

**SSN**  
Model United Nations  
2021



UNITED NATIONS  
**DISARMAMENT AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY**



## AGENDA

*Discussing the nature of Protracted conflicts  
in the GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan  
and Moldova) area and its impact on  
international peace and  
security*



## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD:

Dear delegates, it is my absolute pleasure to be serving on the executive board SSN Model United Nations. SSNMUN over the years has garnered a reputation for simulating committees that facilitate great debate and deliver a learning experience to all participants. Though this background document finds you quite close to the conference, I do hope that you have done your background reading on the topic and are merely consulting this document for an overarching understanding. The agenda chosen is of pertinent influence in the policies created by The European Union, The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) among other multilateral entities and influential countries in the West, and not to forget the bear in the room, The Russian Federation. We shall look to tackle the extended conflicts as the General Assembly and attempt to find a mitigating path to the problem, if not a route to the solution itself. The extent of the effect of these conflicts, the precedent they set and the future ramifications the conflicts pose can threaten the very security of the continent of Europe, the heart of the last 2 world wars. Exploring the depth of the matter can help us all in understanding the strategic interests that form the foundation of the conflicts and the reason they have not yet reached any settlement.

Wishing you luck on your preparation,

The Executive board.





## ***Introduction to the issue:***

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union in the 90's there existed a few conflicts built on the bedrock of ethnicity and self-determination due to the fact that several states that fell under the blanket of the Union, found themselves as independent entities and each decided to stake claim to certain regions that they felt should belong to them. As we dive into the four conflicts under the purview of the discussion, it is important to know two things: the first being the term Frozen conflicts. The second, being the role of the OSCE in mediating and mitigating these conflicts.

The term “protracted conflicts” (also known as ‘frozen conflicts’ in most cases) has over the years, come to mean the ongoing separatist conflicts on territories previously under The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in which the international community is playing a role in trying to resolve: Karabakh (involving Azerbaijan), Abkhazia and South Ossetia (involving Georgia), Trans - Dniestria (involving Moldova) and Crimea + Eastern Ukraine.

Though these conflicts are more often than not grouped together, they differ vastly from each another. For example, there is no interaction between the Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijanis, due to the fact that the front line is heavily mined and depopulated, made impassable yet however on average each year, about 50 people are killed near the line of contact even in the absence of wider hostilities. At the other end of the spectrum, Trans-dniestrians and Moldovans interact in daily life, they travel through lands controlled by the other side. However, there has been virtually no violence near the de facto boundary since 1992. Resolving these conflicts represents a core function of the OSCE. Several of its bodies have been established over the years with the conflicts at the very crux of their mandates. For example, the mandate of the OSCE Mission to Moldova focuses on settlement of the Transdniestria conflict.





The OSCE has been looking into the Karabakh conflict since 1992 while the Minsk Group has been the main negotiating forum since 1994. However since 1996, a personal representative of the Chairman-in-Office has been on the ground in the region. Though the OSCE

Mission to Georgia (the most important focus of which was the South Ossetia conflict) was shut down after the Russian Federation-Georgia war in 2008, the OSCE has been involved in all subsequent discussions on both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It is fair to say that a significant part of the OSCE's activity and resources has been devoted to these conflicts.

The OSCE is also one of the international community's most important on-the ground presences in the Ukraine crisis, through the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, the OSCE - Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints, Gukovo and Donetsk, and the Trilateral Contact Group.

---

### ***The historical conflict and current situation in Azerbaijan (with Armenia):***

The Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (also referred to as the NKAO) occupied the South-Eastern portion of the lesser Caucasus and covered an area of 4,388 square km. The territory of the region stretched for 120 km from north to south and for 35-60 km from east to west. In the year 1988, The Armenians who were majority in the region of Karabakh, openly laid claim to the territory of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan. Both sides claim the ownership of the region and to make matters inherently more complex, several historical factors have been written and interpreted differently by both parties.



Even today, Armenians are not considered as indigenous people of the South Caucasus. According to a Caucasian anthropologist, I.I. Pantukhov (from the 19th century), Armenians, who have covered a centuries-long thorny roads from Europe (Balkan) to Asia Minor (Turkey, Anatolia) including the Caucasus, have always attempted to “Armenianize” the territories, states, tribes and ethnic groups along the way. According to Azerbaijan’ narratives, from 4th century B.C to 8th century A.D -the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh was one of the provinces of Caucasian Albania. And the people who lived in Caucasian Albania should not be confused with European Albania.

This ancient state existed on the territory of modern Azerbaijan till 8 A.D. Karabagh also was part of different Muslim states which replaced one another in Azerbaijan after its occupation by the Arabs. In 18th century Karabakh turned into an independent Karabakh Khanate.

During this period Russia started her Grand strategy as a part of expansionism policy which included here:

- 1) center-driven expansionism (geography and geopolitical factors played a dominant role),
- 2) mercantile interest
- 3) religious factor which Russia believed that the best way to strengthen provinces occupied by Russia was to increase Christian population (especially Armenians) and decrease Muslims.





