

# A chronology of the crisis

## How the major events played out

UNPICKING THE ORIGINS of the fraught relationship between Russia and Georgia could send the curious reader even further back in history than 1801, when Tsar Pavel I signed a decree incorporating the Kartli-Kakheti Georgian kingdom into the Russian Empire. Even before that date, Russia had been offering regional protection.

In the run-up to war in Georgia in August 2008, there were countless provocations and hostile acts claimed by both sides against the other. Some of the background to the latest hostilities was covered in 'Sparring over Abkhazia' (*Strategic Comments*, volume 14, issue 5; available at [www.iiss.org](http://www.iiss.org)). Below, we follow the most important events from 7 August to 8 September.

### August

**7** Georgian forces launch an attack on Tskhinvali, the capital of the breakaway region of South Ossetia, hours after announcing a ceasefire meant to end several days of skirmishes. Tskhinvali is bombarded with rockets and artillery shells.

**8** Russian troops begin moving into South Ossetia, via the Roki tunnel through the North Caucasus mountain range, while Russian warplanes attack targets in Georgia. Georgia takes control of Tskhinvali, much of which is destroyed.

Thousands of South Ossetians flee to North Ossetia, part of Russia. South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity claims 1,600 citizens of the breakaway republic have been killed. This is a number which is confirmed by Russian observers at the time, but later will be revised down drastically.

**9** Russian troops move to take control of Tskhinvali. Russian aircraft bomb the Georgian town of Gori, 60km west of Tbilisi, and its military base. In Abkhazia, Georgia's other breakaway region, local forces attack the Georgian-controlled Kodori Valley area, in the east of the republic. Russian forces move into Abkhazia. The Georgian army reports 30 deaths and says that 15 Russian troops were killed in the previous days' fighting in South Ossetia.

**10** Russian ground forces advance from South Ossetia towards Gori, which is located on the main Georgian highway and railway line. Russia's warships take positions off the Georgian Black Sea coast and its aircraft bomb Gori and targets close to Tbilisi, including a military airport.

**11** Russian troops move beyond Abkhazia and enter the Georgian towns of Zugdidi and Senaki, which has a military base. US President George W. Bush says Russia's invasion of Georgia is 'unacceptable in the 21st century'.

**12** Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, after meeting French President Nicolas Sarkozy in Moscow, says Russia will end its campaign under a six-point deal. The six principles are:

- no use of force;
- cessation of hostilities;
- free access to humanitarian aid;
- Georgian armed forces to withdraw to their normal bases;
- Russian military forces to withdraw to the lines prior to the start of hostilities, although they will implement 'additional security measures' pending an international mechanism; and
- international discussions on achieving lasting security in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

France also says it will also table a draft resolution in the UN Security Council, based on the six-point plan, to help bring the conflict to an end.

Meanwhile, the presidents of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine visit Tbilisi to show their solidarity with Georgia. Abkhaz forces capture the Kodori Valley area of Abkhazia.

**13** In Tbilisi, Sarkozy secures the agreement of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili to a modified peace plan. The Georgian leader requests the removal of the sixth clause referring to talks on the future status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Medvedev agrees. Saakashvili asks that an arrangement for the future internationalisation of security measures in the region be included.

Russian troops occupy Gori and its military base. Russia says this is permitted under the deal, which

foresees 'additional security measures'. Bush calls on Moscow to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, to cease military activity and to withdraw. He orders the US military to provide humanitarian aid to Georgia. Aid begins arriving in US Air Force C-17 military transport aircraft.

**14** Reports emerge of 'ethnic cleansing' attacks by Ossetians and 'Chechen' militia in South Ossetia on ethnic Georgians and their property.

**15** Saakashvili signs the modified six-point accord during a visit to Tbilisi by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. While she is there, a Russian armoured column advances from Gori along the main highway to within 40km of Tbilisi. German Chancellor Angela Merkel travels to the Russian Black Sea port of Sochi, for tough talks with Medvedev over the crisis. She emphasises the need for Georgia's territorial integrity.

**16** Medvedev signs the six-point agreement. However, Russia indicates it will keep troops in Georgia for as long as is necessary.

**17** Russia says it will begin a troop withdrawal to a security zone around South Ossetia established in 1999. It is reported to have moved SS-21 missile launchers into South Ossetia.

**18** The deputy chief of the Russian General Staff, Colonel General Anatoly Nogovitsyn, says Russia has begun 'the pull-back of peace-keeping forces'. However, there are few signs of this happening. Instead, Russian troops re-enter the port of Poti, which they had previously entered several times and bombed, as well as destroying Georgian vessels there. They capture 20 Georgian soldiers and seize five American Humvee troop transporters.

**19** France tables its resolution in the UN Security Council, where it is rejected by Russia. The Russian representative says the resolution separates individual elements of the six-point peace plan and reinterprets them for 'propaganda' purposes. Russia

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claims the peace plan allows its troops to stay in a buffer zone on the Georgian side of the border with South Ossetia, which is something the UN draft resolution does not recognise.

