



**Advanced Research and Assessment Group  
Defence Academy of the United Kingdom**

# **THINK PIECE**

## **The Nature of the Georgian Ceasefire**

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### **Russian objectives met in full**

- A ceasefire agreement between Russia and Georgia has been drawn up following mediation by French President Nicolas Sarkozy. But the content of the agreement as disclosed at the time of writing leaves open serious ambiguities and is fraught with consequences for relations between Russia, its neighbours, and the West.
- A vital point is that the agreement immobilises Georgian forces, while giving Russian forces outside South Ossetia free rein.
- Sarkozy's clarification of which Russian forces are intended to be covered is ambiguous: especially if taken in the context of Russian explanations that their presence in South Ossetia is simply a reinforcement of their "peacekeeping" presence there. (The Russian description of the 58<sup>th</sup> Army units and others which have entered Georgia through Ossetia is "enhanced peacekeeping contingent".)
- In addition, Russia is free to interpret "implementing security measures in the vicinity of South Ossetia" as a right to maintain a buffer zone of unspecified depth into Georgia, in order to prevent any repeat of attacks or shelling of Tskhinvali. This too equates to carte blanche to Russia to operate on Georgian territory.
- Thus the text of the agreement as available to date leaves a loophole for unrestrained military activity by Russia, while neutralising any remaining Georgian military potential. It also confirms and legalises the Russian presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In this manner it presents a total and unqualified success for Russian policy, and provides ample rewards for the Russian military incursion.

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## **Detail of ceasefire agreement**

On 12<sup>th</sup> August Dmitry Medvedev gave a press conference where he outlined six "principles" of the ceasefire agreement as discussed with Sarkozy. These were largely unchanged from Russia's already stated demands on Georgia.

### **Text of ceasefire agreement as per Dmitry Medvedev, 12<sup>th</sup> August:<sup>1</sup>**

President of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, and President of the French Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy support the following principles for the settling of conflicts and urge other sides to undersign them.

There will be six principles.

Number one, the sides shall refrain from the use of force.

Number two, the sides shall put an effective end to all hostilities.

Number three, the sides shall provide free access to humanitarian aid.

Number four, the Georgian Armed Forces shall return to the bases of permanent deployment.

Number five, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation shall withdraw to the line of deployment they occupied prior to the outbreak of the conflict. Until special international mechanisms are set up, the Russian peacekeeping forces shall effectuate additional security measures.

Number six, an international discussion should begin over the future status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the ways of ensuring reliable security for them.

Sarkozy then presented amended principles in Tbilisi, following discussions with President Saakashvili. In essence, the only variation from those presented earlier which emerged in Sarkozy's press conference was an amendment to the sixth point, which it was suggested would protect Georgian territorial integrity.

### **Amendment to ceasefire agreement as per Sarkozy press conference in Tbilisi following meeting with Saakashvili, 12<sup>th</sup> August:<sup>2</sup>**

The first principle is not to resort to force between the different main players - this concerns everybody: the Ossetians, the Abkhazians, Georgia as a whole, including Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the Russians.

[The second principle is] to cease hostilities in a definitive manner, to move from a provisional cease-fire to a definitive cease-fire.

The third principle is to give free access to humanitarian aid...

[The fourth principle is that] the Georgian military forces will withdraw to their usual places of stationing; President Saakashvili was happy to give me his agreement on this provision.

[The fifth principle is that] the Russian military forces will have to withdraw to the lines in place prior to the outbreak of hostilities. I add that this concerns South Ossetia. This is an addition which President Saakashvili wanted me to make. I'm quite happy to make it. And,

pending an international mechanism, the Russian peace forces [changes thought] - why are we calling them Russian peace forces? Because that's the designation of the Russian military forces deployed under an international mandate in South Ossetia prior to the crisis. That's why we are talking about the withdrawal of Russian military forces, in other words those who arrived after the outbreak of the crisis, and we are specifying that the Russian peace forces, in other words those in South Ossetia prior to the crisis, will, in a provisional manner, implement additional security measures. This paragraph, I mean the additional security measures, only concerns the immediate vicinity of South Ossetia. This is in no way about additional security measures concerning the whole Georgian territory.

