

RUSSIAN POWER BROKERING, PEACEMAKING, AND MEDDLING IN THE GEORGIAN-ABKHAZ CONFLICT

THE SOUTHERN CAUCASUS REGION in central Asia is notoriously volatile, and when the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1990 released once-protected republics, the stage was set for the emergence of power struggles aimed at redrawing national boundaries based on ethnicity.

Georgia was one of the first to face a threat to its territorial integrity. In 1992, the tiny, semi-autonomous Georgian republic of Abkhazia declared independence, claiming the right to self-determination of its Abkhaz population. One month later, a contingent of Georgian National Guard troops sparked a civil war when they rolled into Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia, to reassert power. The fighting lasted two years, with brief intermissions of Russian-brokered ceasefires. It left at least 3,000 people dead and as many as 25,000 to 30,000 wounded.¹ Between 200,000 and 250,000 people, mostly ethnic Georgians, fled. In May 1994, the warring parties signed the last in a series of ceasefires mediated by Moscow. The truce, called the Moscow Agreement, created a security zone patrolled by international peacekeepers to separate the belligerents. The buffer marks a de facto border. Very little has changed since 1994.

Russia played a central role in the conflict. It participated in the initial stages of the war on behalf of the Abkhazis, and it later took on the role of conflict mediator. In fact, evidence indicates that Russia used the conflict, and even exacerbated it, to retain influence over Georgia and to coerce Georgian leaders to join the Commonwealth

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of Independent States (CIS), the loose confederation of former Soviet republics formed by Moscow after the fall of the Soviet Union. The international community sanctioned Russia's role in the conflict. Organizations like the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) agreed to empower a "multilateral" CIS (read "Russian") peacekeeping force to patrol the ceasefire line between Georgia and Abkhazia; however, the international community's ability to check Russia's power in the situation is weak.

The former Soviet Union is a fractious region. Clashes such as the Georgian-Abkhaz one present case studies in dealing with ethnic conflict, particularly within the sphere of influence of a regional hegemonic power. The steps the international community took to resolve the conflict, namely approving a regional hegemony to deal with it, provide insight into the nature of international peacekeeping as a means for dealing with ethnic conflict. In addition, the Caucasus should be a priority for study because the ethnic diversity of the region creates a tinderbox that will continue "to pose an increasing number of conflict-related humanitarian challenges to the international community."²

Using a variety of primary and secondary accounts of the conflict, cross-checked with media sources, this paper seeks to uncover the details of events on the ground and how they dictated the course of the political reality. After describing the background of the conflict and intervention, the paper looks at what the intervention did and did not accomplish with respect to the goals of the parties involved. It then analyzes the peacekeeping force's effectiveness in implementing its mandate and in ending the conflict. Finally, the paper attempts to flesh out the role that international bodies should play in checking the use of coercive power by regional hegemonies, like Russia, over nations within their spheres of influence.

BACKGROUND

Georgia is an ethnically divided nation. No single group can claim a majority in its population, and it has been that way throughout history. The Caucasus

is home to hundreds of groups with distinct cultures and languages. Georgia's own history reflects this through a tortured process of unification of warring clans and culturally distinct tribes. Further, Georgia sits at the intersection of present-day Arab, Iranian (Persian), Turkish, and Russian spheres of influence (not to mention its historical situation on the fringes of the Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Mongolian empires). By its very geography, Georgia has been subjected to a perpetual tug-of-war between imperial powers for centuries.

Although the authoritarianism of the Soviet era suppressed ethnic tensions for a time, the issue remained a pervasive undercurrent in Georgia's social networks. Then, with the fall of the iron curtain in 1989, they re-emerged as an overt and formidable challenge to the tiny Caucasian state. Because this paper focuses solely on the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia, it will not address other ethnic divides in Georgia, though

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it is important to note that others exist.

It is unclear whether Abkhazians or Georgians have greater historical ties to the land, but clearly the two cultures have lived intertwined for centuries.³ After a brief Abkhaz principality from the eighth to tenth centuries, under which both Georgians and Abkhazians lived peacefully, Abkhaz rulers began to unite with Georgians, intermarrying and joining a united Georgian kingdom that lasted until the Ottomans conquered Abkhazia in the 15th century. The Ottomans ruled until the 18th century, bringing Islam to the people of Abkhazia.

