

Forum: Special Political and Decolonization Committee (GA4)

Issue: The Question of South Ossetia

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INTRODUCTION

South Ossetia is a separatist state located within Georgia that is unrecognized by the international community and the Georgian government, though it has received the recognition of a few other countries, most notably Russia. Today the official status of South Ossetia remains unclear without progress. The region rules by de facto and remains one of the least developed regions in Georgia. Even before the conflict of South Ossetia, Georgia had already experienced ethnic-related conflicts, setting the precedent.¹ The wars were products of growing Georgian nationalism, to which South Ossetians responded aggressively for fears of identity erasure.²

Although it is indicated both Georgia and South Ossetia are ethnically mixed, South Ossetians consider their culture to be distinct from Georgian culture and more closely linked to Russian culture. Under the Soviet Union, South Ossetia was separate from Georgia, enjoyed the right to practice their own custom and speak their own language, all of which were threatened by Georgia's ethnic nationalism. The intervention of Russia allowed South Ossetia to preserve much of its independence, but consequently has become dependent on Russian support. Due to this dependency, it has been alienated from the international community, while struggling to recover from the two wars fought over it. Due to its sensitive location and difficult circumstances as well as its immense vulnerability, the question of South Ossetia is an issue of the utmost importance. A consensus must be reached in order for peace and justice to be reinstated for those who have suffered, to work towards building a better future for those in need. Although the situation is adverse, with such a goal in mind, the hope for progress is not lost.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Accession

1 Wolff, Stefan. "Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia." *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Self-Determination*, pesd.princeton.edu/node/706. Accessed 10 June 2023.

2 Wilson, Josh, and David Golubock. "South Ossetia: Old Territory, New Problems." *Geohistory*, 24 Jan. 2015, geohistory.today/south-ossetia/#:~:text=After%20the%20Russian%20Revolution%2C%20South%20Ossetia%20became%20part. Accessed 10 June 2023.

The action or process of formally joining into another group or entity.

Autonomy

The right of an organization, country or region to be independent and govern itself.³

Bolshevik Party

The political group that took power in Russia after overthrowing the monarchy.

Buffer State

A peaceful country between two larger countries, that reduces the chances of war between them.⁴

De facto State

Existing in practicality but may not be legal or accepted.

Menshevik Party

Menshevik, member of the non-Leninist wing of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party, which evolved into a separate organization. It originated when a dispute over party membership requirements arose at the 1903 congress of the Social-Democratic Party. One group, led by L. Martov opposed Lenin's plan for a party restricted to professional revolutionaries and called for a mass party modeled after western European social democratic parties.⁵

Nationalism

An ideology that emphasizes complete selfless devotion to one's country or nation.

Oblast

Administrative division used by ex-Soviet states.

Pastoral Nomads

Tribes who migrate periodically with their cattle.

3 Cambridge Dictionary. "AUTONOMY | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary." *Cambridge.org*, 2019, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/autonomy. Accessed 7 July 2023.

4 Cambridge Dictionary. "Buffer State." *@CambridgeWords*, 5 July 2023, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/buffer-state. Accessed 3 July 2023.

5 Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Menshevik". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 8 Jun. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Menshevik>. Accessed 15 July 2023.

Referendum

A general vote by all eligible voters in a country regarding a direct decision about a political question.

Self-Determination

The power of a nation to decide how it will be governed.

Sovereign State

A state that is capable of ruling itself.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

History of South Ossetia

Early History of South Ossetia

South Ossetia is a landlocked region located in the Southern Caucasus, bordering Russia and Georgia. As of the 2023 census, it has an approximate population of 56,520 people with nearly half of the residents living in the capital Tskhinvali.



Figure 1 Map of south ossetian territory⁶

⁶ Map of South Ossetia. i.pinimg.com/originals/a9/f2/f0/a9f2f05398704e51384bde2edc02a3f8.png. Accessed 4 July 2023.

The inhabitants of South Ossetia are descendants from pastoral nomads who migrated from central Asia in the 13th century, seeking the natural defense of the Caucasus mountains. They formed the kingdom of Alania, which became a buffer state between its powerful neighbors. The destruction of the Kingdom of Alania in the early 14th century was the main reason for Ossetians to flee south and into the region known today as South Ossetia.