At the end of 18th century two Armenians: Josef Argutinsky and Ivan Lazarev used this situation and reached high level in St. Peterburg's circle. They aimed to establish an Armenian state with the capital in Erivan to Potemkin. At the same time, the target region was specifically Karabakh, under the thought process that Armenia might be easily restored and in a short time many Armenians can flow in and create "Great Armenia" expanding their state at the expense of the territories of Eastern Turkey and Azerbaijan. As a result of Russia's expansionism policy, Karabakh khanate's independence couldn't last and all entities in the region, including the Karabakh khanate had come under the rule of Tsarist Russia. According to Kurekchay Treaty (1805), Karabakh khanate ended its independence. Later on, Russia applied "divide and rule" policy to the South Caucasus which played a decisive role in the nations' fate. The 2 treaties: Gulustan Treaty (1813) and Turkmenchay Treaty (1828) are the major agreements which prove the dividing of the South Caucasus between Russia and Persia.



Turkmenchay Treaty, Russian empire instigated massive deportations of Armenians from Turkey and Iran and settled them in Karabakh. According to the Russian scholar N. Shavrov by the end of 19th century, of the 1.3 million Armenians living in Transcaucasia, more than 1 million were resettled civilians by the Russians. Close to 150,000 Armenians were resettled in the territories of Karabakh and Iravan khanates by Russia in the short span of 17 years during 1813-1830.

Apart from these Armenians, who were resettled officially, a great number of Armenians settled in the region unofficially; hence the total number of settlers considerably exceeds 200,000. Therefore, the population of Nagorno-Karabakh consist of Armenians in majority. After the resettlement, Armenians started to slowly erase all monuments, mosques and tried to ruin everything in Karabakh which belonged to the Azerbaijani people's identity. The idea, it is believed was to try and clean the past to show the world that they were the indigenous people of Nagorno-Karabakh. The beginning of the 20th century was marked with bloody clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan. A key event was the July 5, 1921 decision of Caucasus Bureau on Nagorno-Karabakh which gave rise to serious controversies.

The Bureau decided to retain the Nagorno-Karabakh region within Azerbaijan which nullified the Armenian's claims to the region. According to this decision: "Taking into account the necessity of national peace between the Muslims and the Armenians, the economic relations between upper and lower Karabakh and permanent relations of upper Karabakh with Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh shall be retained within the Azerbaijan SSR and broad autonomy shall be given to Nagorno-Karabakh with Shusha city as an administrative center." (MFA. Department of analysis and strategic studies, 2017, UN Doc: A/64/475-S/2009/508, p-176)





The Armenians denied Stalin's decision which they felt was in favor of Azerbaijan and saw it as a political decision made by Stalin who wanted to establish better relations with Turkey, which coincidentally, had a good relationship with Azerbaijan. (Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, 2000) Contrary to Azerbaijan's narratives, Armenians also argue that NK has always been historically part of Armenia for several thousands of years; however, they accept that NK was annexed by Tsarist Russia according to Gulustan and Turkmenchay Treaties. Armenians also rejected any settlement of Armenians from Persia and Turkey. (karabakh, 2011) According to the first argument one has to immediately ask: Did the Armenian state itself exist for "several thousand years" in order that Nagorno-Karabakh could be part of it for "several thousand years?"

Another major misconception is related to the terms "enclave", "disputed enclave" and "disputed region". Regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh situation - cannot be applied to an area completely surrounded by the territory of another country. NKAO was part of the Azerbaijan SSR and was surrounded by Azerbaijani territory. Therefore, a part of one country cannot be separated geographically from its main body by the territory of another/ other countries. Since there is no change in the position of Azerbaijan, it considers the region as its undisputed territory and it is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan. Thus, the term "disputed" or "disputed region" is not applicable either and Armenians have no right to claim to the territory.

### ***Post the break-up of the Soviet Union:***

Contemporary stage of Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict started before the dissolution of USSR, during period of Mikhail Gorbachev who initiated the Glasnost and Perestroika. On 20 January 1989, the representatives of the Armenian community at the session of the Soviet of People's Deputies of the NKAO adopted a resolution seeking the transfer of the NKAO from the Azerbaijan SSR to the Armenian SSR.





Their pretext was that the Azerbaijani government was violating the rights of Karabakh Armenians' self-determination and abusing their human rights and applied a discriminating policy. But, relying on historical data, it should be mentioned that the Azerbaijanis and Armenians lived together peacefully and had very good relations in the past. At the end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992, the claim of "reunification of Nagorno-Karabakh" which adopted by Armenians at that time being part of USSR alongside Azerbaijan and declared its independence in 1992 brought political turmoil and conflict turned into a military phase. (MFA. Department of analysis and strategic studies, 2017, UN Doc: A/64/475-S/2009/508, p-180)

In February 1992, the first armed attack by the Republic of Armenia to the town of Khojaly in the Republic of Azerbaijan resulted in an unprecedented massacre. This bloody tragedy, which would later be known as the Khojaly genocide resulted in the death of 613 civilians, including 106 women, 63 children and 70 senior citizens with approximately 1275 people taken hostage. To this day, 150 people from Khojaly remain missing. Consequently, 20% of the Azerbaijani territory was occupied by the Armenian Armed Forces over the next 2 years including Shusha, Kalbajar, Aghdam, Jabrayil, Gubadly, Fizuli and Zangilan. As a result, more than 20,000 Azerbaijanis were killed and over 1 million were displaced as a result of the large-scale hostilities. The ceasefire was established according to the Bishkek Protocol which was signed on May 5 1994 by representatives of the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia. However, Armenia has allegedly continued to violate the rule of law. So far, Armenians deny any kind of involvement in the war between Azerbaijan, reemphasizing that this is the war between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan and the conflict will not be solved unless Azerbaijani side accept independence of Nagorno-Karabakh "Republic" which is not acceptable in any case by Azerbaijan.





