

The Attack on South Ossetia

Since Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union, three regions of the republic have not obeyed to their new masters: Abkhazia (NW), Achaia (SW) and South-Ossetia (N). The latter is connected to its related people north of the Caucasus ridge, North-Ossetia, by a strategically important tunnel, and 90% of its population carries a Russian passport.

Since the current president of Georgia with strong American support in the so-called 'Rose Revolution' replaced post-communist Shevardnadze, he has prepared to re-establish Georgian authority to its Soviet territory. But in 2006, 99% of South Ossetian voters supported independence and the turnout for the vote was 95%.

Since Sakashvili took power, Georgian military spending has effectively increased by over 40 times and now has the highest growth-rate of any country in the world [1]. Like Ukraine, Georgia has pledged for a place in NATO and the European Union (Europe finally getting south of Caucasus?), and it is upholding keen connections to Israel [2].

Georgia has long cut off supplies of electricity to the region, which forced the South Ossetian government to run an electric cable through North Ossetia. The majority of the population (~70,000) survives on subsistence farming. Virtually the only significant economic asset that South Ossetia possesses is control of the **Roki Tunnel** that links Russia and Georgia, from which the South Ossetian government reportedly obtains as much as 1/3 of its budget by levying customs duties on freight traffic. The tunnel, altitude ~3 km, length 3.7 km, was opened in 1985. The separatist officials admitted that Tskhinvali received more than 60% of its 2006 budget revenue directly from the Russian government [3].

August 8-9 2008

In the night to August 8, Georgia invaded South-Ossetia after a merciless shelling of its capital Tskhinvali (Population ~10,000), possibly claiming ~1,500 civilian lives. The region's only hospital was, as most of the other houses, transformed to a bunch of rubble. Also Georgian jet-fighters were involved, until Russian fighters destroyed their bases. Within hours, Georgian troops conquered large parts of the destroyed city.

It has speculated, whether the absence of Putin or the opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing (his target) determined the time for the attack. In that case, the events showed it to be unimportant. The rapid Russian reaction seems (to me, at least, but not yet given any attention in the mainstream media) indicative of a good intelligence and preparation. Compare the recent American wars, how long preparation they demand. Within hours, Russia sent 150 military vehicles, which already in the evening arrived to the northern outskirts of Tskhinvali. In the morning of the following day, the Georgian troops were expelled and their President asked for a cease-fire [4].

The strategic importance of the Roki Tunnel has been given little attention in the lame mainstream media. Except for the roads along the sea sides (Black Sea and Caspian Sea), there are hardly any other connections over the Caucasus ridge which could transport heavy vehicles in the matter of hours. Obviously, the arrival of the Russian forces was as much a surprise to the Georgians as Hannibal's elephants to the Romans. Sky Channel analyzed: "If the Georgian army commanded all the heights above the South Ossetian capital and then made it to the Roki tunnel then the Russian army would have a much harder job to do" [5]. The Georgians could have it free of fight if they had attacked in winter and let the Snow do the job – maybe next time?

On the 9th before noon, BAZ reported that 30,000 civilians had been evacuated to North Ossetia. It is hard to believe that such a number – half of the population of South Ossetia – can be moved under the conditions of ongoing fighting.

1 http://www.tiraspoltimes.com/news/arms_build_up_as_georgia_prepares_war_on_abkhazia_south_ossetia.html

2 <http://www.debka.com/article.php?aid=1358>

3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_ossetia

4 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7550039.stm>

5 <http://news.sky.com/skynews/Home/World-News/South-Ossetia-Conflict-Between-Russia-And-Georgia-Shows-New-Cold-War-Heating-Up-Says-Tim-Marshall/Article/200808215074350>

The Western press is as usual very critical of Russia, but except for some attempts in the beginning ("it all began as they hit back") all now acknowledge that Georgia started the hostilities. The heavy artillery shelling of the capital deserves the designation 'war-crime.'

August 10-12, 2008

Now it started. The censored Mainstream Media is already relying on the increasing dementia among their readers. They (or some, at least) are no longer talking about, who started the calamity. Instead, the immense difference in military potency between Georgia and Russia is described (yes, Sakashvili should have thought of that before). Guardian brings a lot of pictures from an apartment house in Gori "devastated by a missile strike that appeared to have missed its target, a nearby military training ground ... But if Gori had suffered, reports from .. Tskhinvali were horrific" [6]. The propaganda warfare spreads out its smoke, but that is why I started this writing early.

Already on 9/8, Mr. Sakashvili suggested a cease-fire, bound on the retirement of Russian and Georgian troops from all crisis areas (South-Ossetia and Abkhazia) – so we can try again? Russia insisted there would be no ceasefire until all Georgian troops had withdrawn from South Ossetia [7]. This was claimed to fulfilled by the Georgian government [8], but in the rural area, there are still Georgian snipers [9] and Tskhinvali was still under fire.

The Russian 'Kommersant' reported that Russia Prepares for Naval Blockade of Georgia - to prevent arms deliveries to Georgia by sea [10]. Perhaps that may cause a small delay, but Georgia's border with Turkey (and 1,000 American and unnamed Israeli advisors) will ascertain that this is only a temporary condition.