Ottoman dominance gave way to Russian rule, which has remained in play to the present. Indeed, tensions over the status of Abkhazia with regard to Georgia have been "exacerbated by years of vacillating Soviet nationalist policies."⁴ From 1921 to 1931, the USSR granted Abkhazia the status of union republic, though it was joined to Georgia by a special treaty. In 1931, however, its status was downgraded to that of an autonomous republic within Georgia. Favorable migration policies that followed, as well as Abkhazia's idyllic landscape, brought in a large wave of ethnic Georgians, which shifted demographics and worried Abkhazians. In 1978, Abkhaz leaders petitioned the Soviet government for separation from Georgia. Although

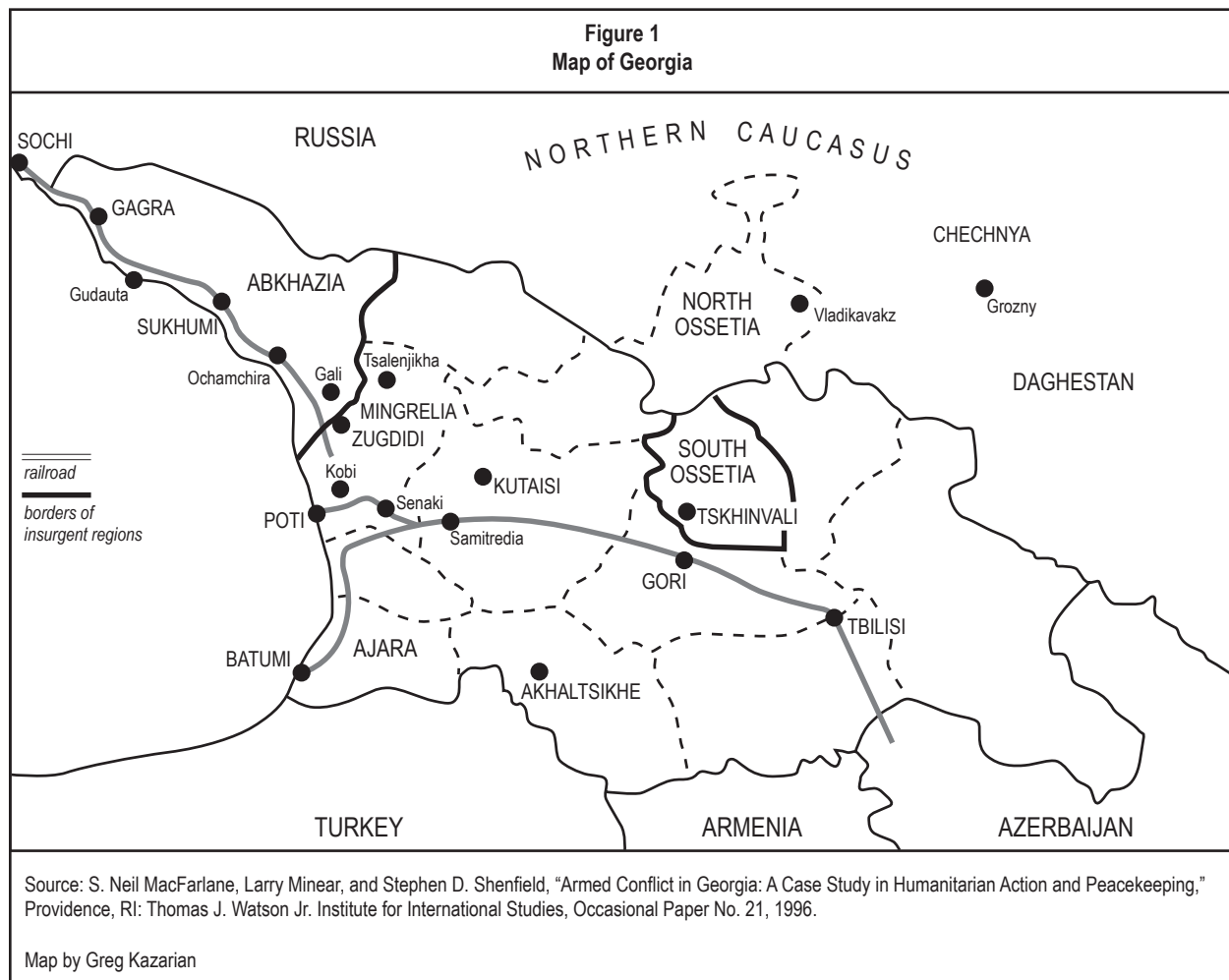
the Soviets denied the request, Moscow agreed to institute "an Abkhazization policy" to assuage the discontent of the Abkhaz elites. The new policy gave "the Abkhaz minority disproportionately strong representation in [Georgian] government offices,"⁵ angering Georgians and fueling Georgian nationalism. Russian policies, backing either Abkhaz or Georgian positions, shifted over the years with regard to its perceived geopolitical interests. Toward the end of the Soviet era, Georgian nationalism became more of a threat, and Moscow saw a means of limiting Georgian power by fueling the divisions already endemic to the region. It is here that the conflict, and the international community's reaction to it, begins.