## 2020 war and its conclusion:

In September, Azerbaijan President Aliyev launched the offensive vowing to take back Nagorno-Karabakh and other Armenian-occupied districts. In six weeks of fighting, Azeri forces, backed by Turkey-supplied armed drones and other equipment, cut through Armenian defences and retook territories, including some 40% of Nagorno-Karabakh itself.

Russia, which has a security agreement with Armenia, remained neutral in the early days of the war when Turkey threw its weight behind Azerbaijan. Russia brokered a ceasefire two weeks into the conflict, but it didn't hold. When Azerbaijan defeated Armenian troops and captured territories, Armenian Prime Minister sought Russian help. But Mr. Putin said the security guarantee is for Armenia, not for the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. But Russia was apparently concerned about the rapid change in the status quo and the more assertive security role Turkey was playing in its backyard.

By the third week of October, Russia established small military outposts along the Armenian border, apparently to prevent the conflict spilling into mainland Armenia and also to send a message to Baku. In the same week, Russia conducted a massive air strike in Syria's Idlib against Turkish-backed militants, killing dozens of them, which is seen as Moscow's warning against Turkey. Mr. Putin accepted Azerbaijan's victory (as the ceasefire allows Azeri troops to control the territories they have seized) but prevented a total defeat of Armenia. Under pressure from a decisive Moscow, both sides agreed to cease the operations.

After six weeks of fierce fighting, Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to end military operations in and around Nagorno-Karabakh in a ceasefire brokered by Russian President Vladimir Putin. Some 2,000 people, including combatants and civilians, are estimated to have been killed in the war.





Armenian leader Nikol Pashinyan has described the decision to accept truce as “painful”, while Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev, backed by Turkey, has claimed victory. Russia, which has enforced the ceasefire, seems to have reinforced its influence in the South Caucasus.

### ***Abkhazia – A historical outlook:***

Geographically squeezed between the Black Sea and the Caucasus mountains, it had been known as Soviet Riviera where modern Abkhazians and Georgians lived together from ancient times as tribes. According to Georgian historiography the tribes that settled in Abkhazia were the people who gradually arrived as Adyghean (Circassian) tribes from northwest Caucasus to part of the territory present day Abkhazia, identified with the ancient Apsila and Abazga tribes (these being ancestors of the modern Abkhazians). Irakli Tsereteli, who is one of the co-founders of the Georgian political nation, also states: Those whom we call Abkhazians are not Abkhazians. The Abkhazians were a Georgian tribe. The present Abkhazians are the descendants of Kabardeys and Balkars who migrated into Georgia in the mid 19th century. Playing important roles in Georgian history, both Abkhazia and Georgia became the place of invasions of Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Persians, Arabs, Turks-Seljuks, Mongols, Ottoman Turks and Tsarist Russia who tried to strengthen their influence and nation’s unity was repeatedly destroyed.

In the 19th century Russia’s war in the Caucasus led to a large exodus of Muslim peoples such as Abkhaz and Lezgins to the Ottoman Empire.





According to Thornike Gordadze this exodus described by him like that: "The mukhadzhirstvo is the first tragic consequence of the classification which clearly differentiated the two ethnic groups in the region-the Abkhaz and the Georgians." The czarist government didn't allow Georgians to settle in Abkhazia, at the same time, territory was settled with Russians, Armenians and other nationalities. As a result, Abkhazia became under protection of the Russian in 1810 but it was autonomy until 1864. Ajaria was ceded to Russia by the Ottoman Empire in 1878, as a result of the RussoTurkish war of 1877-78. As a result of Tsarist Russia' reform, Georgia was divided into two gubernias-Tiflis and Kutaisi, that is the names" Georgia" and "Abkhazia" disappeared from geographic maps. Abkhazia was renamed "the Sukhumi Military Department which was under the subordination of the Kutaisi governor-general.

When Georgia declared independence in the spring of 1918, it ultimately established direct military rule over the whole territory. According to Georgian perspective, it is said that Georgia itself offered wide self-rule to Abkhazia, which was also a big mistake, resulted in 1921 with "a special union treaty" as an establishment a confederation between Abkhazia and Georgia after the Sovietization. However, in 1931 Stalin downgraded Abkhazia's status to that of an autonomous entity within Georgia. But according to Abkhaz perception, when Georgia gained independence, Abkhazia also gained independence in 1921 under the leadership of Nestor Lakoba who promoted of the Abkhazian national cause and demand to autonomy. Abkhazia existed as a Soviet republic equal in status to Georgia while united with the latter under the short-lived Transcaucasian Federation. This status was written into Abkhazia's constitution of 1925, whose unilateral restoration in the summer of 1992 became a pretext for the current war with Georgia.





