

Timeline of Developments Leading Up to the Russian-Georgian Conflict of August 2008

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(This timeline is designed to illustrate incidents which occurred between Russia and Georgia in the lead up to the South Ossetian/Abkhazian War. It primarily covers the period between January 2008 and the outbreak of war on August 8, 2008. The timeline is a work in progress, and may be updated or changed at any time.)

January 2008:

Jan. 23: Russia demands that the Council of Europe create representation offices for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgia fundamentally opposes this.

Jan. 23: Russia's Foreign Minister Lavrov advises Georgia to show its commitment to solving the disputes in Ossetia and Abkhazia by signing a treaty against the use of force in the regions. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=16971&search=>)

Jan. 23: Abkhazia's coast guard claims to have opened fire on two Georgian vessels violating Abkhazian territorial waters; Tblisi denies that the incident ever took place. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=16978&search=>)

Jan. 29: UN Secretary Ban Ki-Moon's report on the Georgia/Abkhazia conflict is released, calling for a peaceful end to the conflict. The report advocates an autonomous Abkhazia within the borders of Georgia. (<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,...GEO,4562d8cf2,47ab022be,0.html>)

February 2008:

Feb. 5: Abkhaz President Sergey Bagapsh sets November as the deadline for residents of Abkhazia to register for Russian passports, during a cabinet meeting. After November, residents will not be able to attend university, own property, or register cars unless they hold a Russian passport. Those without Russian passports will be asked to leave the territory. Georgia condemns the decision.

Feb. 17: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov states that the declaration and recognition of Kosovar independence has direct implications for the treatment of Georgian regions Abkhazia

and South Ossetia. (<http://www.iht.com/articles/reuters/2008/02/15/europe/OUKWD-UK-SERBIA-KOSOVO-RUSSIA.php>)

Feb. 17: South Ossetian President Kokoity appeals to the countries of the CIS and the UN for recognition of South Ossetia's independence. (http://www.sofiaecho.com/article/southern-ossetia-to-demand-for-international-recognition/id_27630/catid_5)

Feb. 23: Georgia claims to have reached a deal with Russia on joint border control around South Ossetia and Abkhazia. On February 27, however, the Russian foreign ministry denies that such a deal was ever a possibility. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17214&search=>)

Feb. 26: A Georgian journalist, Malkhaz Basilaia, is arrested and detained in Abkhazia by Russian peacekeepers and then by Abkhaz forces while reporting on Abkhaz participation in the Russian presidential election. (<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080229/100361020.html>)

Feb 27: Sergei Bagapsh refuses to release the journalist, alleging that he illegally crossed the Abkhaz border. Georgia agitates for his release. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17208&search=>)

Feb 27: The Georgian government protests to Russia on the issue of voting for the Russian election in Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Georgian government maintains that it did not give Russia permission to open polling stations in the enclaves. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17204&search=>)

Feb. 27: The Abkhaz government announces that it will hold large-scale military exercises on the 1-5 March.

Feb. 28: A blast in a South Ossetian police station kills two police officers and wounds several others. The militia claim that the bomb was brought to the station disguised as a television by 'persons of Georgian ethnicity.' They accuse Tblisi of committing terrorist acts. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17226&search=>)

Feb. 29: The Abkhazian military exercises start a day early, with an addition five hundred reservists mobilized for participation in the exercises. (<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080324/102090934-print.html>)

March 2008

March 1: Abkhazia announces partial mobilization of military reservists. (<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080324/102090934-print.html>)

March 1: Tblisi suggests that the Joint Control Commission on South Ossetian negotiating be scrapped and replaced with a new format. Russia denied the request, saying it did not see an alternative to the current model. Three days later, Georgia finally pulls out of the JCC, refusing to participate. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17244&search=>, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17257&search=>)

March 5: Georgian and foreign media reports that Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia are digging trenches on the Georgian border. A report also alleges that citizens of Abkhazia have been transported to the border and are being forced to dig trenches. The claim is rejected by Russian peacekeepers.