DISCONTENT IN ABKHAZIA

Abkhazia rests on a small strip of land in northwestern Georgia. Located on the north shore of the Black

Sea, it is well known for its beautiful landscapes and has been a favorite vacation spot for Russians for centuries. Not only is it a profitable tourist mecca, but Abkhazia is also strategically important as it contains the sole railroad and telecommunication line from Georgia to Russia (see Figure 1).

The Abkhaz share of Abkhazia's population has always been much smaller than Georgia's; indeed, Abkhazis have never been a majority within the region. When the USSR granted Abkhazia autonomous status in 1921, it drew the borders of Abkhazia arbitrarily "to include areas with large ethnic Georgian majorities."⁶ Only in a few areas did the Abkhaz have a true majority in their own region. Additionally, Soviet policies of Georgianization reduced the Abkhaz proportion of Abkhazia's population even further.⁷ In 1926, Abkhazis made up 27.8 percent of the population of Abkhazia, a figure which had shrunk to 17.8 percent by 1989. The demographic shift, first apparent in the late 1970s, alarmed the Abkhaz elites, but it was not until the



fall of the Soviet Union that they saw an opportunity to arrest the declining proportional representation of their nationality.

Murmurs of independence drifted through the Abkhaz population starting around 1989, when a group of Abkhaz elite petitioned unsuccessfully for entry into the USSR as a full Soviet republic. Georgian nationalism, evidenced by the election of extreme nationalist Zviad Gamsakhurdia as president in 1990, was also on the rise.

In December of the year of his election, Gamsakhurdia abolished the autonomous status of South Ossetia in northern Georgia. His actions fueled fears in Abkhazia of Georgian nationalism and its potential effect on them. In the meantime, Abkhazia elected its own nationalist statesman, Vladislav Ardzinba, to head the Supreme Soviet of the Autonomous Abkhaz Republic.

In April 1991, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia declared independence from the USSR, followed by a January 1992 coup in Tbilisi that overthrew President Gamsakhurdia and instated the presidency of Eduard Shevardnadze.

THE CONFLICT

The first sign of a conflict came on July 23, 1992, when the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia passed a resolution "On the Termination of the 1978 Constitution of the Abkhazian ASSR."⁸ In doing so, Abkhaz lawmakers agreed to restore the 1925 constitution, which defined Abkhazia as an independent republic (of the USSR), ostensibly until a new constitution could be written. The resolution amounted to a declaration of independence. Not surprisingly, two days later, the Georgian State Council invalidated the decision of the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet. Apart from Russia, Abkhazia had no official exterior support for declaring independence. Ardzinba, "surrounded by Russian advisers who promised him success," decided to push for Abkhazia's right for independence anyway.⁹ Russian support, which came in the form of official and unofficial troop deployments and supplies, was essential. Without it, the tiny Abkhaz insurgency would have had no chance of successfully challenging Georgia. However, to this day, no nation has recognized Abkhazia's sovereignty, not even Russia, which raises questions as to Russia's motivations in backing its move at secession from Georgia.

As with many conflicts, the details surrounding the actual spark of hostilities are unclear. In 1992, Tbilisi was fighting an insurrection led by Zviad

Gamsakhurdia, the deposed president. Reportedly, guerilla fighters carrying out the insurgency kidnapped a number of top Georgian officials, including the deputy prime minister, bringing them to shelters in eastern Abkhazia. Shevardnadze ordered the Georgian National Guard into Abkhazia to rescue the officials. Some reports claim that Shevardnadze not only warned the Abkhaz authorities that Georgian forces were on their way, but that he had at least tacit agreement for a limited military operation inside Abkhazia. Georgian troops, led by Defense Minister Tengiz Kitovani, entered Abkhazia on orders to rescue the kidnapped officials; inexplicably, they advanced all the way to Sukhumi, the Abkhaz capital. The Abkhaz parliament fled to Gudauta, in western Abkhazia, and some reports have accused the Georgians of burning the Parliament buildings and destroying much of the city.¹⁰

Georgian President Shevardnadze claimed that Kitovani acted of his own volition in going all the way to Sukhumi. However, it is likely Georgia was trying to reassert control over Abkhazia given the Abkhaz Parliament's de facto declaration of independence less than a month before. Georgia's intervention into Abkhazia sparked the involvement of Russian forces. Initially concerned with protecting the 12,000-plus Russian nationals in the

Table 1
Population of Georgia, Including the
Regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and
Population Living in the Autonomous Region
of Abkhazia, Whole and by Ethnicity, 1989

	Total	Percentage	Of whom: Located In Abkhazia	Percent of population of Abkhazia
Whole population	5,400,841	100.00%	525,061	100.00%
Georgians	3,787,393	70.10%	239,872	45.70%
Armenians	437,211	8.10%	76,541	14.60%
Russians	341,172	6.30%	74,913	14.20%
Azeris	307,556	5.70%	—	—
Ossetians	164,055	3.00%	—	—
Greeks	100,324	1.80%	14,664	2.80%
Abkhazians	95,853	1.80%	93,267	17.80%
Ukrainians	52,443	1.00%	—	—
Kurds	33,331	0.60%	—	—
Jews	24,795	0.50%	—	—
Other	56,708	1.00%	—	—

Source: for Georgia, the Census 2002 publication; for Abkhazia, <http://www.abkhazia.org/georgia.html>.

