia's first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, abolished the autonomy. The South Ossetian authorities rejected that decision and put up an armed resistance to the Georgians.

In January 1991 open warfare broke out between Georgia and South Ossetia claiming heavy casualties on both sides.

After the armed conflict, which lasted until 1992, Georgia lost control over the territory and peacekeeping forces were introduced into the conflict zone.

In 1994 talks to settle the conflict began. On May 16, 1996 a memorandum on security and confidence measures between the sides was signed in Moscow. The Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze and South Ossetian President Lyudvig Chibirov had several meetings to discuss ways to end the conflict. Russia was the mediator in the negotiation process. On December 23, 2000 a Russian-Georgian intergovernmental agreement was signed on interaction and economic reconstruction in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone and on the return of refugees. In April 2001 a referendum in South Ossetia introduced changes in the republic's constitution. Georgia considers the referendum to be illegal.

On December 22, 2001 the OSCE mission in Georgia and the European Commission signed an agreement on a 210,000 euro grant for measures to settle the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. The European Commission took an active part in collecting and destroying weapons in the conflict zone.

The 10th meeting of the parties' official delegations took place as part of the negotiations to settle the Georgian-Ossetian conflict outside The Hague on October 14-17, 2003. Taking part in the consultations were the representatives of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, the Dutch co-chairs of the OSCE, the head of the OSCE mission to Georgia and the representatives of the European Commission. For the first time the parties failed to sign a final protocol due to substantive differences over its content.

On May 31, 2004 the commander of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone, Svyatoslav Nabdzorov, declared the intention to liquidate the checkpoints the Georgian Interior Ministry had set up along the Gori-Tskhinvali highway ostensibly to stop the transportation of smuggled goods.

On June 1, 2004 the Russian Foreign Ministry made three statements on the situation in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone. The Russian ministry called on the Georgian authorities to recognize the danger of provocations in the region.

On June 2, 2004, during a meeting of the co-chairmen of the Joint Control Commission for the settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict the Georgian and Ossetian representatives agreed not to use force or economic pressure with regard to each other.

On June 20, 2004 Georgia sent 20 flatcars with tanks and armored vehicles, several Grad rockets and 350 peacekeepers to the Tskhinvali area. Georgia had 150 troops armed with small arms near Tskhinvali. All

in all, Georgia can have 500 servicemen with limited quantities of armor in the conflict zone, the country's Defense Ministry said.

On June 28, 2004 three members of the Georgian Security Ministry were detained on suspicion of committing acts of sabotage and terrorism in South Ossetia.

Following the incident Georgia refused to attend the meeting of the Joint Control Commission due to be held in Moscow on June 30. On July 3 the representatives of the Georgian special services were released. Georgia declared that it would continue working with the commission.

On June 30, 2004 Russian peacekeepers were attacked by a Georgian Interior Ministry unit. The Russian Foreign Ministry called on Tbilisi "not to bring the situation in South Ossetia to a danger point." Moscow "has no doubt that the forcible seizure of military property was deliberately aimed at further aggravating the situation in South Ossetia and undermining the Russian-Georgian relations," the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

The situation in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone took a turn for the worse when an armed clash occurred in the Liakhvi Gorge in South Ossetia. Tbilisi reported that two Georgian peacekeepers were wounded and one kidnapped. On July 8-9 talks were held in Tskhinvali between Georgian Minister of State Giorgi Khaindrava and Deputy Commander of the Russian Ground Forces Lieutenant General Valery Yevnevich on the settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. The two sides discussed measures to stabilize the situation around South Ossetia.

On July 11 a meeting took place in Tskhinvali between the head of the unrecognized republic of South Ossetia Eduard Kokoity and the Russian Foreign Ministry's Special Ambassador Lev Mironov to discuss the preparation and holding of the meeting of the Joint Control Commission (JCC) on the settlement of the situation in South Ossetia. On the same day a working meeting took place in Tskhinvali between the co-chairmen of the JCC with the participation of the South Ossetian Special Ambassador Boris Chochiyev and a representative of the North Ossetian government, Teimuraz Kusov. The parties agreed to stop all provocative actions in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone. The conflicting parties pledged to stop the shooting and to lift the economic blockade.

On July 14, 2004 the first round of closed high-level talks in the JCC format was held in Moscow. The parties agreed that illegal armed units had to be withdrawn from the conflict zone. They confirmed the status of the peacekeepers in the conflict zone. The chairman of the Georgian National Security Council, Gela Bezhuashvili, said that the solution of the South Ossetian problem lay in the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity.