**21** As Western countries accuse Russia of failing to honour the ceasefire plan, Russia circulates its own UN Security Council resolution. Among other things, this reiterates Moscow's view that the peace plan allows it to implement 'additional security measures' before leaving Georgia.

Separately, Russia issues new casualty figures, now listing 133 civilians as having been killed in South Ossetia – less than a tenth of the 1,600 casualties previously claimed. The Russian emergencies ministry reports that out of an estimated 38,000 civilians who fled South Ossetia at the height of the conflict, almost 18,000 have returned.

**22** Most Russian forces withdraw from Georgia, although they remain in an area just outside South Ossetia, in Poti and around the towns of Zugdidi and Senaki. Russia insists only 'peacekeeping' forces remain.

**24** US Navy destroyer *McFaul* arrives in the Georgian port of Batumi to distribute humanitarian aid.

**26** Russia formally recognises the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Bush condemns the move as 'irresponsible' and calls on Moscow to adhere to the six-point agreement and to live up to its international commitments.

**27** NATO calls on Russia to reverse its decision, which 'violates the many UN Security Council resolutions it has endorsed regarding Georgia's territorial integrity.' It says Russia's actions 'have called into question its commitment to peace and security in the Caucasus'.

The US Coast Guard cutter *Dallas* delivers aid to the port of Batumi, avoiding the Russian-occupied port of Poti which was previously said to be its destination. In an interview with the BBC, Medvedev accuses the US of using the guise of humanitarian aid to take weapons into Georgia.

The G7 group of leading industrial nations issues a statement criticising Russia's recognition of South Ossetia

and Abkhazia and deploring its 'excessive use of military force in Georgia and its continued occupation of parts of Georgia'.

**28** Medvedev attends a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe, seeking support for Russia's position. Instead, China and four central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – call for respect for the territorial integrity of states and criticise the use of force to redraw borders.

In Moscow, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin gives an interview to CNN, in which he suggests that the United States may have provoked the war in Georgia to 'create a competitive advantage for one of the candidates for the US presidency'.

**29** Russia hits back at the G7 statement of 27 August, calling it biased. The deputy speaker of the South Ossetian parliament, Tarzan Kokoity, suggests the region could be absorbed into Russia soon. President Eduard Kokoity had previously welcomed Russian bases on South Ossetian soil. A Russian official tells the Interfax news agency that Moscow also plans to establish two bases in Abkhazia.

Georgia announces that it will recall all diplomatic staff from its embassy in Moscow and cut diplomatic ties with Russia to a bare minimum.

**30** Medvedev promises military aid to South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

**31** Medvedev declares Russia's decision to recognise the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia is 'irreversible'.

## September

**1** An emergency summit of 27 EU leaders describes Russia's recognition of South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence as 'unacceptable' and condemns Russia for failing to fully implement the French-brokered peace plan.

The EU decides against imposing sanctions on Russia or sending armed EU peacekeepers to Georgia. Instead, it shelves forthcoming negotiations on a new strategic partnership with Moscow and agrees to send military ceasefire monitors to Georgia.

**3** The US announces a \$1 billion aid package to help Georgia rebuild. The move comes as US Vice President Dick Cheney arrives in Tbilisi to pledge support for Saakashvili. Cheney vows that Georgia will join NATO.

Nicaragua becomes the first country besides Russia to recognise South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence.

**5** The USS *Mount Whitney* arrives with humanitarian aid in Poti, where Russian ships remain stationed. Russia questions whether the flagship of the US Navy's Mediterranean fleet is ideally suited to carrying humanitarian aid, but says it will not respond militarily to the increased presence of US naval forces in the Black Sea.

At a meeting in Moscow, the leaders of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) – which comprises Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – release a statement backing Russia's actions in South Ossetia. Four of these countries had been less supportive of Russia at the SCO summit.

In Avignon, France, EU foreign ministers meet to discuss sending international observers to monitor the ceasefire in Georgia.

Russia's emergencies ministry calculates that nearly 31,000 refugees have returned to South Ossetia.

**6** In Italy, Cheney makes the strongest US criticism yet of Russia, calling its recent actions 'an affront to civilised standards' and 'completely unacceptable'.

**8** Russia agrees to withdraw its troops from Georgian territory surrounding South Ossetia and Abkhazia, following talks in Moscow with Sarkozy, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana and European Commission head José Manuel Barroso. Russia agrees that checkpoints around Poti and Senaki will be closed within a week. The rest of the pull-out will happen once 200 European monitors are deployed by 1 October. Russia's withdrawal is dependent on Georgia signing a 'non-aggression pact'. An international conference on the crisis is scheduled for 15 October in Geneva.

Georgia releases casualty figures indicating that 295 Georgians were killed during the crisis – 186 soldiers and 109 civilians.