Source: Originally published on the Migration Information Source (<http://www.migrationinformation.org>), a project of the Migration Policy Institute. Available: <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?id=314>.

region, Russian troops, joined by volunteers and mercenaries from inside Russia, soon began to fight alongside the Abkhazis. Brief ceasefires tempered the fighting. The first, on September 3, 1992, quelled the initial violence and cornered the Abkhazis in the northwestern corner of Georgia. Russia brokered the agreement, which all parties signed, including Abkhazia (albeit reluctantly) and representatives of the South Russian voluntary forces. In addition to the ceasefire, the agreement required the restoration of Abkhaz government services and created a tripartite commission to help restore security.¹¹

One month later, the fighting renewed when Abkhaz forces broke the ceasefire line and attacked the northwestern town of Gagra. With Russian help, they quickly gained control over Gagra and pushed east. The frontline remained just outside of Sukhumi for several months while Abkhaz forces attempted to take it. After two unsuccessful attempts, they agreed to a third Russian-brokered ceasefire, which was signed on July 27, 1993. This agreement stipulated the withdrawal of all Georgian forces from Abkhazia, and required that Russian forces hold the Abkhaz in place.¹² Russia would control the territory in between.

Late in the summer of 1993, after the Georgians had withdrawn nearly all of their forces and equipment from the designated territory, the Abkhazis, experiencing little resistance from Russia forces, pushed forward again. This time they easily secured Sukhumi and all of the purported territory of Abkhazia. By September 1993, a provisional border at the Inguri River had been established and the Abkhazis were content, having secured all territory they deemed to be Abkhaz.

This last phase of the conflict saw the greatest wave of Georgians fleeing Abkhazia. It is estimated that between 200,000 and 250,000 people left—a substantial portion, considering that Abkhazia had a population of only 550,000 before the war.¹³ According to one UN official interviewed by MacFarlane et al., former Georgian regions in Abkhazia “resembled an empty desert.”¹⁴

The Georgians were too exhausted and demoralized to push back against the Abkhaz. The defeat for Georgia was humiliating: The Abkhazis represented only 1.8 percent of Georgia’s total population, but they had taken one-twelfth of Georgian territory.¹⁵

It was at this moment that Zviad Gamsakhurdia decided to launch another insurgency to retake Tbilisi. An overwhelmed Georgia had little strength left for another fight, so President Shevardnadze played his last card. He flew to Moscow to ask for help. The price for aid was capitulation to Russian pressure to join CIS, and the acceptance of the placement of Russian bases within Georgian territory. With a signature from Georgia, Russia finally supported Georgia’s struggle against the Zviadist insurgency by intervening on its behalf.¹⁶

Another result of Georgia signing the CIS pact was that Russia insisted on inserting troops along the Inguri River to uphold an unofficial truce. This action restrained Georgia from trying to take back territory it had lost to the Abkhazis. The fragile truce was part of another series of ceasefires, which were frequently ignored as both sides took pot-shots at each other in half-hearted attempts to destabilize the situation. Regardless, there

was no concerted effort to move the frontline. The Abkhazis did not want to see the Georgians cross their de facto border and the Georgians lacked the political will to push back against the Russian-backed Abkhaz.¹⁷

Finally, the hint of a true political settlement was borne out in the Moscow Agreement, signed on May 14, 1994. It was still only a ceasefire, but some hoped that it would lay the groundwork for a durable political settlement. Brokered by the Russian government and the UN Special Representative for Georgia, it formalized the Russian operation already in place by renaming it a CIS Peacekeeping Force and requiring a token presence of non-Russian (CIS) troops. The terms of the agreement delineated a ceasefire line between Georgia and Abkhazia that ran along the Inguri River. It also provided for a security zone that cut 15 miles into Abkhaz and Georgian territory on either side of the ceasefire line. In the security zone, there would be no armed forces apart from the peacekeepers and no military equipment. The agreement also established a restricted weapons zone that extended another 15 miles on either side. The sum of the two zones became the buffer in which CIS peacekeepers carried out missions such as maintaining the ceasefire and promoting the safe return of refugees. Other provisions of the agreement called for the deployment of

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UN observers and the establishment of a coordinating commission to discuss mutual infrastructure interests in areas like energy, transportation, and telecommunications.