Thus, with the 1925 constitution began the institutionalization of the political identity. Two other factors-Moscow's recognition of the Abkhazian language as one separate from Georgian and its policy of preferential treatment for Abkhazian peasants-both reinforced this separate political identity and created increasing tension within Georgia. It is also claimed by Abkhazians that during the exodus of the mahajees, Abkhaz became a minority in their own land, settled in dispersed, discontinuous areas and their place became land of different settlers like Georgians, Armenians, Greeks and most of the North Caucasian mountaineers. Thereafter, the Georgian population in Abkhazia increased from 37,000 or 28% in 1914 to 240,000 or 45.7 % in 1989. Even though Abkhazians were a minority in Abkhazia, it had been achieved the status of a titular nationality through the efforts of Nestor Lakoba who envisioned Abkhazia and received all the potential benefits that the status conferred until his mysterious death in 1936.

### ***Period between 1980s and 2008 war:***

Toward the end of Soviet Union between 1980s and the beginnings of 90s hastened by the Gorbachev's policy of "glasnost and perestroika" gave Abkhazians opportunity to demand re-granting of their status of Soviet Socialist republic of 1921-31. In March 1989, several thousand Abkhaz signed the Lykhny Declaration, organized by the People Forum of Abkhazia, which called for the creation of a Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, separate from the Georgian Union Republic.

The conflict started in July 1989 in Abkhazian capital Sukhumi in response to set up a Georgian branch in Abkhaz State University in Sukhumi and ended up in severe confrontation. On August 5, 1990, the Parliament of Abkhazia adopted a Declaration "On the State Sovereignty of Abkhazia and on July 1992 annulled its 1978 Constitution and returned to the 1925 according to which it had equal treaty based status with Georgia.





After the collapse of Soviet Union, when Georgia declared its independence, Abkhazians also raised their voices for independence from Georgia. Military conflict intensified between Zviad Gamsakhurdia's government and Vladislav Ardzinba's authorities who became president in 1990s in Abkhazia and also became a leader in Abkhazian movement for independence in 1980s-1990s. By the end of 1993 with support of Russian troops Abkhazians can sustain the control over the whole territory and forced the Georgian population to leave the Gali region. From 1992, to 1993 Georgia took control of Abkhazian territory, including Sukhumi. But again, with Russia's big support Abkhazia again gained control over the Abkhazia which ended with a ceasefire agreement which was established under Russian mediation in Sochi. According to the article of Sochi Agreement (July 27, 1993), it called for disarmament of the warring sides, to be accompanied by a prompt withdrawal of Georgian troops from Abkhazia and return of the Abkhaz government to Sukhumi. Later in early April 1994, the Abkhaz and Georgian sides, under Russia's mediation and with participation of the UN and the CSCE representatives held official talks in Moscow and signed an interim peace agreement which set out general guidelines of political settlement of the conflict, the return of internally displaced persons and the referendum of future political status of Abkhazia.

The actual fact of an agreement was the issue of deployment of a peacekeeping force (PKF) separate the combatants and help to displaced persons. On May 1994, the Georgian and Abkhaz sides signed the Moscow Agreement on another form of ceasefire and the separation of forces. According to this agreement Russian troops to be deployed under a CIS mandate in a security zone along the Inguri River which divides Abkhazia from the rest of Georgia and also along this "security zone" about 12 kilometres on each side of the ceasefire line was created where officers and peacekeeping operations were only allowed. In the same period, Vladislav Ardzinba also proposed a union state with Georgia on the basis on equal partnership. In response, Georgian authorities withdrew from the next round of the UN sponsored negotiations.



Until July 2006, the situation was more or less stable and parties agreed not to use of force. However, military escalation occurred, when Georgia embarked on which is called as “anti- 31 criminal operation” in Kodori Valley in order to disarm local militia who were threatening Georgia’s constitutional order. Later the August 2008 war between Georgia and Russia was more destructive and shifted the “concept of internal conflict of Georgia” into status quo under the name of “frozen conflict”. Ethnic cleansing and massive resettlement of 300 000 ethnic Georgian population from Abkhazia during and after 1992-1993 war was the harshest consequence of Georgian Abkhaz war.

### ***South Ossetia:***

South Ossetia is an extremely mountainous region situated on the southern side of the Caucasus, separated from the more populous North Ossetia and extending southward to Georgia’s Mtkvari river. Unlike Abkhazians, South Ossetians have had common history, intermarriages, good relations, including the engagement economic activities with Georgians. Generally, South Ossetians are people of Iranian origin and belong to the old Persian speaking people, are said to descend from Scythians and Sarmatians who came to Caucasus relatively later in medieval times to the region, lived and spread in southern parts of today’s Russia. Most of them lived in North Ossetia throughout history and came to South Ossetia from North Caucasus. The central question in Georgian-Ossetian dispute is to whom the land historically belongs. According to Georgian perspective, South Ossetia is considered to be historic Georgian territory and called Samochablo, which was ceded to Ossetians by Bolsheviks in return to use of the hand of Ossetians to occupy independent Georgian Republic in 1920.