March 6: The Russian Duma officially lifts the sanctions on trade, finance and transport which it had imposed on Abkhazia since 1996 as required by the cease fire agreement negotiated under the auspices of the CIS, and the Russian government advised other nations to follow suit. (http://www.kommersant.com/p864557/r_548/unrecognized_states/)

March 7: President Saakashvili calls the Russian pull-out from the CIS restrictions on Abkhazia dangerous and illegal. He calls for a policy of 'zero tolerance on Abkhazian militarization. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17294&search=>)

March 13: The Russian Duma recommends a deferred status of official diplomatic and economic cooperation with the two breakaway republics, in lieu of full recognition. Both republics expressed discontent with the decision. (<http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1079631.html>)

March 14: An armed exchange on the Georgian-Ossetian border results in the wounding of two Georgian soldiers. The Georgian military accuse the South Ossetians of staging a provocation. (<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080516/107600751.html>)

March 18: Abkhazia claims that it shot down a Georgian reconnaissance aircraft, and the Georgian government denies this. Fragments of the supposed aircraft have yet been recovered to corroborate the claim. (<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080512/107168419.html>)

March 21: The Russian Duma urges President Putin to consider recognizing independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This is in response to possible Georgian membership of NATO. (<http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/03/21/europe/russia.php>)

March 21: Abkhazia announces a military exercise and mobilization which will end on March 28. Up to 4,000 people will participate in the military exercise. (<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080324/102090934-print.html>)

March 26: Russia accuses Georgia of facilitating terrorist attacks after two South Ossetian militiamen were badly wounded in a car bombing. Russia announced that the Georgian security services were responsible. On March 28, a similar attack on the car of the chief prosecutor of the region kills a bystander; this attack is also blamed on Georgian security services. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17456&search=>,
<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17465&search=>)

March 28: Abkhazian military officials comment to local television that the ongoing military exercises are preparations for an upcoming war. (http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=651&Itemid=130)

April 2008

April 3: As NATO announced that Georgia will someday become a member, Vladimir Putin affirms his support for Abkhazian separatists. His letter to regional leaders stresses the dangers of Georgian accession and describes his support for Abkhazia as an integral part of regional security. (<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/04/03/europe/EU-GEN-Russia-Putin-Georgia.php>)

April 16: Russia establishes official ties with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Foreign Minister Lavrov again calls on other countries to lift the sanctions against the breakaway regions. (<http://www.cctv.com/english/20080417/104642.shtml>)

April 21: Georgia accuses Russia of shooting down a reconnaissance drone over Georgian territory. Officials release footage showing a jet, possibly a Russian MiG-29, firing a missile at the drone. Russia dismisses the allegations. (<http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/04/21/europe/georgia.php>)

April 22: Russia's Foreign Ministry announces that the Georgian drone downed over Abkhazia is in violation of the force separation treaty (1994). Despite this, Russia continues to deny shooting down the drone, and Abkhazian separatists have taken the blame. (<http://www.civilgeorgia.ge/eng/article.php?id=17663>)

April 22: Despite growing tensions, UN observers deny that there has been any build up of troops by either side in Abkhazia or South Ossetia. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17654&search=>)

April 28: Russia's NATO envoy Dmitry Rogozin says Georgia is acting provocatively and may be seeking war. (<http://www.iht.com/articles/reuters/2008/04/30/europe/OUKWD-UK-GEORGIA-RUSSIA-NATO.php>)

April 29: Russia announces its intention of increasing troop numbers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, although it gave assurances that these troops will not exceed the limits imposed by the 1994 ceasefire. The troop increases are blamed on Georgia, which Russia claims is concentrating troops near the borders. (<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/600/42/362347.htm>)

April 29: Georgia announces that it is cancelling bilateral talks on Russia's accession to the WTO until Russia rescinds its recognition of Ossetia and Abkhazia. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17710&search=>)

May 2008

May 1: Russian reinforcements arrived in Abkhazia, estimated at 900 new troops. (<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20060201/43282261.html>)

May 1: Abkhazia's Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba invited the Russian military to take control of the region. In exchange, Shamba demanded security guarantees.
(<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080428/106115714.html>)

May 4: It is discovered that 500 paratroopers will be among the new Russian reinforcements in Abkhazia, as well as thirty airborne infantry fighting vehicles, artillery guns and anti-aircraft systems. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17786>)