CIS PEACEKEEPING

The Moscow Agreement empowered a CIS peacekeeping force (CISPKF) to secure the region. The mostly Russian CIS operation represented a regional hegemonic power, and, not surprisingly, its interests. Peacekeeping policies served four of Russia's geopolitical interests. First, Russia wanted to ensure that unrest in Georgia did not spread throughout the already explosive Caucasus. Second, Russia saw the Caucasus as a buffer between itself and Turkey and Iran. The Soviet collapse left a power vacuum in the Caucasus, and as states declared their independence, Russia wanted to prevent that vacuum from being filled by unfriendly forces. Third, unable to govern its former republics directly, Russia began to build up a defense alliance through the CIS framework. Finally, and perhaps most important, the Russian government has felt increasing pressure as Western powers squeezed its sphere of influence. Georgia has been warming to American and NATO influence, and Russia wants to limit Georgia's ability to create alliances with the West, which could continue to erode Russia's influence in the region. In the end, it is to Russia's advantage to keep Georgia dependent on it. As long as Russian forces have a green light to enter Georgia, that is exactly what happens.¹⁸

Peacekeeping in Georgia occurred in two phases. The first came after the July 1993 ceasefire brokered by Russia. Georgians, worried that the CIS peacekeeping force empowered by the accords would favor the Abkhaz, asked the UN to provide observers. The UN Security Council agreed. It authorized a small observer force of 50 "to monitor compliance with the accord's disengagement and disarmament provisions."¹⁹ However, before the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) had fully been established,

Abkhaz forces broke the truce and pushed toward Sukhumi and the Inguri River.²⁰

By late September 1993, a provisional border between Georgia and Abkhazia had been established along the Inguri. The fighting had mostly died down because the Abkhaz forces had taken the entirety of what they considered Abkhaz territory, and the battle-fatigued Georgians were in no position to fight back against the Russian-fortified Abkhaz.²¹ The next few months saw the gradual stabilization of the situation.

This interim period of a tacit peace led to the second phase of CIS peacekeeping, which came after the Moscow Agreement was signed by all parties in May 1994. The accord provided the durable end of hostilities and allowed for a long-term CIS deployment. Although the nature of the Russian forces along the Inguri did not change substantially with the signing of the accord, their mandate as part of a CIS peacekeeping force became clearer.

The CIS peacekeepers' presence had full permission of every party involved. Moreover, their mandate would come up for renewal every six months, and if one party did not agree to renew it, the peacekeepers would be withdrawn.

In addition, the accords renewed international interest in the region owing to the promising prospects laid out by the settlement. The UN more than tripled the number of observers at the mission, and it became much more active in observing Russian neutrality.

The situation had calmed down precipitously by summer 1994. The Russians had an enormous capacity to prevent the resumption of conflict and their very presence deterred either side from trying to regain small strips of land in a "post-settlement show of force." However, their presence did not erase "the deep-seated motivation for revenge" on the Georgian side.²²

NATURE OF THE PEACEKEEPING FORCE

Initially, the Russian peacekeeping force came mostly from bases that were already located in Abkhazia. In fact, it appeared that the very same forces that had been supporting Abkhazis in the

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insurgency now kept the peace between the two sides.²³ The bases from which they came had, only a year before, offered munitions and armaments to Abkhaz insurgents. Not surprisingly, Georgians were not convinced of the impartiality of CIS peacekeeping.

Furthermore, the CIS peacekeepers were not trained peacekeepers. The force on the Abkhaz side included an infantry battalion that was part of the 27 Guards Rifle Division, which was the “peacekeeping” division in the Russian army—not because they were trained peacekeepers, but because they had a smattering of peacekeeping experience in Moldova. It also included an engineer company, a mortar company, a helicopter platoon, and a reconnaissance platoon. On the Georgian side of the ceasefire line, the force included two infantry battalions and a mobile tank section.²⁴

INTERACTION WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

A UN Security Council Resolution in July 1994 expanded the presence and mandate of the UNOMIG in Abkhazia and Georgia. It more than tripled the number of UNOMIG observers from 40 to 136 and set a more aggressive investigative observation mandate.²⁵ By 1996, UNOMIG expanded to two sector headquarters in Abkhazia and one in Georgia. The UN mission regularly met with the CIS peacekeepers at force and sector headquarters, and less formally, at checkpoints and between individual patrols.²⁶

