

Crisis in the Caucasus:

A Unified Timeline, August 7-16, 2008

by

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First compiled on August 28, 2008, this timeline is continuously being revised as more information becomes available.

The latest PDF version can be downloaded from my web site at: <http://npetro.net/7.html>

This unified description of the onset of the crisis in the Caucasus is based on the detailed timelines available on the web sites of the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and *Russia Today* news service, supplemented by various Georgian, Russian, and international press sources. The references in brackets refer to the list of sources at the end of this document: “G” for Georgian, “R” for Russian, “M” for miscellaneous. For convenience all local times have been converted to Greenwich Mean Time which, at the time these events unfolded, was GMT (UTC) +4 in both Moscow and Tbilisi.

There are surprisingly few disagreements about the actual sequence of events. Those that exceed two hours are noted by italics. My comments, at the bottom of each page, attempt to highlight notable findings.

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On August 1-2, sniper and machine-gun exchanges between Georgian troops and South Ossetian militia leave at least eleven dead and fifteen wounded. On August 4 the parliament of Abkhazia, where a UN Observer Mission has been active since August 1993, appeals to the UN, the OSCE and to Russia, saying: "The Georgian leadership is preparing for new forceful actions with the aim of restoring its control over the Republic of South Ossetia" and warns that "a war in South Ossetia won't leave Abkhazia untouched . . ." [M13]

South Ossetian forces claim that Georgian forces are trying to occupy the surrounding hills, in order to better launch an attack. Georgian officials deny any such intentions, and make daily denials that any Georgian troop movements are taking place at all [G2, R5, R6, M10]. None the less, by the morning of August 7, more than 12,000 troops and a third of Georgia's military arsenal are poised on the border with South Ossetia. [M8, M9]

August 7 -- Georgia attacks

14:00 -- Georgian Defense Minister Kezerashvili says he ordered Georgian troops "to prepare everything, to go out from the bases." [M6]

15:10 -- Georgian President Saakashvili announces a unilateral ceasefire and orders all Georgian forces "not to return fire, even if they face intensive bombing," adding "We do not have the will to respond to violence with yet more violence." [G5]

16:30 -- Western intelligence sources report that Georgian artillery begins to shell the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali. [M9]

18:00 -- Citing the shelling of Georgian villages from S. Ossetia, Tbilisi informs Marat Kulakhmetov, commander of Russian peacekeepers, that the cease fire is cancelled. [M9] OSCE monitors on the scene report no such shelling. [M6]

18:35 -- Georgian forces begin an artillery assault on Tskhinvali. This is about one hour before Saakashvili later says Russian tanks entered the Roki Tunnel. [M8]

19:05 -- Mamuka Kurashvili, the general in charge of Georgian peacekeeping operations, announces on television that his troops are now engaged in an operation to "restore constitutional order throughout the region." [G1, M3]

22:45 -- Georgia says it has occupied three villages in South Ossetia. [G6]

23:45 -- In Beijing Russian Prime Minister Putin tells U.S. President George Bush that Russia has been unable to contact the Georgian leadership recently, but that "one of Georgia's military leaders has declared that they have started an attack on S. Ossetia. George replied . . . 'Nobody wants war'." [M4]

- *Saakashvili's cease fire lasts less than three hours. During this time, Georgia moves additional infantry and artillery up the front. [M6, G4]*
- *There are no Georgian reports of Russian troops in the region prior to the beginning of Georgian military operations (this will change later). The next day, on national television, Saakashvili will say that Russian air strikes began on August 8. [G3]*

August 8 — Russia responds

00:45 -- Georgian Minister for Reintegration Temuri Yakobashvili announces that Tskhinvali is nearly surrounded and that Georgia now controls two-thirds of South Ossetia. [R19]

01:30 – *The Georgian Foreign Ministry reports that the "first Russian troops enter through Roki Tunnel."* [G6] *Three days later it will say that 100 Russian vehicles crossed through the Roki tunnel into Georgia six hours earlier, at 19:30 GMT on August 7.* [G7] *The first international press agency reports of Russian tanks in the Roki tunnel appear almost exactly between these two accounts, at 22:06 on August 7* [M9].