May 5: Georgia withdraws from a military air defense cooperation treaty with Russia, citing its wish to remove itself from involvement in any CIS organized military organization
(<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17710&search=>)

May 8: Russia announces further possible reinforcements to peacekeeping forces if Georgia sends reinforcements to the conflict zone. Russia claims to have 2,542 troops in Abkhazia, under the limit of 3,000 established in the 1994 ceasefire.
(<http://www.iht.com/articles/reuters/2008/05/08/europe/OUKWD-UK-RUSSIA-GEORGIA-PEACEKEEPERS.php>)

May 8: Abkhazian rebels claim to have downed another Georgian drone, the third in five days.

May 12: Abkhazia claims to have once again downed a pair of Georgian drones, bringing the total to five this month.
(<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2008/05/200861502325960666.html>)

May 16: Alexander Zelin, Russia's Air Force Commander, says a base in Abkhazia would improve Russian security. (<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080515/107491421.html>)

May 16: Russia accuses Georgia of supporting subversive and terrorist activities. They claim to have caught a Georgian spy who was heavily involved in 'Georgian involvement in subversive activities in Russia's North Caucasus.'
(<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17845&search=>)

May 18: A Georgian policeman is injured when his vehicle strikes an explosive device, providing the second explosion of the day in Nikozi. The Georgian deputy defense minister accuses South Ossetian separatists of turning to terrorist methods.
(<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080516/107600751.html>)

May 19: Five Russian peacekeepers are detained by Georgia along the Abkhaz border. The Georgians claim that the peacekeepers damaged a car, but Russians say the arrests are a direct provocation. The UN observer mission reports that the facts were unclear.
(<http://www.unomig.org/media/headlines/?id=10638&y=2008&m=5&d=19>)

May 20: Taimuraz Mamsurov, president of North Ossetia, appeals for support of unification of North and South Ossetia at a presentation in the Russian Foreign Ministry. South Ossetia's president Eduard Kokoity echoes the remarks, claiming South Ossetia's main goal is to be unified with North Ossetia as part of the Russian Federation.
(<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080520/107888655.html>)

May 21: Several people are wounded in gunfire along the Abkhazian border. Georgia's interior ministry accuses Abkhazian forces of firing on a bus carrying Georgian citizens from Abkhazia to Georgia to cast ballots in the parliamentary elections.

(<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/05/21/europe/EU-GEN-Georgia-Abkhazia.php>)

May 26: Russia completes a troop rotation in Abkhazia. Moscow says the redeployment will continue until 30 May and that the procedure is in line with the 1994 ceasefire.

(<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080531/108956050.html>)

May 27: The UN Investigation concludes that the Georgian reconnaissance drone downed last month was struck by an air-to-air missile fired from a Russian jet. Georgia denounces Russia's non-neutral position in the region and its unsuitability for peacekeeping and demanded a Russian apology and compensation. The report also accuses Georgia of stoking tensions in the region with its reconnaissance over flights.

(<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080529/108827453.html>)

May 28: Russia calls for Abkhazian representation at the UN Security Council hearing on the drone downing. Russia argued that holding the session without one of the main parties would be a waste. (<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080530/108885616.html>)

May 29: Five South Ossetian militiamen are injured in a car bombing in Tskhinvali. 'Georgian Security Services' are blamed for the attack.

May 31: Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin states that he supports Abkhazian autonomy, though not full independence. Putin backs Georgia's package of autonomy, the vice-presidency, a free trade agreement and parliament seats in exchange for Abkhazia dropping its bid for independence. (<http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL31462201>)

May 31: Russia deploys unarmed troops to rebuild a railroad in Abkhazia, calling the deployment 'humanitarian aid.'

(http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2373110)

June 2008

June 7: Moscow announces the withdrawal of the 400 soldiers deployed to Abkhazia to repair damaged rail lines. (<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L0772791.htm>)

June 15: A shootout between Georgian and South Ossetian forces leaves several wounded on the Ossetian side. Both Georgia and South Ossetia deny opening fire first.