UNOMIG was composed of experienced military personnel with backgrounds in peacekeeping missions, while CIS peacekeepers were frequently inexperienced and new to peacekeeping operations. However, because UNOMIG was present in an unarmed, observer capacity, it depended on CIS peacekeepers to protect it from hostile groups. This sent signals to the local population that UNOMIG was working with the Russians, undermining its appearance of neutrality. Further, if the Russians wanted to keep UN observers out of an area, the CIS forces could close down routes and claim that it was doing so to protect UNOMIG personnel from dangerous situations. Experienced UNOMIG officers were not always deterred. They reacted by continuing their patrols on foot, which led to greater interaction with the local population and the ability to “gain greater insight into local attitudes towards the peace process.”²⁷ This speaks more to the efficacy of UNOMIG observers in performing their duties than to the verifiable transparency of the Russian operation.

THE REFUGEE SITUATION

The refugee problem presented the most destabilizing threat to the situation. Even though the CIS mandate to “promote the safe return of refugees and displaced persons”²⁸ was clearly laid out in the Moscow Agreement, its application was inconsistent at best.

Initially, the formal nature of the relationship between CIS forces and UNOMIG lacked clarity, particularly with regard to refugee issues. CIS peacekeepers performed ceasefire duties well, but in the beginning, CIS “carefully avoid[ed] taking any action on the refugee problem.”²⁹ Some Russian commanders continued to resist the point, saying that the CIS peacekeepers “should not be regarded as the implementers of a plan to return the displaced population.”³⁰

The mass exodus of nearly all of the Georgian population had created an artificial plurality of Abkhaz in Abkhazia. It was not in their interest to reinstate the Georgian population; indeed, that would undermine the position of the Abkhaz in invoking their right to self-determination. The longer the displaced population was kept outside of Abkhazia, the less likely that they would return.

Whenever displaced Georgians would attempt to return to their Abkhaz homes, Abkhaz authorities would treat them harshly, claiming it was within their authority to administer their own region. An incident in March 1995 brought attention to the problem. International peacekeepers and observers witnessed the arbitrary arrest of more than 200 returned refugees in the Gali district, followed by the summary execution of about 20 of them. International outrage produced pressure which reinvigorated the peaceful reinstatement of refugees. By 1997, some 40,000 to 60,000 refugees had returned, mostly to Gali.³¹ In May 1998, however, a new round of fighting broke out and Abkhaz authorities expelled 30,000 of the returned refugees.³² Today, returned refugees total only 15,000,³³ and they remain in a precarious situation under the authority of local Abkhaz administrators. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has a presence, but it remains incapable of reining in local authorities. Most displaced people remain in temporary lodging in Georgia, with a hefty contingent living in an old Soviet-era hotel in Tbilisi.³⁴

ON THE GROUND ACTIVITIES, ACTUAL DUTIES OF CISPKE

Under the terms of the Moscow Agreement, the civil authorities on either side of the ceasefire line were responsible for policing and protecting civil-

ians.³⁵ However, CIS peacekeepers often became entwined in this mission, especially in situations involving the spontaneous return of displaced persons. In the beginning, CIS peacekeeping dealt with clashes between returning Georgian refugees and Abkhazis by handing the refugees over to the Abkhaz authorities. Because Abkhaz administration policies were “structurally hostile to Georgian returnees,” the usual response was deportation or imprisonment.³⁶ Both UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeepers maintained that they were fulfilling their peacekeeping duties by delivering refugees to Abkhaz authorities. They further classified protecting the security of returning Georgians as a humanitarian action and therefore not within the scope of their mission.³⁷ After several instances of abuses and reprisal killings of returning Georgians witnessed by CISPKF and UNOMIG without intervention, the peacekeepers, including UNOMIG, lost a measure of credibility in fulfilling humanitarian functions. The UN gently nudged Russia to broaden its mandate for protection, and, under international pressure, Russia gradually complied.

CONCLUSION

The CIS Peacekeeping Force has a mixed track record. The force, with all of its faults, was likely effective in bringing about a sustained end to the immediate hostilities. The fighting had mostly abated before the intervention force arrived, but the conflict was perpetually on the verge of starting anew. Without the presence of the peacekeepers, Georgia would have had little incentive to keep from invading Abkhazia and reasserting control. Therefore, imposing a security zone patrolled by a third party, regardless of its bias, seems to have had a positive effect.³⁸

On the other hand, the peacekeepers did little to bring about an end to the underlying conflict. There has been no progress toward a political settlement, and CIS peacekeepers have a history of not facilitating the safe return of refugees, further undermining a true political solution.