The political power of the region remained weak and unstable until its annexation by the Russian Empire with an official agreement signed on January 8, 1801. Absorption by the Russian Empire brought some technological advances to the region agricultural wise, but it still was undeveloped.

South Ossetia Post-Russian Revolution

After the Russian Revolution, South Ossetia became part of Georgian Democratic Republic, during which Georgian-Ossetian relationship deteriorated under the land struggle between the South Ossetian peasantry and the land-owning Georgian aristocrats. The Georgian government, backed by the Menshevik party, accused South Ossetians of collaborating with the opposing Bolshevik party, who were the main sponsor of the Russian revolution and now in full control of Russia.⁷ South Ossetian peasants, influenced by Bolshevik ideals of revolution, began to fight against the Georgian aristocrats. A series of riots broke out from 1918 to 1920 as South Ossetians resisted Georgian rule, with Georgia sending armies into the area to restore order.⁸ South Ossetia claims casualty numbers as many as 5,000 people from this conflict, starvation and disease.⁹ While Georgia has yet to acknowledge these claims.

South Ossetia within the Soviet Union (USSR)

The Georgian Democratic Republic ended with the invasion of the Red Army in 1912. In the new Soviet Union, South Ossetia became the South Ossetain Autonomous Oblast and continued to operate as a separate territory, enjoying considerable autonomy, with Ossetian

7 Wilson, Josh, and David Golubock. "South Ossetia: Old Territory, New Problems." *Geohistory*, 24 Jan. 2015, geohistory.today/south-ossetia/#:~:text=After%20the%20Russian%20Revolution%2C%20South%20Ossetia%20became%20part. Accessed 10 June 2023.

8 Saparov, Arsène. *From Conflict to Autonomy in the Caucasus: The Soviet Union and the Making of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh*. Google Books, Routledge, 27 Aug. 2014, books.google.com.hk/books?id=AW5eBAAAQBAJ&pg=PA67&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false. Accessed 15 June 2023.

9 Wilson, Josh, and David Golubock. "South Ossetia: Old Territory, New Problems." *Geohistory*, 24 Jan. 2015, geohistory.today/south-ossetia/#:~:text=After%20the%20Russian%20Revolution%2C%20South%20Ossetia%20became%20part. Accessed 10 June 2023.

being the official language for transactions and instruction.¹⁰ The region also saw infrastructure development, with railroads and construction within its capital city, Tskhinvali.



Figure 2 Map of South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast ¹¹

Georgian-Ossetian War (1991-1992)

Origin of the conflict

Georgians and South Ossetians were able to co-exist peacefully for the majority of the Soviet Era, but as the Soviet Union began to crumble, tensions escalated once more. The Georgian government declared Georgian as the sole official language within the Republic of Georgia in August 1989, and in 1990, barred regional parties from participating in elections.¹² In November 1989, the South Ossetian government requested the Georgian government upgrade South Ossetia from an oblast to an autonomous republic, which Georgia refused. This was the trigger for South Ossetia to declare independence from Georgia on September 20 1990. South Ossetians boycotted the Georgian elections in October and formed their own government, while

¹⁰ Wilson, Josh, and David Golubock. "South Ossetia: Old Territory, New Problems." *Geohistory*, 24 Jan. 2015, geohistory.today/south-ossetia/#:~:text=After%20the%20Russian%20Revolution%2C%20South%20Ossetia%20became%20part. Accessed 10 June 2023.

¹¹ Wikipedia. "Creation of South Ossetia in 1922," *Wikipedia.org*.

¹² Kaufman, Stuart J. *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*. Google Books, Cornell University Press, 31 May 2001, books.google.com.hk/books?id=2Plw98pTk5wC&pg=PA110&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false. Accessed 16 June 2023.

Georgia declared the separatist government illegitimate and moved to abolish it. With Georgian nationalist, Zviad Gamsakhurdia elected as the Georgian president, Russia intervening by backing South Ossetian military resistance, conflict began. Assuming office in 1991, Gamsakhurdia conducted systematic persecution of South Ossetians among other minorities including Armenians and Laks, while also disputing South Ossetia's claims to the region, saying: "They [Ossetians] have no right to a state here in Georgia. They are a national minority. Their homeland is North Ossetia Here they are newcomers." Georgian nationalistic rhetoric was at the height of its popularity, speaking to the general atmosphere. Such radical rhetoric from Gamsakhurdia and his allies included slogans like 'Georgia for Georgians', furthering the dissent. Eventually, the animosity between South Ossetia and Georgia escalated into war.¹³