(<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080615/110549527.html>)

June 16: Russia denies reports that it was constructing a military base in Abkhazia, announcing that the rumors are designed to discredit Russia's peacekeeping operation in the region. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17850>)

June 17: Four Russian peacekeepers re detained by Georgian police, charged with allegedly illegally transporting weapons. The detention violated treaties permitting Russian peacekeepers free movement in the area.

(<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18561&search=>)

June 19: Russian Lt. General Alexander Burutin warns Georgia that Russia's peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia will not maintain restraint if they continue to face 'provocations' from Tbilisi. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18576>)

June 20: Russian cellular company MegaFon is accused of illegally expanding into South Ossetia. (<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/1009/42/368435.htm>)

June 23: Abkhazian armed forces hold more military exercises designed to improve coordination between tanks and motorized infantry units.

June 25: Russia announces plans to build a gas pipeline into Abkhazia Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili accuses Gazprom of intending to explore for oil in the breakaway region, but Gazprom denied this. (http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2373168)

June 30: Four blasts in two days injure about a dozen people in Abkhazia; it is unclear who was behind the blasts. Both sides have blamed the other.

(<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18649&search=>)

July 2008

July 3: Three Georgian policemen are injured in a mine explosion in South Ossetia. The officers were part of a convoy accompanying Dimitri Sanakoev, the head of the Georgia-backed South Ossetian provisional authority. Sanakoev was uninjured.

(<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18674>)

July 4: Two people aer killed in overnight shelling near Tskhinvali. At least seven more are injured. Two militiamen are also killed in attacks on their command post. All the dead and injured were casualties of Georgian shelling, although Georgia claimed it was responding to fire from South Ossetian militants. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18677&search=>)

July 6: Several blasts occurre on the Abkhaz side of the border, although no one is injured. Local police report that parts of the uniforms worn by Georgian special forces were found near the explosion site. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18698&search=>)

July 7: Four people are killed and six injured in a bomb blast in a café in Gali, Abkhazia. Among the dead are the local head of the Abkhazian militia and a UN translator. The blast has been blamed on Georgia. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18702&search=>)

July 8: Four Georgian soldiers are detained in South Ossetia. It was unclear whether Ossetian or Russian forces were holding the men. Georgia's Defence Ministry claims the detentions are illegal. (<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/1010/42/368820.htm>)

July 19: A Georgian police post on the Abkhaz border is attacked. One assailant is killed after accidentally detonating a grenade. (<http://www.itar-tass.com/txt/eng/level2.html?NewsID=12883676&PageNum=0>)

July 19: Abkhaz defence officials deny Georgian allegations that Russian and Abkhaz forces are deployed in the Kodori Gorge. Anatoly Zaitsev, chief of Abkhaz forces, calls the report 'fiction' designed to discredit the Russian peacekeeping force. (<http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2008/07/19/10021.shtml>, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18818>)

July 21: Georgia takes prisoner four South Ossetian civilians, charged with drug possession. However, the men were most likely kidnapped in response for the imprisonment of a Georgian man several days earlier. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18823&search=>)

July 25: Russia announces firm plans to withdraw its 400 railroad troops from Abkhazia on 29-30 July once repairs to a 34-mile stretch of track are completed. (<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080725/114890829.html>)

July 29: Georgia accuses South Ossetian militants of firing on a Georgian post on the Sarabuki heights. (<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080729/115197261.html>)

July 30: South Ossetia announces again its desire to join Russia. Eduard Kokoity, the province's president, is quoted saying that South Ossetia is undermined to weaken Russia's regional standing. (<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080729/115197261.html>)

August 2008

August 1: Two improvised explosive devices explode in Georgian-controlled territory in South Ossetia, injuring 5 Georgian policemen. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18868>)

August 2: Six South Ossetians are killed by snipers near the Georgian border in retaliation. The dead were mostly off-duty police officers with the South Ossetian separatist government who were out fishing and swimming. (<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,574812-2,00.html>)

August 2: South Ossetian leader Edward Kokoity warns that if tensions continued to rise in the region, he will declare a general mobilization of all troops, including volunteers from North Caucasus republics within Russia. North Ossetian President Mamurov pledges to aid South Ossetia if attacked. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18876&search=>, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18874&search=>)

August 2: Seven Georgian civilians are injured during shelling of Georgian controlled villages in the region. The attack is blamed on Ossetian separatists. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18872&search=>)

August 2: Valery Yevtukhovich, commander of a Russian paratrooper force, says his men are ready to deploy to South Ossetia to support peacekeeping efforts. He announces that Russia will not allow harm to come to those living in South Ossetia.