05:01 -- South Ossetia asks Russia's for protection. [R10]

05:15 – Russia's convenes an extraordinary meeting of the UN Security Council to consider a cease-fire resolution. The U.S. and Great Britain back Georgia, which objects to a phrase in the three-sentence statement that calls on all sides "to renounce the use of force." The meeting adjourns after 45 minutes without taking action. [M7, M12]

05:30 -- Russian president Medvedev convenes an emergency session of the government to discuss options. [R3]

07:30 -- In a televised address, Saakashvili mentions Russian air strikes as beginning on August 8 (later he revise this to August 7) and mobilizes Georgian reserve troops against "a large-scale military aggression" by Russia. [G3]

10:30 -- Georgia reports that it now controls Tskhinvali. [G7]

12:04 -- Russia's Defense Ministry announces it has sent "peacekeeping reinforcements" into South Ossetia. [R10]

14:44 -- Georgia reports that Russian forces have reached Tskhinvali. [G7]

16:30 -- *Georgia reports that its troops have withdrawn from Tskhinvali, though it later reports that its troops withdrew on August 10 at 03:00.* [G7] *The commander of Russian forces reports that his forces take control of the city on August 9 at 07:40.* [R11]

17:03 -- South Ossetian president Kokoity says that 1,400 people were killed in Friday's fighting. [R10]

- *Russia appeals for a ceasefire resolution at the United Nations at least six hours before sending in ground forces.*
- *Officially, Russian troops enter South Ossetia 17 hours after Georgia launches its military operation. During this time Georgia reports Russian air assaults, but no encounters between Russian and Georgian ground forces for 19 hours.*
- *The battle of Tskhinvali lasts anywhere from 2-37 hours, depending on the source, with Georgia attempting three distinct assaults.* [M6]

August 9 — UN mediation stalls

02:00 – U.S. condemns Russia's 'military actions against Georgia' at the UN. [R11]

05:46 -- Medvedev announces that Russia is engaged in “peace enforcement” operations in South Ossetia. [R11]

07:04 -- Russia says 30,000 refugees have fled South Ossetia during the past 1.5 days. [R11]

07:16 – U.S. Department of State condemns Russia's “use of strategic bombers and missiles” against Georgia. [R11]

10:30 -- Georgia declares it is at war with Russia. It simultaneously declares martial law within Georgia and a general mobilization. [G7]

11:05 -- Saakashvili calls for an immediate ceasefire. [R11]

11:52 -- Abkhazia launches an offensive to remove Georgian troops occupying the Kodory Gorge in Abkhazia. [R11]

13:34 – Russia’s ambassador to Georgia says that at least 2,000 people have been killed in Tskhinvali. [R11]

23:00 -- UN Security Council for the third time fails to pass a resolution on the conflict. [R11]

- *First official U.S. condemnation of Russian for “military actions against Georgia.” Curiously, on August 22, US Ambassador to Moscow John Beyrle will say that Russia “responded to attacks on Russian peacekeepers legitimately. . .” [M11] He will later say that he was misquoted.*
- *The UN Security Council repeatedly fails to pass a ceasefire resolution.*

August 10 — Positioning for peace

13:30 -- Georgian Foreign Ministry hands diplomatic note on ceasefire terms to Russian charge d'affairs in Tbilisi. Russian deputy foreign minister Karasin announces terms for a cease fire—Georgia must withdraw its military to positions prior to conflict and pledge not to use force. [G7]

19:17 -- French and Finnish foreign ministers arrive in Tbilisi to mediate a peace agreement. [R12]

19:28 – Russia reports that it has sent troops into Abkhazia. [R12]

- *Basic ceasefire terms are agreed upon before the arrival of foreign intermediaries.*