On July 15, during the second round of the talks, the members of the JCC meeting signed a final document calling on the leaders of Tbilisi and Tskhinvali not to use force to resolve the conflict. The parties had to honor all the previous agreements. All the illegal armed units were to be disarmed and military vehicles had to be withdrawn from the conflict zone. A separate point in the protocol was devoted to humanitarian aid: the parties reaffirmed that such cargoes were to enjoy a favorable customs regime, as prescribed by the 1992 Dagomys agreements. The sides agreed that the JCC would be a permanent body based in Tskhinvali and that the following meeting would take place in Tbilisi several days later.

At a meeting in Tskhinvali on July 19, 2004 the representatives of Georgia, South Ossetia, North Ossetia and Russia agreed to set up a group of secretaries of the Georgian, South and North Ossetian parts of the JCC; and on July 21, the group and the counselor at the Russian Embassy in Georgia held their first meeting in Tbilisi. Georgia and South Ossetia reaffirmed their commitment to a peaceful settlement in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict and to preventing an escalation of tensions. A meeting of the representatives of co-chairs of the JCC in Tskhinvali on July 22 set the deadlines for the start of joint patrolling of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone by peacekeepers and OSCE observers and the routes of the patrols.

On September 30-October 2, 2004 a Joint Control Commission (JCC) meeting in Moscow discussed the prospects of resolving the conflict situation in South Ossetia, preventing future crises and economic rehabilitation of the conflict zone. A working group was set up to prepare decisions on the withdrawal of illegal units, dismantling of illegal checkpoints and the setting up of new checkpoints by peacekeepers.

On November 5, 2004 talks were held in Sochi between Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania and the head of South Ossetia, Eduard Kokoity. They were mediated by the Russian Foreign Ministry represented by First Deputy Foreign Minister Valery Loshchinin. The parties agreed on full demilitarization of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone. On November 13 Georgian Minister of State Giorgi Khaindrava and Special Affairs Minister of the Government of South Ossetia Boris Chochiyev agreed to liquidate the dugouts and other military structures. On November 15 the liquidation of military engineering structures began in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone.

On November 18-19, 2004 a meeting of the JCC in Vladikavkaz reviewed progress in the fulfillment of the Russian-brokered agreements between Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania and the president of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia, Eduard Kokoity, reached in Sochi on November 5. President of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania Alexander Dzasochv, speaking at the JCC meeting, backed the proposal made by Zhvania and Kokoity to form a special economic zone that would include the Alagir District of North Ossetia, South Ossetia and the Gori District of Georgia.

On January 2005 Mikheil Saakashvili announced peace initiatives with regard to South Ossetia at a PACE meeting in Strasbourg. South Ossetia was offered broad autonomy as part of the single Georgian state. President George W. Bush in a telephone conversation on February 15 backed Saakashvili's initiatives. South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity, commenting on Saakashvili's initiatives, said that "South Ossetia has long been an independent republic" and there could be no question of creating a common state with Georgia.

On March 11, 2005 Mikheil Saakashvili told a briefing that he would not wait long for Tskhinvali's response to his initiatives on the status of South Ossetia. He noted that some representatives of the Tskhinvali authorities welcomed the Georgian initiatives, but were unable to make a decision. He said the Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia would "never become part of an empire, even of a former empire." "These are our people, our territory called Georgia and it will never be called anything else," Saakashvili said.

On March 16-17, 2005 a meeting of the co-chairs of the Joint Control Commission discussed demilitarization of the conflict zone in the

framework of the November 2004 Sochi agreements. Taking part in the meeting were the delegations of Russia, Georgia, North Ossetia-Alania and South Ossetia.

On June 20-21, 2005 an emergency meeting of the Joint Control Commission for the settlement of the Georgia-South Ossetia conflict was held in Moscow. The sides were supposed to sign a protocol on the cooperation of the law-enforcement bodies in the conflict zone. However, the protocol signed envisaged only the creation of a group to investigate the incidents in the conflict zone on May 29 and June 6 (the murder of four Ossetian and one Georgian servicemen and the disappearance of four Georgians).

On July 10, 2005 an international conference on the settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict was held in Batumi. The representatives of South Ossetia boycotted the conference. During the conference Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili declared that Georgia was ready to grant South Ossetia full autonomy and amend the country's Constitution accordingly. He said that his plan of settlement of the conflict with South Ossetia was a phased one and would take considerable time to implement. He said the plan took into account all the wishes expressed at various stages by the South Ossetian representatives. The unrecognized republic of South Ossetia rejected Saakashvili's offer of autonomy within Georgia.