(<http://www.iht.com/articles/reuters/2008/08/02/europe/OUKWD-UK-GEORGIA-OSSETIA.php>)

August 3: Russia warns that South Ossetia is close to a "large-scale" military conflict.

(<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18886&search=>)

August 4: South Ossetia begins the evacuation of hundreds of women and children to Russia.

(<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18881&search=>)

August 4: A senior Russian MP argues that escalating violence in South Ossetia should not be met with indifference in the North Caucasus. Konstantin Zatulin calls on Russian peacekeepers to actively suppress violence and punish those committing crimes.

(<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080808/115896027.html>)

August 4: Israel blocks arms sales to Georgia following Russian protests. Tbilisi has been a major buyer of Israeli arms in the past and the embargo prevents the delivery of tanks, armoured personnel carriers and other heavy weaponry on order.

(<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080904/116547799.html>)

August 5: Russia issues statement that it will defend Russian citizens in South Ossetia (Note: Russia had given passports to virtually all residents of South Ossetia over the previous decade.)

August 6: Georgia and South Ossetia accuse each other of opening fire on villages in the region. Intensive exchanges of grenade launcher fire took place on both sides.

(<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18909&search=>)

August 6: South Ossetia claims it destroyed two Georgian military vehicles in the village of Nuli. Tbilisi denies the report, saying no major incidents have occurred since 2 August.

(<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080805/115751591.html>)

August 6: South Ossetian separatists refuse to participate in peace talks set for the 7th of August, aimed at defusing tensions in the region.

(<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18910&search=>)

August 7: Russian forces entered South Ossetia through the Roki Tunnel in the early morning under cover of darkness. (Russia later claimed this was a normal rotation of its peacekeepers; Tbilisi countered that under the terms of the existing cease fire agreement all rotations of peacekeeping forces must occur in daylight and must be preceded by one month's notice.)

(<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18943&search=>)

August 7: A Georgian envoy travels to South Ossetia at the invitation of Russian Special Envoy Popov to meet with South Ossetian negotiator Chochiev. Chochiev refused to attend the meeting, while Popov's car allegedly broke down en route.

August 7: Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Vashadze calls Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin to assure him that under no circumstances will Georgia attack Russian peacekeepers.

August 7: Three Georgian servicemen are injured after their armoured vehicle is blown up by a rocket propelled grenade launched by South Ossetian militants (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18924&search=>)

August 7: The South Ossetian government announces that 18 people have been hurt during 'intensive' shelling of villages by Georgian troops. Georgia also reports two soldiers injured during mortar fire. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18914&search=>)

August 7: Saakashvili appeals for calm in a televised statement. He orders a ceasefire and makes the offer of 'unrestricted autonomy' for South Ossetia in exchange for peace. Russian peacekeepers claim they had completely lost control of separatists in the region. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18931&search=>)

August 7: The ceasefire only lasts a few hours, as Georgia claims that several villages continue to come under attack. Hostilities resume later that evening. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18940&search=>)

August 8: Georgia claims Russian planes have dropped bombs just south of South Ossetia. (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7550804.stm>)

August 8: Abkhazia announces that it will reinforce its border following escalating violence in South Ossetia. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18950&search=>)

August 8: Putin warns Georgia that any actions it takes in South Ossetia may lead to possible 'retaliatory' action from Russia. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18956&search=>)

August 8: Russian aircrafts bomb a number of strategic targets across Georgia, including military bases and ports. (<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18976&search=>)

August 9: Abkhaz separatists launch an offensive in the Kodori Gorge. Sergei Shamba, the province's Foreign Minister, says Abkhaz warplanes and artillery are targeting Georgian forces in the area, and vowed the initial assault is only the first phase of the operation. (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1591470.stm>)