August 11 – Russia enters Georgia

- 05:07** -- Russian military says 9,000 Russian troops have been sent to Abkhazia. [R13]
- 08:18** -- British Foreign Secretary condemns Russia's actions in Georgia. [R13]
- 08:48** – Russia calls for an emergency meeting of the Russia-NATO council to appeal for assistance in South Ossetia. [R13] The meeting is blocked by the United States. [R9, R14]
- 08:53** -- The US flies 800 Georgian troops from Iraq back to Georgia. [R13]
- 09:16** -- NATO head Jan de Hoop Scheffer says Russia is using 'disproportionate force' against Georgia. [R13]
- 09:30** -- Saakashvili signs ceasefire agreement prepared by France and Finland. [G6]
- 13:00** -- Georgia reports that Russian troops occupy Zugdidi, outside S. Ossetia. [G7]
- 14:12** -- Russian troops say they are taking "preventative action" near Senaki and Zugdidi, both inside Georgia proper. [R13]
- 17:19** -- Saakashvili says the Russian military has blocked a central highway linking east and west Georgia. [R13]
- 21:15** -- US president George W. Bush says "Russia has invaded a sovereign neighboring state and threatens a democratic government elected by its people." [G6]

- *13:00 on August 11 is the first official mention of Russian forces entering Georgia proper. This is 73 hours after Russian troops officially enter S. Ossetia, and 90 hours after the beginning of military operations by Georgia.*
- *Russia is prevented from raising the crisis at the Russia-NATO Council, which was ostensibly created to discuss issues of conflict that might arise.*

August 12-13 — Russia consolidates

August 12

01:46 – At the UN Security Council Russia rejects a draft resolution on the Georgia-South Ossetia conflict introduced by France. [R14]

11:41 -- Tskhinvali's mayor says 70 percent of the city's buildings were destroyed during the conflict. [R14]

16:31 -- Abkhazia says it has re-taken the Kodori Gorge (confirmed by Georgia three hours later). [R14]

21:11 -- Saakashvili accepts the ceasefire terms signed in Moscow. [R14]

August 13

12:05 -- EU says it is ready to send peacekeepers to Georgia. [R15]

15:13 -- Bush orders the start of a "humanitarian mission headed by the U.S. military" in Georgia. [R15]

15:47 – The Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), comprising Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, condemns Georgia, saying: "Under the pretext of re-establishing territorial integrity, Georgia, in essence, conducted genocide against the Ossetian people." [R15]

- *There are persistent reports of Russian troops inside Georgia proper. Georgia says they are planning an assault on Tbilisi. Russia claims they are establishing a security perimeter around South Ossetia and Abkhazia to prevent further Georgian attacks. All told roughly 1,000 Russian troops will be deployed in this security perimeter through September.*

August 14-16 — Peace accord

August 14

08:10 – The Russian army reports it has transferred control of Gori to civilian administration, but that it remains in the city to prevent looting. [R16]

09:42 -- Leaders of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia sign a peace agreement in Moscow as part of the cease fire. Medvedev says Russia will support any decision made by the people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on their status. [R16]

15:16 – U.S. Secretary of Defense Gates says he doesn't "see any prospect" of the U.S. military becoming involved in the troubles in Georgia. [R16]

August 15

11:52 – U.S. Secretary of State Rice arrives in Tbilisi on a “visit of support.” [R17] Saakashvili signs the version of the Sarkozy-Medvedev peace plan she brings with her.

August 16

10:57 -- Medvedev officially signs the six point Sarkozy-Medvedev peace plan. The Russian press notes significant differences between the versions signed by Saakashvili in Tbilisi and by Medvedev in Moscow. [R18]

21:34 – French President Nicholas Sarkozy has sent a letter to Saakashvili interpreting the security measures allowed within the conflict zone. [R18]

23:32 -- U.S. President George W. Bush calls Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili to express support for him and for the people of Georgia. [R18]

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