On October 11, 2005 the Georgian parliament adopted a resolution "On Peacekeeping Operations and the Situation in the Conflict Zones of Georgia." It required Russian peacekeepers, stationed in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone, to enforce both parties' compliance with their agreements before February 1, 2006. Otherwise, the Georgian parliament would initiate the procedure of withdrawal from the Dagomys Agreement of 1992 on February 15, 2006, and require Russian peacekeepers' to withdraw.

On December 8, 2005 the Joint Control Commission held an emergency meeting following the increase of tensions in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone. The commission analyzed the conflict and laid out measures to guarantee a peaceful Georgian-Ossetian settlement. Valery Kenyaikin, ambassador at large of the Russian Foreign Ministry and head of the Russian part of the commission, attended the meeting.

On February 15, 2006 the Georgian parliament adopted a statement envisaging cessation of the peacekeeping operation in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone.

It qualified Russian action in the region as "armed intervention."

On May 31, 2006 Russian troops of the Joint Peacekeeping Force in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone rotated troops through the Rok Tunnel, which was out of Georgian control. Tbilisi regarded the Russian move as an official challenge. Georgian authorities alleged that Russia was introducing a greater contingent under the guise of rotation.

On July 16, 2006 Georgian police followed by car the Joint Control Commission leaders then stopped and detained them. They were searched,

and their belongings were confiscated for several hours. The commission meeting had to be postponed for a day and a night.

On July 18, 2006 the Georgian parliament adopted a resolution on an immediate pullout of Russian peacekeepers from the country.

On September 27, 2006 Georgian secret services arrested four Russian military officers working in the GRVZ (Group of Russian Troops in South Caucasus) on espionage charges.

According to a statement issued by Marat Kulakhmetov, the commander of the Joint Peacekeeping Force in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone, which was carried by mass media, a Georgian task force attacked a vehicle of a North Ossetian peacekeeping battalion as it was leaving the village of Avnevi on September 29, 2006. Sergeant Kudziyev, who was in the vehicle, was beaten.

On November 12, 2006 a referendum on independence was held in South Ossetia alongside the presidential elections.

On August 7 Georgia accused Russia of an air attack, claiming two Su-25 jets with Russian markings intruded into Georgian airspace and fired missiles at a radar station near Gori. The incident prompted the cancellation of a Tbilisi meeting of the Joint Control Commission for Georgian-Ossetian Conflict Resolution (JCC) slated for August 9-10. Tensions surged in the conflict zone.

On August 29 Georgian authorities arrested and convicted two servicemen from the North-Ossetian peacekeeping battalion, Tariel Khachirov and Vitaly Valiyev. They were detained in a Georgian prison until February 2008, in violation of international law and the existing agreements on resolution of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. Neither representatives of the Joint Peacekeeping Force command nor officials from the Russian Embassy in Tbilisi were allowed to see them; they were also denied the right to use defense attorneys at court hearings.

The resumption of the negotiating process by the Joint Control Commission for Georgian-Ossetian Conflict Resolution (JCC) after a twelve-month break did not bring any progress. Georgia and South Ossetia failed to adjust their positions and adopt a joint statement during the talks held on October 23-24, 2007 at the OSCE premises in Tbilisi.

On March 31, 2008 a South Ossetian police post near the village of Okona in the Znaur District was attacked by a group armed with guns and grenade launchers.

Military observers from the Joint Peacekeeping Force and the OSCE mission established that the shots were fired from an area controlled by Georgia. Two days before the shooting, Georgian police task force and security officers dressed as civilians had been seen in the vicinity.

On April 2 another armed group fired automatic weapons at a South Ossetian Defense Ministry checkpoint near the village of Andzi-si. The servicemen at the checkpoint did not return fire.

A total of 56 incidents of ceasefire violation by Georgian forces were registered by the Joint Peacekeeping Force in April 2008. Most of them involved random shooting with the purpose of fueling tension in the region.

Georgian Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili, commenting on the explosion of an anti-personnel mine that injured a local police officer near the village of Kheiti, accused Russian peacekeepers of planting the mine. Later he spoke on Georgia's Alania TV Channel accusing the South Ossetian government of issuing 1,500 fake Russian passports to local residents.

On May 14 President of South Ossetia Eduard Kokoity said the Georgian special services were planning a terrorist attack in the territory of the self-proclaimed republic against Georgians and Georgian peacekeepers.

On May 15 Captain Vladimir Ivanov, an aide to the Joint Peacekeeping Force commander for contacts with the media, announced a planned rotation of the peacekeeping contingent in South Ossetia. Georgian media then spread information about an alleged expansion of the Russian peacekeeping contingent in the conflict zone, quoting Georgia's foreign minister. A routine rotation was described as a "provocation" and a "reckless enterprise."