They also consider that Ossetians are newcomers to this region, having their historical homeland in North Ossetia within the Russian Federation. Thus, they have no right to territorial autonomy. Ossetians on the contrary consider that historically both North Ossetia and South Ossetia (in the Russian territory) were the parts of common Alan heritage-Skif-Sarmat-Alans and their people have been living here in this area for centuries, mainly emphasizing that the South Ossetians consider themselves to be the southern branch of the Ossetian nation. Three uprisings in 1918, 1919 and 1920 by the South Ossetian population of the Shida Kartli region became the root of the present conflict between the government of Tbilisi and South Ossetia, where people of South Ossetian dissatisfied with the central government claiming that it only supports the interests of big landowners who most of them were ethnic Georgians. This struggle soon developed into armed conflict in 1918.



The dissatisfaction of the South Ossetians with the policies of the Menshevik government in Tbilisi strengthened their sympathy for the Bolsheviks and traditionally warm relations between the Ossetians and the Russians. In 1919 and 1920 the South Ossetian rebels received support from Red Army and political elite with the goal of being annexed to Soviet Russia. Later the liquidation of South Ossetian sovereignty was accompanied by ethnic cleansing which cost the lives of 3000-7000 people. In 1922, the South Ossetian Autonomous Region was created. However, under Soviet rule South Ossetia had much less formal autonomy within the Georgian SSR, while North Ossetia was an autonomous republic within the Russian SSR but it was rejected later by Georgia. The idea of uniting the two Ossetians emerged during national revival movement at the end of 1980s during Mikhail Gorbachev's era of perestroika. The new Ossetian nationalist movement leader Ademon Nykhas sparked tensions between Ossetians and Georgians by sending an open letter expressing support for their claims for independence from Georgia. The focus of the movement in South Ossetia was a campaign to enhance the status of the South Ossetia as an autonomous oblast. In September 1990, South Ossetia declared itself an independent Republic. However, in the same year Georgian Supreme Soviet rejected this decision and abolished the status of autonomy. In 1990, South Ossetians again declared their independence of autonomy and later demanded unification with North Ossetia which resulted active hostilities in Tskhinvali which lasted until June 1992. In 1991, the Gamsakhurdia-led administration ordered Georgian militias to bombard Tskhinvali from surrounding hills. In so doing, serious fighting between Georgian and Ossetian troop took place mainly in and around Tskhinvali. Despite Gamsakhurdia's strong desire to crush the Ossetian secession by force, the Georgian troops failed to occupy Tskhinvali. Indeed, Russia's role was very vague and contradictory and a number of leading Russian politicians openly supported the South Ossetians. As a result, a final ceasefire agreement was achieved in Sochi in the summer of 1992.





According to Sochi Agreement/ also known as Dagomys Peace, Shevardnadze was forced to accept a ceasefire to avoid a large-scale confrontation with Russia. Under Russian auspices the Georgian government and South Ossetian separatist agreed to refrain from the use of force against each other. Georgian authorities also pledged not to improve sanctions against South Ossetia. Yeltsin and Shevardnadze also agreed on the establishment of a Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF). Despite a lasting ceasefire, a political settlement of the dispute has remained elusive and separatist authorities remain in control of the majority of the region's territory. Even prior to ceasefire agreement there were some attempts to normalize the situation between breakaway territories and Georgia. On May 29 1992, when South Ossetian Parliament adopted a new declaration of independence, which laid the first step of de facto independent state in post-Soviet era, Georgian government and Abkhazia agreed upon a Declaration of Measures for a Political settlement Georgian-Abkhaz conflict on April 1994 and took a commitment to strictly observe the cease-fire. The demilitarized security zone was set out along the Inguri River on May, 1994 and Memorandum that was signed in May 1996 related to non-use of force in mutual relations sought a final settlement of the conflict. The new confrontation between Georgia, South Ossetia and Russia was triggered in Saakashvili's presidency period who came to the power during the "Rose Revolution" and determined to tackle the problems that went unresolved during Shevardnadze era and tried to get state sovereignty at all cost. Immediately after his election in 2004, Saakashvili began to increase pressure on South Ossetia by tightening border controls, especially setting up custom posts on the South Ossetia section of the Russian border in order to put an end to smuggling where Russian organized crime and corrupt Georgian officials were involved. In May 2004, the Georgian authorities also started "anti-smuggling campaign" between Georgia and South Ossetia area and shut down Ergneti market in South Ossetia which is a major trading center for tax-free goods from Russia. It resulted with big discontent by South Ossetians and "felt that their main source of income, that is contraband, was under threat."