Overview of the conflict

The war itself officially lasted from January 5 1991 to June 24 1992, with South Ossetian forces mainly consisting of militia and volunteer troops, facing a poorly equipped Georgian side. Georgian forces entered Tskhinvali in an attempt to disarm the South Ossetian groups, resulting in a divided city with each side controlling a certain part. For the entire duration of the war, an economic blockade was placed on South Ossetia by Georgia¹⁴, creating a difficult situation for civilians. On 23 March 1991, the Russian leader Boris Yeltsin met Gamskhurdia in Georgia to discuss the resolution of the conflict, agreeing to establish a joint Georgia-Russia police force.¹⁵ An armistice was achieved on 24 March seeing the withdrawal of Georgian troops, but fighting did not stop. It is estimated the majority of infrastructure within the capital city of Tskhinvali were destroyed by the shellings¹⁶, with casualties numbering several hundred on both sides.¹⁷ The Georgian-Ossetian war eventually ended with the Sochi Agreement, brokered by Russia on 24 June 1992.

13 Kaufman, Stuart J. *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*. Google Books, Cornell University Press, 31 May 2001, books.google.com.hk/books?id=2Plw98pTk5wC&pg=PA110&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false. Accessed 16 June 2023.

14 Wolff, Stefan. "Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia." *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Self-Determination*, pesd.princeton.edu/node/706. Accessed 10 June 2023.

15 "The Dagomys Peace: 26 Years of Signing an Agreement on the Introduction of Peacekeepers in South Ossetia." *Государственное информационное агентство "Рес,"* 25 June 2018, cominf.org/en/node/1166517176. Accessed 11 June 2023.

16 Hearst, David, and James Orr. "Analysis: Georgia's Decision to Shell Tskhinvali Could Prove "Reckless."" *The Guardian*, 8 Aug. 2008, www.theguardian.com/world/2008/aug/08/russia.georgia1. Accessed 12 June 2023.

17 "The Dagomys Peace: 26 Years of Signing an Agreement on the Introduction of Peacekeepers in South Ossetia." *Государственное информационное агентство "Рес,"* 25 June 2018, cominf.org/en/node/1166517176. Accessed 11 June 2023.

Impact of the war

Though the war had ended, its influence extended beyond the ceasefire treaty. Not only did this war shape South Ossetia's road to independence, it had also affected Georgia's own quest to seek recognition as an ex-Soviet state. Gamskhurdia's various acts of oppression and wartime atrocities against the South Ossetian people were viewed by the West as violations of human rights.¹⁸ Their support of Georgia's sovereign rights did not cause them to overlook its faults during the war.

Georgian nationalism, propelled by the independence of Georgia and highlighted by Gamsakhurdia's policies, are still prevalent today as the majority of South Ossetians continue to face ethnic discrimination. Likewise, South Ossetia has forced millions of ethnic Georgians to migrate out of the region, furthering the separatist sentiments. Being dependent on Russia also means that South Ossetia is cut off by Russian border patrols, barbed fences and walls with Georgia.¹⁹ The regional economy is currently dependent on Russian support for nearly 2/3 of its income, leading to mass migration to Russia.²⁰