Finally, the sixth point, and this is where there is a change, a change accepted by President Medvedev on the basis of the two telephone conversations I had with him in the presence of Bernard Kouchner: the opening of international discussions on the modalities of security and stability in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We are thus withdrawing the expression "the future status".

The clarification of the fifth point, on withdrawal of Russian troops, appeared to arise from discussion with Saakashvili. It remains to be seen whether Saakashvili's under-reported objections to the principles Sarkozy brought from Moscow will be reflected in the final version.<sup>3</sup>

**Comment by Saakashvili at Tbilisi press conference, 12<sup>th</sup> August:**

With regard to this document, there are several things there. First of all, I agree with everything that President Sarkozy has said...

The point that concerns the peacekeepers would have to underline: it is about South Ossetia... because there is another question with the so-called peacekeepers, in Abkhazia. But here we are talking about South Ossetia and the proximity of Tskhinvali. It cannot be interpreted as a way to [indistinct] in Georgia, and, say, blow up ships in the port of Poti...

The last point was ... that the future status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia should be discussed in an international process. And that has been deleted with the agreement of [Georgia] and the Russians and the French side, because there were different interpretations...

Territorial integrity and the belonging of South Ossetia and Abkhazia to Georgia can never be put under doubt... That is out of question."

Asked whether he had signed the document, Saakashvili said: "It is not to be signed. It is a political document. It is an agreement on principles".

**Was there an alternative?**

1. In our ARAG situation paper on 11<sup>th</sup> August, we wrote that "Russia is unlikely to view a Western European peace mission... as legitimate." This failed to take into account the possibility of a Western European peace mission which sought to enforce all Russia's demands.
2. Medvedev said his talks with Sarkozy were easy because they shared a common viewpoint. It could be that Sarkozy accepted all Russian demands for putting to the Georgians because he saw no viable alternative: it could also be that no other

Western politician would have been acceptable to Medvedev, especially if they were to raise objections or alternatives.

3. The ceasefire appears to cement Russian military gains in place for the foreseeable future. Russia therefore sees that in certain circumstances, use of military force for foreign policy aims will be rewarded. This does not mean that similar circumstances are likely to pertain for Russia's other neighbours in the near future, especially if they behave responsibly: but a precedent has been set.
4. NATO and the EU have demonstrated that Western-leaning nations who get themselves into trouble with Russia need not expect help over and above verbal declarations: and Russia has at no time considered words of outrage to be a meaningful response. Georgia has found that France and Germany will torpedo any efforts in the interests of their own bilateral relations with Russia. This was already clear in other areas of leverage, and has now been shown in response to military force; to the extent that Germany's Frank-Walter Steinmeier "warned against condemnation of Russian actions in Georgia".<sup>4</sup>
5. Neighbours of Russia will take note of this and may adjust their posture accordingly (see the case study at the end of this note). In the worst case, this could go as far as finding their own new accommodation with Russia in order not to suffer worse consequences.<sup>5</sup>

## Questions

It is essential for management of the West's relations with Russia and with Russia's neighbours that the following questions find answers over the coming weeks:

1. It seems improbable that Georgia could have mounted its move into South Ossetia without foreign partners, in particular the USA, being aware – particularly given the number of US military advisors still in country. Was Saakashvili badly advised that he had a chance of success? If foreign partners had prior knowledge of a military plan that did not include immediate control of the Roki Tunnel, then they share responsibility for the outcome.
2. Given that Russian troops were pre-positioned for precisely this deployment, and the number of times it had been practised over the previous two years, who in the Georgian military leadership thought the Georgian military operation had realistic chances of success?
3. Or did Saakashvili fall victim to believing his own propaganda, and act alone or against advice?
4. Where else in its immediate neighbourhood can Russia now create conditions where leaders see no option but to play into Russia's hands by taking ill-advised action?
5. How and why did the Georgian Armed Forces collapse so rapidly and so dramatically? Equipment purchased over years of inflated defence budgets seems

to have performed adequately in some cases (for example, initial air defence successes) but US training does not seem to have prevented the army melting away.