On May 16 a bomb exploded on a roadside 200 meters from the Georgian village of Ergneti in the conflict zone. No one was hurt. Another bomb was detonated on the road between the Georgian villages of Eredvi and Ditsi. A Georgian Interior Ministry car was hit, injuring one Georgian special task force officer. A third explosion occurred on the same day in the vicinity of the village of Nikozi, where a local resident was injured by a mine in a field.

On July 3 as Dmitry Sanakoyev, head of the 'alternative' Georgian-backed government of South Ossetia, was driving across the republic to Batumi to attend an international conference, his car was struck by a mine and fired at from the direction of local villages. Sanakoyev's bodyguards returned fire. The shooting went on for several minutes. Three of the guards were severely injured. Sanakoyev himself was unscathed. South Ossetian Interior Minister Mikhail Mindzayev said that the attack on Sanakoyev was orchestrated by Georgia to provide a pretext for invading the self-proclaimed republic.

In the early hours of July 4, 2008 Georgian forces used mortars, grenade launchers and guns to fire at Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, and the villages of Ubiat and Dmenis. One person was killed and three wounded. Georgian officials claimed that South Ossetia started the shooting and Georgia was forced to fire back in self-defense.

On July 7 the police in Russia's Southern Federal District detained four military men from the Georgian Defense Ministry in the village of Okon, South Ossetia's Znaur District. Officials of the breakaway region of South Ossetia claimed the detained men were pursuing intelligence activities in the Tskhinvali region. Georgian President Mikheil OD Saakashvili considered the detainment a hostage situation. On July 8, the detainees were released.

On July 9, Russia's Foreign Ministry issued a statement concerning the aggravated situation in the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflict zones, which said that "For the past several days, the situation in the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian conflict zones has intensified.

The city of Tskhinvali has been shelled by the Georgian army, with victims registered among civilians. Fighters and unmanned aircraft of the Georgian Air Force have repeatedly violated the conflict territorial air zones. In a terrorist attack, a South Ossetian police officer was killed. Georgian military set up a post at a strategic site near the village of Sarabuki. Additional military equipment was moved from Georgia into the conflict zone without any coordination with the Joint Peacekeeping Forces, which was registered by military

observers including by the OSCE mission in Georgia. These actions point to an open and planned aggression against South Ossetia, which is the internationally recognized side in settling the conflict."

On August 1 and 2, the tension in the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict zone was aggravated due to a massive shelling of Tskhinvali's residential districts, which led to numerous deaths among civilians, with six South Ossetians killed and 15 wounded. Georgia claimed this was a response to South Ossetia's gunfire on Georgia's territory. South Ossetia began evacuating the region's residents to North Ossetia, with 2,500 people leaving their homes during the two days after the shelling.

On August 6, South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity said he would take "the toughest measures" toward "militants firing at the villages." Previously, the breakaway region's Defense Ministry reported that the Georgian side started sniper fire at the South Ossetian villages of Mugut and Didmukha in the Znaur District at around 12:00 p.m. According to South Ossetian sources, the Georgian special forces attempted to occupy Nul Height to gain control over the Znaur road and the South Ossetian villages located along the road. In the afternoon, it was reported that an aggressive battle was taking place at the village of Nul.

Irina Gagloyeva, head of South Ossetia's Committee for Information and the Press, told RIA Novosti that South Ossetian units had forced the Georgian military units out of Nul Height.

Georgia's Interior Ministry, however, denied the reports.

The same day, the special envoy of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Yury Popov, said direct Georgian-South Ossetian talks with Russian mediators were offered in the Joint Peacekeeping Forces' headquarters for August 7. However, Tskhinvali refused the offer.

On August 7 Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, in his national TV address to Georgia and to the Tskhinvali region, said he was ready for any negotiations to settle the conflict with South Ossetia. He suggested Russia become a guarantor of South Ossetia's autonomy within Georgia.

According to the South Ossetian Interior Ministry, on August 7 Georgia started ground fire and shelling of the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali from the village of Nikozi. Then, according to Tskhinvali, the shelling and shooting at the South Ossetian village of Khetagurovo was started from the Georgian village of Avnevi. About 10 people were killed and another 50 received various wounds.

The Georgian media, however, reported that the South Ossetian side had been shelling the Georgian villages of Avnevi and Nuli for three hours. According to the information of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces in the conflict zone, it was the Georgian side that started firing first. Also, there were reports that Russian peacekeepers were fired on.

On August 8 Georgia started military operations in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone.

The article was written using information of RIA Novosti news agency and open sources