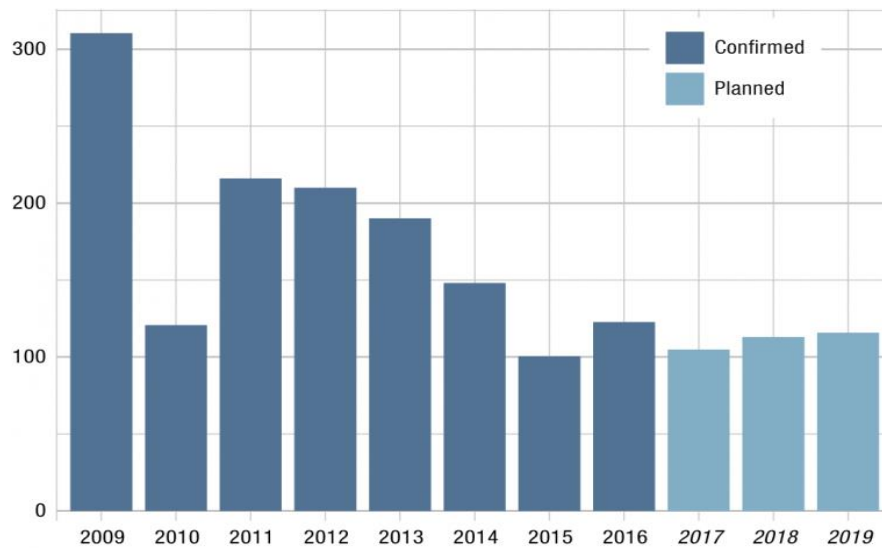


Figure 3 Russian financial assistance to South Ossetia (in million USD) Including direct budget transfers only ²¹

18 "Up in Flames | Humanitarian Law Violations and Civilian Victims in the Conflict over South Ossetia." *Human Rights Watch*, 29 Apr. 2015, www.hrw.org/report/2009/01/23/flames/humanitarian-law-violations-and-civilian-victims-conflict-over-south. Accessed 14 June 2023.

19 "Georgia: Russia Occupies BP Oil Pipeline | Eurasianet." *Eurasianet.org*, eurasianet.org/georgia-russia-occupies-bp-oil-pipeline. Accessed 29 June 2023.

20 Wolff, Stefan. "Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia." *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Self-Determination*, pesd.princeton.edu/node/706. Accessed 10 June 2023.

21 Crisis Group. "Russian Financial Assistance to South Ossetia (in Million USD) Including Direct Budget Transfers Only," *Crisis Group*, 2018. Accessed 30 May 2023.

Georgian-Russian War (2008)

Overview of the Conflict

The origin of conflict dates to the election of the Russian president Vladimir Putin in 2000 and a pro-Western shift in the Georgian government in 2003, developing into a full diplomatic crisis by April 2008, when the NATO promised to consider Georgia's bid for membership. On 1 August, 2008, Russian-backed South Ossetian forces started shelling Georgian villages.²² Russia intervened by mobilizing troops to the Georgian-Russian border and conducting air strikes on August 7, 2008 under the guise of Georgia committing genocides against the South Ossetians.²³ Long before the war began, South Ossetians already faced persecution from the Georgian government. Harsh crackdowns of rebellions and riots, disregard of South Ossetian's autonomy granted by the Soviet Union and ban from political participation were main factors in fueling South Ossetia's sense of injustice, which eventually led to Russia's intervention on the behalf of South Ossetia. The resulting war was a full scale attack on military and civilian targets. Georgian forces were most criticized for their shelling of Tskhinvali, which left approximately 800 dead, 192,000 displaced. Georgian forces retreated with the ceasefire treaty signed on 15 August, 2008.²⁴

Impact of the War

This war was extremely impactful upon global relations as the first European war of the 21st century. Then French president Nicolas Sarkozy negotiated the ceasefire himself, in an effort to avoid further escalations between Russia and Georgia, which could possibly threaten Europe. Russian forces held onto obtained territories even after the ceasefire agreement, withdrawing troops from Georgia as late as 8 October 2008. This action received harsh criticism from the international community as well as Georgia, but Russia denies the claims and insists the ceasefire agreement was followed through. By August 26, 2008, Russia had recognized South Ossetia's

22 "Georgia/Russia, Human Rights Watch's Report on the Conflict in South Ossetia | How Does Law Protect in War? - Online Casebook." *Casebook.icrc.org*, casebook.icrc.org/case-study/georgiarussia-human-rights-watches-report-conflict-south-ossetia. Accessed 11 June 2023.

23 "Up in Flames | Humanitarian Law Violations and Civilian Victims in the Conflict over South Ossetia." *Human Rights Watch*, 29 Apr. 2015, www.hrw.org/report/2009/01/23/flames/humanitarian-law-violations-and-civilian-victims-conflict-over-south. Accessed 14 June 2023.