Who was when where?

In the propaganda war, we are bombarded with doubtful reports, about which value of truth can only be decided later. The pictures may be manipulated (as this one from Gori, other pictures reveal that here is a tele-objective used and the victim is at least far away from a limited fire), or they are taken from another place (e.g., South Ossetia) as indicated (Georgia proper). CNN had used footage of Georgian forces attacking Russian civilians in Tskhinvali, but then claimed it showed Russians attacking Georgians in Gori [11]. I have been hunting aerial photos for hours confirming the video-impression of the totally destroyed Tskhinvali but this important witness is not available. Beside the small capital, also some villages were destroyed. If there is any truth in the rumour that 50 Ossetians were burned alive in a church, we shall hear from it at a later time in order to believe it.

Abkhazia uses the Opportunity

"On August 9, 2008, Abkhazian and Russian forces fired on Georgian forces on the Georgian side. This coincided with the 2008 South Ossetia war" [12]. They conquered the Kodon Gorge, which was lost to Georgia in 2006.

The legitimacy of this war is a different. The tribal Abkhazians are still, in spite of genocide and ethnic cleansing since 1992, in minority in their small country. About 250,000 ethnic Georgian residents of Abkhazia are restricted from settling in the region by the Abkhazian separatist regime and cannot participate in the elections.

From Ajaria, no movements were perceived.

6 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/war-in-the-caucasus-inside-the-battle-zone-889755.html>

7 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/aug/10/russia.georgia>

8 <http://www.faz.net/s/Rub97F2F5D596354F4BBE619038133D791F/Doc~E71EC66F3EBDF4147925DE2DBB2C01339~ATpl~Ecommon~Scontent.html>

9 <http://www.reuters.com/article/asiaCrisis/idUSLA343142>

10 http://www.kommersant.com/p-13063/r_500/South_Ossetia/

11 <http://www.prisonplanet.com/russian-cameraman-cnn-aired-misleading-footage.html>

12 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abchasia#The_Abkhazian_War

The Formal End of the War

On **August 12**, shortly before a visit of French President Sarkozy, Russian President Dimitri Medvedev declared cease-fire. The day before, Sakashvili had signed a similar declaration, without much effect in South Ossetia. His credibility is, however limited: just hours before the Georgian aggression, he had also declared peace for South Ossetia.

In the evening, Sakashvili celebrated a strange ceremony in Tblisi together with the Polish and Ukrainian presidents and an enormous amount of supporters. Other Georgians considered his responsibility for the calamities. What the consequences will be remains to be seen.

Israeli Involvement

Surprisingly, Hezbollah-Chief Nasrallah stated that "Failed IDF generals caused Georgia defeat in war" [13] – and there was a core of truth in that saying: Privately-owned Israeli military contractors, like those operated by Major General Yisrael Ziv and Brigadier General Gal Hirsch (both with a prominent position in the 2nd Israeli-Lebanon War), continued training Georgian security forces [14]. The official Israel, foreseeing the conflict with Russia, reduced its military supplies to Georgia already in 2007. Apparently they were then less surprised of the war than their American allies; did they know something they forgot to tell others about?

Citicide during the Initial Phase of the War

I was deeply shocked by the intensive bombardment of Tskhinvali – not a military target – by the Georgian 'Stalin-orgues' in the night between 7th and 8th of August. I was waiting in vain for aerial pictures showing the destruction, expecting the city turned into a bunch of rubble – but these pictures did not appear. I have instead collected a number of pictures (next side) showing destruction of buildings, not necessarily restricted to that city. There is no flattened city seen, but some buildings have holes in their roofs, some are even completely hollow (all floors missing) but generally, the outer walls are standing, though scarred by sequels from multiple grenades and with almost all windows gone. Inside the houses, chaotic remains (if not burnt out) give some impression of what can still, in spite of the standing walls, be termed a citicide.

Already termed Genocide by Putin on an early occasion, the brutal attack, by which the war was begun, may have killed 15-20% of Tskhinvali's inhabitants – a more detailed counting remains to be published.

Cease-Fire – When and on Which Conditions

On August 16, President Medvedev signed the 6 point cease-fire which was elaborated by French President Sarkozy. The plan has, as any political compromise, several weak points: it does not include a precise time-table, therefore talk of that "the Russian military would remain inside Georgia until 'extra security measures' were in place" [15] but which are not defined. "The six-point ceasefire agreement authorises Russia to carry out 'additional security measures on a temporary basis' until an int. peacekeeping force arrives in Georgia" [same ref.].

As if these items were unknown, the Western countries exhibit great paranoia and (unspecific) threats the day after Russia signed the cease-fire. "Medvedev .. support independence bids by Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as Russian troops roamed in Georgia proper, prompting outcries that Moscow was violating a truce reached with Tbilisi" was written in Moscow Times on Aug. 16 [16]. The extent of the propaganda-war lets one feel that we are already at war (but, unfortunately, at the wrong front, led by war-criminals and scrupulous politicians). Dear Friends, **try to keep a clear head in that smoke!**

Aug. 18, 2008

13 <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1011867.html>

14 <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1011344.html>

15 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/aug/17/russia.georgia>

16 <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/600/42/369810.htm>