In accordance with 1992 peace accords, checkpoints can only be established within the permission of the JCC, which Georgia had not sought. Thus, the commander of the Russian peacekeeping troops in the region, General Svyatoslav Nabz dorov was sent to defend the post where 300 Georgian Interior Ministry troops were there. The deployment of Georgian troops provoked fears amongst the local population that Georgia was seeking to resolve stalemate by military means. In response, in televised address, Saakashvili assured Ossetians that Georgia only intended to re-assert its control over the region by peaceful means, stating that the political status of the region should be decided through negotiations rather than force. In July 2005, Saakashvili offered broad autonomy and reconstruction of the region's infrastructure to South Ossetians but this offer was rejected by separatist South Ossetia leader Kokoyt and insisted that, "we [South Ossetians] are citizens of Russia", the people of the South Ossetia do not regard themselves as part of Georgia. In November 2006, South Ossetia again claimed for independence and held referendum which was declined to recognize votes by Georgian government. In March 2007, Saakashvili offered another peace plan that involved creating "transitional administrative districts throughout the region"- ostensibly under Sanakoyev's authority. It was also not implemented later as a result of alleged Russian influence. The further escalation in Georgian-South Ossetian conflict culminated with Saakashvili's pro-western policy which irritated Russia who strongly disapproved of Georgia's exponentially widening partnership with NATO. In order to punish Georgia, Russia banned the import of Georgian wine in 2006 and deported Georgian citizens in 2007 and forced Georgia to give up the closer relations it was building with the West.





## **The August War of 2008:**

The Five-Day War in Georgia caused for all the international turmoil and tension which sparked debates about Russia and its policy which was remembered as a product of the “sleep of reason”. According to some analysts, Russia’s interest in “near abroad” relates with “historical revanche”, superpower status where Russia is seeking even a single opportunity to broaden its sphere of influence.

Late at night on August 7, 2008, the attack of Georgian troops to Tskhinvali was one such pretext, which automatically made Tbilisi guilty of initiating the war and justified Russian intervention. Matthew Bryza, a State Department envoy to the South Caucasus declared: “I did indeed advise the Georgian leadership not to get drawn into a trap. That was our consistent advice for several years.” On 13 August, President Saakashvili in response declared: ‘I am sickened by the speculation that Georgia started anything... We clearly responded to the Russians... The point to be noted here is that around 11 o’clock, Russian tanks started to move into Georgian territory, 150 at first. And that was a clear-cut invasion. That was the moment when we started to open fire with artillery, because otherwise they would have crossed the bridge and moved into Tskhinvali.’ Tbilisi argued that Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Ajaria were strategically important to Georgia. Georgia is a small country and to be broken up into ever smaller entities was meaningless. Georgians didn’t see them as autonomous entities and were only sustainable due to continued Russian support. Their economies were weak, as a result of the republics becoming the centers of organized crime, smuggling and black market which were a threat for the rest of Georgia. Thus, Georgia needed to use of force to suppress secessionist uprisings in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and build constitutional order. On August 8, Saakashvili declared that the Georgian troops had liberated most of South Ossetia; also, with the help of 2000 troops were recalled from Iraq to resist the Russian invasion.





Russia started military operation from three sides applying C4ISR capabilities- (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance):

- 1) Roki tunnel from the north of South Ossetia
- 2) Kodori Valley (Abkhazia)
- 3) Sea Coast of Abkhazia.

First, Russian tank columns engaged in and around Tskhinvali and were able to push back Georgian troops from South Ossetia. Russia also attacked military targets in Gori, Vaziani, Senaki and Poti. And destroyed Georgian aircraft defenses and naval forces in Black Sea. Secondly, Russia attacked and occupied Kodori Gorge with the support of Abkhazians. Kodori Valley was the only place in Abkhazia which was under control of Georgia. Russia also took the towns of Zugdidi. After occupying Gori on 13 August, the country was cut in two.

Who started the war? It is still ambiguous who the aggressor was in the August war. Russia claims that the war escalated after the direct Georgian attack on Tskhinvali where Georgia committed genocide. Georgians insist that the cause to attack on South Ossetia was the data they gathered relating to the movement of large contingent of Russian forces from North. As proof, Georgian officials released transcripts of Russian mobile telephone conversations with the Ossetian body guard at Roki tunnel which showed Russian military troops would reach South before Georgian attack. Some other facts such as repairing a total of 54 km railroad track in Abkhazia and deployment of Russian units via railway links prove that Russian military operation in Georgia had been planned for several years. However, Russia denied all these facts and claimed that it was an unexpected war.

Neither Putin nor Medvedev was in Moscow at that time. Putin was at the opening of the Olympics in Beijing and Medvedev enjoying his summer holiday. And Moscow was only able to respond and protect the civilians in South Ossetia after 48 hours.



Russia also blamed Saakashvili for backstabbing Russia despite some hope of rapprochement between Moscow and Tbilisi concerning Ajaria. When Saakashvili gained power over Ajaria, Putin didn't deny it or prevent it from happening. Putin even promised to remove all the Russian military bases in Georgia by 2008. But Saakashvili's western policy and his refusal to sign an agreement of non-use of force regarding the autonomy of two national republics turned the situation adverse. Vladimir Putin responded with the statement that: "Now remember, we did not intervene in Adjara, but you won't have any gifts from us in South Ossetia and Abkhazia."



The Russification of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia is one of the best tactics used by the Russians. This included the act of providing Russian passports for South Ossetians and Abkhazians, to justify its intervention in both republics, in order to defend its nationals. Making the Rouble the official currency, increasing reliance of Russian economy in these regions, filling the important positions with Russian officials in both regional and governmental organizations; and enabling military support which enabled the Kremlin to freely effect its policies without obstacles. Secondly, the Western recognition of Kosovo's independence was a possible precedent for Moscow's decision for supporting and recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent republics. The 2008 August Russo-Georgian war ended with the victory of Russia. On August 25, 2008, the Federation Council and the State Duma prepared a letter for President Dmitry Medvedev to recognize the independence of both states and establish diplomatic relations. On August 26, 2008 President Medvedev signed the decree recognizing the independence of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia as sovereign states. Nauru, Nicaragua, and Venezuela also recognized their independence as a state.