24 "Georgia/Russia, Human Rights Watch's Report on the Conflict in South Ossetia | How Does Law Protect in War? - Online Casebook." *Casebook.icrc.org*, casebook.icrc.org/case-study/georgiarussia-human-rights-watches-report-conflict-south-ossetia. Accessed 11 June 2023.

independence as a sovereign state, to which Georgia responded by terminating its diplomatic relationship with Russia, which was only somewhat restored by 2012.²⁵

Through the war Russia gained complete de facto control over South Ossetia, partially by the process of 'passportization', when Russia gave citizenship to South Ossetians without Georgia's consent. South Ossetia's security services are predominantly made up of Russian soldiers, military units of South Ossetia were also being incorporated into the Russian army. This policy has received further international backlash.²⁶

Aside from political impacts, this war had a devastating effect on civilian life, displacing almost 100,000 people, with 350,000 still displaced.²⁷ Tskhinvali in particular faced heavy artillery fire and shelling from Georgian forces, and several villages were also demolished. Civilians fleeing the conflict zone were killed by indiscriminate firing from Georgian troops.²⁸

Current Situation in South Ossetia

Humanitarian crisis

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in South Ossetia extends both to human rights violations and poor quality of life. Systemic injustices, corruption and enforced disappearances are widespread yet under-reported by the region which lies firmly in Russian control.²⁹ Minorities, such as Georgians are persecuted. Electricity, gas and large quantities of food are all imported from Russia, and many South Ossetians live in poverty. Education and healthcare are extremely inaccessible, especially for those in remote villages. Democracy in the region is weak, with tampered election results believed to be under the influence of the Russian government.³⁰ Candidates often try to appeal to the Russian government over their own citizens. Transparency

25 Schwirtz, Michael. "Russia Offers Resumption of Relations with Georgia." *The New York Times*, 2 Mar. 2012, www.nytimes.com/2012/03/03/world/europe/russia-offers-to-thaw-relations-with-georgia.html. Accessed 13 June 2023.

26 "Putin Approves Army Deal with Georgia's South Ossetia." *Www.aljazeera.com*, www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/3/14/putin-approves-army-deal-with-georgias-south-ossetia. Accessed 17 June 2023.

27 "Georgia/Russia, Human Rights Watch's Report on the Conflict in South Ossetia | How Does Law Protect in War? - Online Casebook." *Casebook.icrc.org*, casebook.icrc.org/case-study/georgiarussia-human-rights-watches-report-conflict-south-ossetia. Accessed 11 June 2023.

28 "Georgia/Russia, Human Rights Watch's Report on the Conflict in South Ossetia | How Does Law Protect in War? - Online Casebook." *Casebook.icrc.org*, casebook.icrc.org/case-study/georgiarussia-human-rights-watches-report-conflict-south-ossetia. Accessed 11 June 2023.

29 "Georgia: First ICC Arrest Warrants." *Human Rights Watch*, 30 June 2022, www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/30/georgia-first-icc-arrest-warrants. Accessed 14 June 2023.

30 "South Ossetia: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report." *Freedom House*, freedomhouse.org/country/south-ossetia/freedom-world/2021. Accessed 28 June 2023.

and accountability within the government is scarce given the amount of control Russia exercises in the region.

External investigations

In 2008, the Council of European Union also established an Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFMCG) to investigate possible violations committed by all three parties. In 2016 the International Criminal Court (ICC) authorized an official investigation of possible war crimes committed by Russia, Georgia and South Ossetia during the conflict. In 2021, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled Russia responsible for the violations against human rights committed in the region, and in 2022, issued arrest warrants for Russian nationals responsible for the violations.³¹

Bid to join Russia

A planned referendum on joining the Russian Federation on July 17, 2022 was suspended indefinitely. Given the circumstances of South Ossetia and Georgia's relationship, the outcome was most likely to be in favor of joining. It is important to note that Russia has opposed this idea. During a press conference, Kremlin press secretary Dmitry Peskov has stated that "there have been no steps from the Russian side in this regard." After the referendum was suspended by Gagloev, Russian foreign ministry representative Maria Zakharova called the decision "sound, in line with the spirit of the alliance between our countries and the principle of close bilateral coordination on issues which are significant both for Russia and South Ossetia."³²

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Republic of Georgia

The Republic of Georgia denies the independence of South Ossetia. They refuse to call it 'South Ossetia' but rather the Tskhinvali region. Georgia has exhibited oppression towards the South Ossetians in the past, and has attempted to ethnically cleanse Georgia by displacing South Ossetians. There have been several human rights violations levied against Georgia, mostly regarding their indiscriminate firing of artillery during the shelling of Tskhinvali.³³ Georgia

31 "ECHR Rules on Abuses in Ossetia, Abkhazia, Maidan – DW – 01/22/2021." *Dw.com*, www.dw.com/en/russia-ukraine-panned-by-european-human-rights-court-over-2008-2014-abuses/a-56307034. Accessed 17 June 2023.