From Russia’s perspective, the intervention has been effective. Russia convinced Georgia to join the CIS, which gave Russia substantial influence over Georgia. The frozen conflict has also proved politically favorable to the Abkhazis, even as they remain weak and structurally dependent on Russia. Abkhazia has used the years of the stalemate to accustom the international community to its autonomous status gradually, while buying time to rebuild

its population with sympathetic groups (such as Armenians and Russian Muslims). The situation is much less favorable to Georgia. Abkhazia is a valuable piece of land that Georgia would like to have back, and it is powerless to reassert control as long as Russian troops are present.

LESSONS FROM THE INTERVENTION

This case study provides two applicable lessons. First, international presence alone cannot resolve a conflict. An “international” peacekeeping force has been in Georgia for more than 12 years, and even though the situation is stable, the underlying conflict is not resolved. Because Russia is the power broker in this conflict, it will not end until Russia has the incentive to end it.

Second, peacekeeping by a regional hegemon does not always bring about effective results. The international community provided the legitimacy for Russia to intervene in the hopes that it would end the conflict. Instead, the Russian presence has prolonged the conflict and offered few incentives for either side to compromise on a solution. In the end, the international community cannot trust that the motives of a regional hegemon will have the interests of smaller players at heart. It needs to prescribe incentives for the power broker to settle the conflict.

THE SITUATION GOING FORWARD

Little regarding the 12-year-old conflict has changed. It remains “tense but stable.”³⁹ One positive development is that time and the gradual imposition of less biased Russian forces have resulted in a more stable situation.⁴⁰ In February 2005, Russia formed a new brigade to be trained exclusively for peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, a first in the country’s history. One battalion from the brigade was set to be deployed to the Georgian-Abkhaz ceasefire zone in December 2005.⁴¹ This is a far cry from the pro-Abkhaz forces that initially patrolled the zone.

The region is receiving more international attention lately because of an oil pipeline being built from Ceyhan, Turkey, through Tbilisi, to Baku, Azerbaijan. In addition, the governments of both Abkhazia and Georgia have changed hands within the last few years. Players in the frozen conflict could possibly use the new situation to move toward a more permanent political settlement.

With talks of Georgia joining NATO (Georgia President Mikhail Sakaashvili says his goal is by 2008)⁴² and eventually the EU, Georgia is feeling more support from the West. President Sakaashvili

is hinting that he will not authorize a renewal of the CIS peacekeepers' mandate in July 2006, in direct opposition to Russian interests.⁴³ Western governments have heretofore been reluctant to meddle in Russia's sphere of influence (namely CIS countries), so their actual support of Georgia is unclear, but they do verbally support the removal of Russian bases from Georgia and unification of its territory.

Georgia might believe it can let the CISPCKF mandate expire in order to take action to reclaim Abkhazia, but without overt Western support (an unlikely proposition, as it would pit the West against Russia), the ultimate success of such a plan, in the face of Russian interests, is questionable.

Russia will not let Georgia win back Abkhazia without getting something in return. A feasible compromise would be for Georgia to give up aspirations for entry into NATO and the EU in return for its territory from de facto Russian control. Georgia cannot enter either organization without the territorial dispute resolved, so it has little leverage in the deal. Russia, on the other hand, is in a powerful position. Even if Georgia decides not to reauthorize the peacekeepers, forcing the CIS peacekeepers to pull out, Russia has the power to make Georgia very uncomfortable. Much like when Russia cut off gas supplies to Ukraine in retaliation for anti-Russian policies, Russia has leverage over Georgia that it would not be afraid to use. Further, if Georgians tried to take control of Abkhazia after a required CISPCKF pullout, Russia could easily re-enter the zone—likely with international backing—to “quell” a renewed ethnic conflict, this time under the auspices of a humanitarian intervention. The result would be that Georgia would be in an even worse position to decide the fate of its territory.

Ultimately, even if Georgia has ostensible international backing, it still sits in Russia's backyard. The international community will not likely sanction Russia for the sake of Georgian territorial integrity unless it is part of a much greater geopolitical battle.

In the end, Russian priorities will heavily influence a true political settlement. This would need to include a solution to the refugee situation and a territorial settlement. Unfortunately for Georgia, that means that it will probably be the one compromising. Until it is willing to do so, the conflict will remain as frozen as it has been for the last 12 years.