6. Foreign criticism of the Russian over-reaction is apt and timely, but there has been relatively little visible criticism of Georgian actions in South Ossetia during and immediately before the Russian incursion: including apparent willingness to join in artillery exchanges targetting Tskhinvali and surrounding villages. Abuses of human rights need to be closely, and reliably, monitored on *both* sides.

### **Further implications:**

1. The new-old Russian idea of a pan-European security pact, as mooted in the Foreign Policy Concept launched on 12<sup>th</sup> July, must surely now be null and void.
2. Avenues of cooperation and dialogue with Russia are likely to close: following the immediate withdrawal by the US from the FRUKUS naval exercise, consistent further action would include exclusion from G8 meetings, and the freezing of the NATO-Russia Council (Russian sources have already suggested that meetings have been cancelled at US instigation).
3. Georgia also has leverage in blocking Russia's accession to the WTO: and is surely likely to use it.
4. Developments of this kind will only heighten Russia's encirclement mentality and foster non-cooperation and nationalism.
5. Russian Deputy Chief of General Staff Anatoliy Nogovitsyn was in no doubt that Russia had performed well in the information war. "It seems we did quite a lot to break the blockade of compromising material, lies and misrepresentation, which are hard to assess and which were witnessed by our mass media - especially Georgia's and personal statements," he said at a press conference on 13<sup>th</sup> August.<sup>6</sup>
6. As exemplified in the following text box, Russia's neighbours and near neighbours are alarmed and defence postures which have been established over the past decade and a half are now being questioned.

#### **Case Study: Swedish Media Reaction<sup>7</sup>**

On 12<sup>th</sup> August Col (Rtd) Bo Pellnäs under the heading "A weak Sweden gives no security" in the conservative paper Svenska dagbladet argued that the presence of Russian troops in Georgia prevents the West from providing military assistance and draws the conclusion that if the Russian military buildup continues, it will be inevitable to discuss the deployment of NATO or EU units to the Baltic states. Sweden should show its resolve to defend Gotland.

On 13<sup>th</sup> August the conservative newspaper Svenska Dagbladet under the heading "Therefore the war in Georgia also affects us" supported Pellnäs, arguing that fortified (Swedish) borders show the intention to defend the country, which creates

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stability in the region. "If we doubt our own ability we must dare to discuss whether we should join a defensive alliance". Most people will prefer to have NATO first in place, not Russia, the paper said.

The liberal Dagens Nyheter under the heading "Care for Sweden's defence" on 13th August referred to the travel of five presidents (of Poland, Ukraine, the Baltics) to Tbilisi to show solidarity to a state that had fallen victim to Russian aggression. It concluded that Sweden now has to adapt its defence policy to the same hard reality, which should affect the next budget allocations. "The destruction of the Swedish defence is no longer morally defensible".

Defence Minister Sven Tolgfors was hard pressed on this topic in Swedish television on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> August.

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<sup>1</sup> BBC Monitoring: Moscow *ITAR-TASS* in English 1516 GMT 12 August 2008

<sup>2</sup> BBC Monitoring: La Chaine Info, Paris, in French 2114 GMT 12 August 2008

<sup>3</sup> BBC Monitoring: Tbilisi Rustavi-2 Television in Georgian 2114 GMT 12 August 2008

<sup>4</sup> Spiegel Online, 13 August 2008, "Europa will Beobachtermission auf dem Kaukasus starten"

<sup>5</sup> See also, for example, BBC Monitoring: Fakt, 11 August 2008, "Polish paper questions US as 'credible ally' due to "passiveness" over Georgia"

<sup>6</sup> BBC Monitoring: Vesti TV news channel, Moscow, in Russian 0900 GMT 13 August 2008

<sup>7</sup> Thanks to Ingmar Oldberg of the Swedish FOI for this contribution