32 "Moscow Postpones South Ossetian Referendum on Joining Russia." *Jamestown*, [jamestown.org/program/moscow-postpones-south-ossetian-referendum-on-joining-russia/#:~:text=On%20May%2020%2C%20the%20newly%20inaugurated%20%E2%80%9Cpresident%E2%80%9D%20of](http://jamestown.org/program/moscow-postpones-south-ossetian-referendum-on-joining-russia/#:~:text=On%20May%2020%2C%20the%20newly%20inaugurated%20%E2%80%9Cpresident%E2%80%9D%20of.). Accessed 23 June 2023.

33 "Georgia/Russia, Human Rights Watch's Report on the Conflict in South Ossetia | How Does Law Protect in War? - Online Casebook." *Casebook.icrc.org*, casebook.icrc.org/case-study/georgiarussia-human-rights-watches-report-conflict-south-ossetia. Accessed 11 June 2023.

criticizes Russia for backing the South Ossetian forces to gain control of the area, as well as stationing peacekeeping troops within South Ossetia, which could eventually undermine Georgia's security. It views South Ossetia as an uncompromisable part of their soil and is firm on preventing separation. It has tried various ways in the past to reincorporate the region, but with limited success, often worsening the animosity.

Russian Federation

South Ossetia's armed resistance is mostly Russian-backed, from funding of equipment to training. Peace agreements such as the Sochi agreement between Georgia and South Ossetia are brokered by Russia. It has been criticized by South Ossetia as unable to protect its civilians during the armed conflict as well as Georgia for meddling excessively. Russia offers citizenship and other benefits to South Ossetian citizens, as well as supplying 90% of the region's economic income.³⁴ South Ossetia uses the Russian currency; ruble, uses Russian as an official language, indicating the control Russia has over every aspect. South Ossetian government officials' appointments often needed approval from Russia to ensure the region continues its allegiance to Russia. However, in response to South Ossetia's willingness to join the Russian Federation, Russia presents an ambiguous response that indirectly rejects such. Russia wishes to maintain control in a de facto manner, to avoid as much confrontation with the West as possible. Although the act of formal annexation would hardly change the current dynamic, being formally annexed would mean Russia could face direct condemnation.

United States of America (USA)

The US has been consistently supportive of Georgia for two main reasons. There is the duty to uphold the right to sovereignty as an influential global actor, as well as Georgia being a key ally in the Caucasus region.³⁵ But there is also the need for the US to counter Russian expansionism. The annexation of South Ossetia could be interpreted as a Russian attempt to re-establish dominance, which would prompt the US's objection. The US has also heavily criticized Russia's behavior since its forces had entered Georgia's territory and withdrew troops at a much later date than agreed upon. Particularly the US condemned Russia's air strikes on the undisputed Georgian territory of Gori, which targeted military bases and residents.³⁶

34 "South Ossetia's Unwanted Independence." *OpenDemocracy*, www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/south-ossetias-unwanted-independence/. Accessed 19 June 2023.

35 "S. Ossetia: 99% Back Independence - CNN.com." *Web.archive.org*, 28 Nov. 2006, web.archive.org/web/20061128192630/www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/europe/11/13/sossetia.independence.ap/index.html. Accessed 5 July 2023.

36 "Georgia/Russia, Human Rights Watch's Report on the Conflict in South Ossetia | How Does Law Protect in War? - Online Casebook." *Casebook.icrc.org*, casebook.icrc.org/case-study/georgiarussia-human-rights-watches-report-conflict-south-ossetia. Accessed 11 June 2023.

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

Peace has been attempted to be brokered over by the OSCE, whose main mission is to establish peaceful resolutions between all parties. The organization participates within the Joint Control Commission (JCC) chaired by South Ossetians, Russians, and Georgians. The OSCE mission focuses on the demilitarization of conflict zones in order to prevent the breakout of further confrontations, and submitted proposals to urge further cooperation of the Georgian and South Ossetian sides such as police force collaboration. A secondary concern of the OSCE mission is the monitoring of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF). Currently unarmed monitoring officers patrol the conflict zones to report possible points of tension. The OSCE could improve the situation by a significant margin, as it coordinates between many member states, capable of being more active.³⁷