## **Transdnistria conflict:**

The Transdnistria conflict is considered to be one of the more ‘frozen conflicts’ in the Post-Soviet region. Armed clashes between Transdnistria guerrilla groups and Moldovan troops and police sparked off in the autumn of 1991. The tensions escalated into full-scale warfare in March 1992 and lasted until July 1992. However, Moldova’s attempt to gain control over the region failed. Hostilities ended after Russian military intervention and the stationing of the – then- Russian 14th army in the Transdnistria region.



An official cause of the conflict between Moldova and the separatist region of Transnistria is considered to be a 1989 linguistic legislation which made Moldovan the state language. Afterwards, in September 1990 Transnistria announced its separation. Already in November 1990, in central Transnistria, first clashes occurred between Transnistrians and Moldovan police. Fighting intensified and culminated in a war, which caused almost a thousand deaths and more than 51.000 internally displaced people.





After several attempts of international mediation, a final ceasefire was reached in July 1992 and signed by the presidents of Moldova and Russia. According to the agreement, a 10 km demilitarized "security zone" was formed; it was trilaterally controlled by the forces of the Russian Federation, Moldova, and Transnistria. The agreement also included the establishment of a Joint Control Commission (JCC), with Moldovan, Transnistrian and Russian delegations, due to ensure cease-fire monitoring and implementation of the agreement. Three years later, the Russian forces were renamed from the 14th Army to the Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF).

Despite the long-running dialogues on conflict resolution, in which the OSCE, Russia and Ukraine participated, a political solution still has not been reached. The status of Transnistria is unresolved as well; its self-claimed independence is not recognized by the international community. Aside from the political fallout, the loss of control over Transnistria has had a devastating effect on the Moldovan economy, since Transnistria has a great economic potential; almost 87% of Moldova's electricity and its large electric machinery products are produced in and distributed from Transnistria. In 2005, the Moldovan parliament adopted legislation on the special legal status of Transnistria, as an autonomous territorial unit within the Republic of Moldova. Soon after this, in 2006, the de facto government of Transnistria held a referendum. According to the official result, the overwhelming majority of Transnistria's residents (97%) supported –the notion of Transnistrian independence and eventual union with Russia. Besides this referendum, the desire to join the Russian Federation has been repeatedly declared later on. In parallel with the Association Agreement procedures and progress made by Moldova, several activities took place in Transnistria. In 2012, Russia appointed Dmitry Rogozin (deputy prime minister) as its special representative –on Transnistria and then opened a Russian consulate in Tiraspol. Also, some incidents have happened in the city of Bender in 2013, when Transnistria's de facto authorities tried to gain full control by some ban on Moldovan policy and a decree on the –state border.





In 2014, tensions continued about the use of the Latin script alphabet as well. In addition, pro-Russian sentiments have increased in the separatist region of Transnistria and several steps have been taken by de facto authorities to get closer to Moscow. In 2014, Transnistria adopted Russian legislation and in March-April, 2015 Transnistria lawmakers called on Russian President Vladimir Putin and international bodies to recognize Transnistria's independence as a prelude to Russian annexation; In 2016, Transnistria's president Evgeniy Shevchuk officially issued a decree, asking Russia for full incorporation of the Transnistria region into its Federation.

To sum up, in the three separatist conflicts we just read, in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and Moldova (Transnistria) started in the similar period, the 1990s, and developed in such a way that their statuses are still disputable. The overview of the conflicts' development clearly shows the extensive role of the main external actor, namely the Russian Federation, during and after the active phases of confrontation. In all three cases, in eastern Moldova and in the two separatist regions of Georgia, Moscow still maintains military bases and strengthens its ties with the de facto authorities.

### ***The conflict in Ukraine and its influence on the other protracted conflicts:***

The crisis in Ukraine has a number of distinct aspects, each of which can have its own effect on the protracted conflicts: Annexation of Crimea. The annexation of the Crimea creates the greatest threat yet seen to the consensus codified in the Helsinki Final Act. Helsinki grew out of two factors: the horrors of two world wars, sparked by ethnic conflict and nationalist territorial claims, and the dangers of a cold war centering on a bipolar Europe divided by an Iron Curtain.





Helsinki encapsulated two grand compromises designed to prevent a third world war: first, it recognized the then-current boundaries in Europe (thereby denying historical claims) and the governments of all current states (without regard for alignment or alliance) in exchange for a recognition that human rights everywhere are a valid issue of international concern. Second, Helsinki recognized that European states are multi-ethnic, denying future territorial claims based on ethnic grounds. At the same time, ethnic discrimination within states would be illegitimate. In other words, states could not claim areas of other states just because co-ethnics happened to live there nor could states persecute or discriminate against the ethnic minorities living within their borders. The separatist movements of the protracted conflicts reject that consensus. To the Karabakh Armenians, Abkhaz, South Ossetians, and Transdniestrians, the Helsinki consensus would doom them to live submerged inside states that they believe are incapable of treating them fairly and would inevitably persecute them. They maintain that recognizing their human rights means accepting their right not to live inside those states.