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NOTES

1. The conflicting numbers come from the following two sources. It could be explained by the function of their publication dates, but there is not an official estimate. The first reports the low end, the second the high end: Catherine Dale, “The Case of Abkhazia (Georgia),” in *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, ed. Lena Jonson and Clive Archer (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996); and Georgi M. Derlunguan, “The Tale of Two Resorts: Abkhazia and Ajaria before and since the Soviet Collapse,” *International and Area Studies Research Series*, no. 98 (1998).
2. S. Neil MacFarlane, Larry Minear, and Stephen D. Shenfield, *Armed Conflict in Georgia: A Case Study in Humanitarian Action and Peacekeeping* (Providence, RI: Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies, Occasional Paper No. 21, 1996), p. v.
3. For more a more complete look at the historical and anthropological background of the region see: Svetlana Mikhailovna Chervonnaya, *Conflict in the Caucasus: Georgia, Abkhazia, and the Russian Shadow*, 1st English language ed., *Authentic Voices* (Glastonbury, Somerset: Gothic Image Publications, 1994).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
5. Dale, “The Case of Abkhazia (Georgia),” p. 122.
6. Dov Lynch, *The Conflict in Abkhazia: Dilemmas in Russian ‘Peacekeeping’ Policy* (RIIA Discussion Paper No. 77, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, Russia and Eurasia Programme, 1998).
7. Dale, “The Case of Abkhazia (Georgia),” p. 122.
8. Chervonnaya, *Conflict in the Caucasus: Georgia, Abkhazia, and the Russian Shadow*, p. 112.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
10. MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield, *Armed Conflict in Georgia: A Case Study in Humanitarian Action and Peacekeeping*, pp. 9-12.
11. Evgeny M. Kozhokin, “Georgia-Abkhazia,” in *Us and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force*, ed. Jeremy R. Azrael and Emil A. Payin (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, Center for Russia and Eurasia, 1996).
12. MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield, *Armed Conflict in Georgia: A Case Study in Humanitarian Action and Peacekeeping*, p. 11.
13. The number of people who fled the conflict and the number of IDPs (internally displaced persons) does not match up because many people fled across international borders. However, they are often talked about as the same number, which may be a reason for the discrepancy.
14. MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield, *Armed Conflict in Georgia: A Case Study in Humanitarian Action and Peacekeeping*, p. 11.
15. Zaza Gachechiladze, “The Conflict in Abkhazia: A

- Georgian Perspective," in *Strategic Forum*, No. 21 (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1995).
16. MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield, *Armed Conflict in Georgia: A Case Study in Humanitarian Action and Peacekeeping*, pp. 12, 51.
 17. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
 18. Lynch, *The Conflict in Abkhazia: Dilemmas in Russian 'Peacekeeping' Policy*, pp. 16-17.
 19. MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield, *Armed Conflict in Georgia: A Case Study in Humanitarian Action and Peacekeeping*, p. 13.
 20. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.
 21. Mackinlay and Sharov, "Russian Peacekeeping Operations in Georgia," p. 90.
 22. *Ibid.*
 23. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
 24. *Ibid.*, pp. 96-100.
 25. MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield, *Armed Conflict in Georgia: A Case Study in Humanitarian Action and Peacekeeping*, p. 52.
 26. Mackinlay and Sharov, "Russian Peacekeeping Operations in Georgia," p. 102.
 27. *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103.
 28. Part of the Moscow Agreement, also called "Protocol to the Agreement on a Cease-Fire and Separation of Forces," cited in *Ibid.*, p. 517.
 29. Edward Marks, "Dynamics of Peacekeeping in Georgia," (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1995).
 30. Paraphrased quote of Russian General Vasilii Yakushev, cited in MacKinlay and Sharov, p. 105.
 31. Depending on the source, the number changes. Walker give the figure 50,000 to 60,000 and Kozhokin says it's closer to 40,000.
 32. Lynch, *The Conflict in Abkhazia: Dilemmas in Russian 'Peacekeeping' Policy*, p. 16.
 33. News. 2 Dec. 2005.
 34. Natalia Antelava, "Abkhazia: A 10-Year-Old Tearaway," *Transitions Online*, September 30, 2003.
 35. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
 36. S. Neil MacFarlane, "On the Front Lines in the Near Abroad: The CIS and the OSCE in Georgia's Civil Wars," *Third World Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1997), p. 518.
 37. It should be noted that the position taken by UNOMIG was colored by the fact that it was an unarmed observer mission, and it was not in a position to take issue with the belligerents without backing from CISPKE.
 38. Vladislav Kuznetsov, "101 Russian Servicemen Killed in Georgian-Abkhaz Zone since 1994," ITAR-TASS News Agency.
 39. According to the current commanding officer of CIS Peacekeepers, Major General Sergei Chaban, *Ibid.*
 40. MacFarlane, "On the Front Lines in the Near Abroad: The CIS and the OSCE in Georgia's Civil Wars," p. 519.
 41. ITAR-TASS News Agency, "Russia Peacekeeper to Georgia-Abkhaz Conflict Zone," November 22, 2005.
 42. Gerald Nadler, "Saakashvili: Georgia Will Join NATO, EU," ABC News International.
 43. Defense and Security (Russia) Agency WPS, "Russia-Georgia: Confrontation Continues," October 17, 2005.

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