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

NATO has always expressed their firm support for Georgia and its sovereign integrity, and condemns Russia's military advances into undisputed Georgian territory during the Georgian-Russian war. Georgia's bid to join NATO could be considered one of the triggers for the war, and while Georgia has yet to join the alliance, NATO continues to affirm the possibility. Georgia is considered an eligible country and had been promised admission, but it would also require significant effort from Georgia. Apart from necessary national reforms, several key NATO states, such as Germany, express their opinion that Georgia needs to sort out its internal dispute—such as South Ossetia—before its membership could be considered.³⁸ Joining NATO would be a full pivot from Georgia's past alignment with Russia, while admitting Georgia furthers NATO's sphere of influence, it also risks provoking Russia. NATO could offer valuable protection to Georgia by its mutual defense system, but currently there is no discussion.³⁹

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
January 8 1801	South Ossetia annexed by the Russian Empire
February 2, 1918	First South Ossetian rebellion

37 "The Georgian-Ossetian Conflict." *Www.osce.org*, www.osce.org/georgia-closed/44630. Accessed 2 July 2023.

38 "NATO's Door Open to Georgia but Political Reforms Needed, Envoy Says." *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, www.rferl.org/a/georgia-nato-colomina-accession/31676543.html. Accessed 6 July 2023.

39 NATO. "Strasbourg / Kehl Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Strasbourg / Kehl." *NATO*, 4 Apr. 2009, www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52837.htm?mode=pressrelease. Accessed 4 July 2023.

February 15 - March 17 1921	The Georgian Democratic Republic ended
November 10, 1989	South Ossetia requests to be an autonomous republic
September 20 1990	South Ossetia declares itself independent from Georgia
January, 5 1991 - June 24, 1992	First Georgian-Ossetian War
March 23, 1991	Russian and Georgian leaders met to discuss the resolution of the war
June 24, 1992	Sochi Agreement signed by Georgia and South Ossetia, brokered by Russia
November 13, 2006	South Ossetia holds referendum on independence with 99% in favor
April 13, 2007	Provisional Administrative Entity of South Ossetia established
August 1 - August 7 2008	First Georgian-Russian War
August 15, 2008	Georgia signs ceasefire treaty with Russia, brokered by France
August 26, 2008	Russia recognizes South Ossetia as a sovereign state
December 2, 2008	Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia established
November 18, 2015	UN resolution on internal displaced persons adopted
January 22, 2021	European Court of Human Rights rules Russia responsible for violations in South Ossetia

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

UN RESOLUTION A/70/L.51

This particular resolution, adopted on November 18, 2015, was aimed at discussing the individuals displaced due to the war, or internally displaced persons. Their legal protection, well-being and just treatment without discrimination are all considered by the resolution in an attempt to grant protection over such vulnerable individuals, as well as achieve accountability on the governmental level and ensure local administrative support. The consequences of the Russo-Georgian War, investigation into human rights violations, along with the necessary reconciliation measures were also discussed within this resolution, but primarily it focused on mitigating the displaced individuals crisis.⁴⁰

Sochi Agreement (1992)

The Sochi Agreement, also known as the Dagomys Accords, was a ceasefire treaty signed on June 24, 1992 in the Russian city of Sochi, to stop active fighting. It allowed the trilateral Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPKF) to enter South Ossetia to maintain the region's stability, as well as the establishment of the Joint Control Commission (JCC), a negotiation body with representatives from all three sides.⁴¹ Much like many of the solutions implemented at the time, it was lacking in long-term sustainability and rebuilding frameworks. Although the JPKFs were meant to be a trilateral collaboration, in reality they operated independently and remained more loyal to their respective sides. This lack of actual collaboration has resulted in minimal progress on the situation in South Ossetia, more than two decades after the treaty was signed.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Attempt by the Council of the European Union

On December 2, 2008 the Council of the European Union authorized an Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFFMCG). This marks a significant milestone as the first serious intervention issued by the European Union regarding an armed conflict. This investigation confirms the existence of wartime atrocities committed by Georgian, Russian and South Ossetian forces, particularly with the case of indiscriminate firing against

40 *Protection of and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons*. 18 Nov. 2015, www.jips.org/uploads/2019/02/UN-GeneralAssembly-resolution-2015-AC.370L.51Rev.1.pdf#:~:text=Expresses%20its%20appreciation%20for%20the%20fact%20that%20an,cooperation%20to%20Governments%2C%20upon%20request%2C%20in%20this%20regard%3B. Accessed 26 June 2023.