They assert that the Soviet Union's Union Republics were artificial constructs nominally based on ethnicity, but often ignoring ethnic boundaries and that international recognition of those Union Republics following the Soviet collapse was a matter of convenience for the international community, but an injustice to certain ethnic groups. Both assertions are problematic: there never were clean boundaries that would, for example, have separated all Armenians from all Azerbaijanis and the post-soviet successor republics themselves decided to recognize one another as independent within their 1991 borders. The international community simply followed their lead. For nearly two decades, Russia publicly declared its adherence to the Helsinki consensus, including on the inviolability of borders, and publicly refused to support secession, even when it was the patron of the secessionists since the multi-ethnic Russian Federation itself faced a bloody separatist conflict and the demands of dozens of ethnic groups immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union.





Even the 2008 Georgia war and the subsequent recognition of Abkhaz and South Ossetian independence did not, at first, change Russia's stated adherence to the Helsinki consensus.

While initially justifying that war on grounds of protecting Russian nationals, Russia did not embrace a general rejection of the inviolability of borders. Rather, its rationale (echoing the West's on Kosovo) held that once a country has conducted a genocidal war on its citizens (as Russia accused Georgia of doing) it is impossible to persuade those citizens to subject themselves again to that country's rule. But the annexation of Crimea, which the Russian Federation justified on ethnic and historical grounds, was the first example in Europe of a state's reversion to pre-World War 2 nationalism to justify the territorial acquisition. Whether or not Russia intended to abandon the fundamental principles of the Helsinki *acquis*, it has raised a legitimate fear that other states may follow Russia's precedent by committing aggression against their neighbours in pursuit of territorial aggrandizement and then trying to justify their actions with the ethnic/historical arguments Russia used. These arguments are relevant to protracted conflicts. Yerevan, for example, likened the secession of Crimea to the nationalist struggle for Karabakh independence. Given the Western reaction to the annexation of Crimea, it appears that Russia, too, recognizes the danger of unrestrained nationalist territorial claims and its supporters tend to promote the view that Crimea is a one-off exception, like Kosovo. Elsewhere, Russia may be seeking a "deniable" form of affiliation that affords the same degree of control as annexation but without triggering the same degree of Western response. One potential model of such an affiliation is embodied in the treaties it has signed with Abkhazia and South Ossetia (next page).



## ***Hybrid and alternative proxy Warfare:***

The term “hybrid warfare” has been applied to the type of war Russia has been waging in Ukraine since the first “little green men” appeared in Crimea. There is no one definition of this term, but Russia’s campaign in Ukraine is characterized inter alia by deniable (or at any rate denied) military support for pro-Russian forces of “activists,” including the (denied) deployment of combat troops among the local “activists”, all aimed at disguising invasive warfare as civil unrest and civil war. Much has been written about the applicability of this type of warfare to conflicts outside Ukraine, with emphasis on the Baltics. To be applicable to any of the conflicts we are discussing, a pool of locals in the target country to supply the “activists” would be required. It would require the target state’s military/security weakness and/or lack of ruthlessness since the arrest, death or other neutralization of the “activists” would strip the operation of its cover and there could be no more pretence that the little green men were local “activists.” These tactics require the target state to show restraint, based on the assumption that many of the “activists” are civilians – indeed, fellow-citizens – due to basic human rights.

As we saw in Odessa on 2 May 2014, these tactics can be checked when opposed by equally ruthless forces willing to treat all “activists,” including civilians, as combatant invaders. At that point, the state backing the “activists” must decide whether to back off or to abandon covert tactics and switch to outright war. These considerations would rule out Karabakh as a conflict in which such tactics could be used, and probably also the conflicts in Georgia. The Georgians could try to wage this type of warfare in Abkhazia, for example, using as their Trojan horse the ethnically Georgian population of the Gali region, but they would have to consider whether the Abkhaz would treat prospective Gali “activists” (and the rest of the Gali population) as civilians or combatants.





In 1993, Russia backed Zviad Gamsakhurdia in an insurrection against the Georgian government of Eduard Shevardnadze as part of the ongoing Abkhaz conflict. Such an effort is less likely today. That leaves Moldova, much of whose population bears more allegiance to the Soviet past than to the Moldovan present. The Party of Communists and Party of Socialists, which represent those who look to their Soviet heritage, together took over 40% of the total vote in the 30 November 2014 elections. This electorate could (without regard to ethnicity) serve as a pool of “activists.” Russian bloggers close to the Kremlin call the current Moldovan government illegal. As to turning the tactics in the other direction, successive Moldovan governments have tried – but never found – a sufficient pool of “activists” among the ethnic Moldovans who form a plurality of the Transnistrian population. That is unlikely to change.

---

Further reading:

[https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-2/sipriinsight1808\\_0.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-2/sipriinsight1808_0.pdf)





***Good Luck and  
May the Force be with  
you!***