41 "Georgia/Russia, Human Rights Watch's Report on the Conflict in South Ossetia | How Does Law Protect in War? - Online Casebook." *Casebook.icrc.org*, casebook.icrc.org/case-study/georgiarussia-human-rights-watches-report-conflict-south-ossetia. Accessed 11 June 2023.

fleeing citizens. The Council's stance on this matter is reflective of the majority of the European countries, extending to the entire international committee. Assessing this conflict through the legal lens adds to a layer of intricacy regarding the political aftermath, so while there is sufficient evidence of violations, it is difficult to demand much consequences for the violating parties.⁴²

Provisional Administrative Entity of South Ossetia

In April 2007, Georgia created a Provisional Administrative Entity of South Ossetia opposing the de facto government.⁴³ Part of the effort to re-integrate South Ossetians back into Georgia included moving people from the regions controlled by the South Ossetian government into this newly established Georgian-controlled zone. Better living conditions and wages were provided there, to encourage more South Ossetians to relocate, undermining the separatist government's authority. Georgia claims the families moved by their own will to escape, the South Ossetian government denies this. However, there were also consequences for the Georgian side, as the local Georgians became dissatisfied with the special treatment South Ossetians were given. Many local Georgians who struggle to support themselves have expressed anger with how the 'newcomers' lived comfortably.⁴⁴

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Three-way peace talk to uphold the ceasefire agreement

The main purpose of the Sochi Agreement of 1992 was for the establishment of a ceasefire, which was upheld to some degree, given Russia's slow withdrawal of troops from Georgian territory. Currently, there are Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF) patrolling the conflict zones as well as OSCE-authorized unarmed specialists in the region seeking to maintain the stability. However, the JPKFs lack the very mutual collaboration it relies on to function properly, reflective of the respective sides. Transparent negotiations must be reinstated once more between Georgia, South Ossetia and Russia, to discuss the future of the region and the current stability and security issues.

Formation of an Independent State

42 "Georgia/Russia, Human Rights Watch's Report on the Conflict in South Ossetia | How Does Law Protect in War? - Online Casebook." *Casebook.icrc.org*, casebook.icrc.org/case-study/georgiarussia-human-rights-watches-report-conflict-south-ossetia. Accessed 11 June 2023.

43 "Civil.Ge | MPs Pass Draft Law on S. Ossetia with Final Hearing." *Old.civil.ge*, old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14944?id=14944. Accessed 23 June 2023.

44 "Georgia's Showcase in South Ossetia." *Iwpr.net*, iwpr.net/global-voices/georgias-showcase-south-ossetia-0. Accessed 29 June 2023.

In a 2006 referendum, more than 95% of South Ossetians voted on the independence of the region. The results showed 99% of the population supported the idea of being independent.⁴⁵ This particular referendum was not recognized by the international community, but by democratic choice, it indicated their desire for self-determination. Considering the historical animosity, fundamental disagreement on autonomy and cultural separation between Georgia and South Ossetia, the likelihood of the two parties reconciling is low. This solution would certainly be the most favorable one for South Ossetia, but it calls for a huge compromise on Georgia's part, and the international community backing it. The process of establishing statehood itself is a tremendous challenge, even with precedents like Kosovo, Abkhazia and North Ossetia. Given Georgia's unwillingness, this would be incredibly difficult to realize and execute successfully.⁴⁶

Possibility of holding special status within Georgia

Back in 2004, Georgia offered South Ossetia a 'special status' within Georgia, allowing it to become a republic within the federal state of Georgia, though with considerable autonomy. This was viewed as a considerable concession towards Georgia at the time by South Ossetia who were already de facto autonomous, therefore it was rejected.⁴⁷ But after years of brutal conflict and significant damage to both sides, the possibility of 'special status', which indicates general ordinance to the Georgian government but an independent economic and government model, would be achievable. With this official agreement and recognition, the relationship between Georgia and South Ossetia could be stabilized. This is more of a buffer move than a direct solution to the conflict, not necessarily changing the dynamic between the parties, but rather giving opportunities for dialogue. It would require long-term cooperation, which might also improve relations between Georgia and South Ossetia, in pursuit of long-lasting peace.

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