

**MEDVEDEV-SARKOZY'S
SIX POINTS:
THE DIPLOMATIC ASPECT OF
THE SOUTH OSSETIAN
SETTLEMENT**

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The August 2008 events in South Ossetia marked an important stage in the recent history of the Southern Caucasus: they changed the course of the region's sociopolitical life and have become the axis of the very complicated relations among the biggest international players.

The conflict settlement was achieved through a fairly long diplomatic struggle, which faithfully reflected the relations among Russia, the United States, and the European Union.

Below I offer an analysis of the diplomatic aspect of the South Ossetian settlement.

Mikhail Saakashvili's Stratagem

The tension between Tskhinval and Tbilisi, which cropped up early in 2008, had developed, by August, into a series of armed provocations and clashes. In a diplomatic effort to defuse the situation

Russia relied, very much as before, on the Joint Control Commission for the settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict (JCC); Tbilisi, which refused to back off from its South Ossetian position, made these efforts futile.

Back in March 2008, Georgia, dissatisfied with the balance of votes in the JCC (one Georgian against three from the South Ossetian “lobbyists”) left the structure. This was obviously done to elbow Moscow out of the regional decision-making. This plan required a much worsened situation; Russia’s image as an intermediary should have been discredited. Between March and August 2008, Georgia consistently destabilized the situation in South Ossetia.

Late on 7 August, 2008, America’s interference somewhat stabilized the situation; the Georgian side announced a unilateral ceasefire.¹ Russian diplomats convinced the sides to meet for talks on 8 August outside the JCC on the condition that the Commission would remain the only negotiation format.²

Tbilisi, on the other hand, insisted that the negotiation format should be revised. Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia G. Vashadze was expected in Moscow with an alternative crisis settlement. It looked as if the talks could be restarted.

At about 01:00 a.m. on 8 August, Tbilisi moved forward with a surprising statement that it had to abandon the ceasefire because of the shelling of Georgian villages from Ossetia. Simultaneously, Georgia responded with fire from its side of the border.

In September 2008, Dana Rohrabacher, deputy chairman of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight, said at the Congress hearings that, according to intelligence, Georgia had opened hostilities in South Ossetia.

Moscow, while fully aware of Tbilisi’s military preparations, was still caught unawares. Having agreed on talks with South Ossetia with Russia’s brokerage, Georgia detracted the attention of Russia’s leaders and its diplomatic service. Tbilisi obviously expected that the international community, whose attention was riveted on the Beijing Olympic Games, would be very slow to respond. The Georgian leaders sided with the West, which wrongly dismissed Russia’s military machine as weak and inefficient and its leaders as lacking determination. It seems that Georgia, which was actively seeking NATO membership and very aware of America’s support, expected to find itself under an unofficial security umbrella.

The military operation might also be provoked by certain American political circles out to test Russia’s military potential in the region.

Even if Tbilisi’s expectations came true, the Georgian army should have acted promptly, while the Georgian diplomats should have gained the support or at least the neutrality of the leading powers and international organizations. The blitzkrieg, however, failed: by 02:00 p.m. on 8 August only part of the planned operations had been completed. The morning raid by Russian aviation confirmed Russia’s intention to interfere.

Tbilisi was forced to move to the “humanitarian” stage of bringing constitutional law and order to South Ossetia: it announced that Georgia had allocated 50 million lari (over \$35 million) to implement humanitarian measures in South Ossetia.³

At 03:00 p.m., the Georgian authorities announced that they would cease fire if the Ossetian side lay down their arms before 06:00 p.m.; the Tskhinval population was invited to move toward Gori along a humanitarian corridor via Ergneti.⁴ By that time Georgia no longer controlled the situation.

¹ [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1037918.html>].

² See: *Kommersant*, 8 August 2008.

³ [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1038309.html>].

⁴ [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1038398.html>].

The Georgian diplomats were much more successful: they ensured direct support from some of the Western countries and the neutrality of the rest. The U.S. Department of State promptly responded with a demand that Moscow put pressure on the South Ossetian leaders to make them cease fire in the conflict zone. Tbilisi was merely admonished to demonstrate restraint.

The European Union's response was more adequate: Secretary General of the Council of Europe Terry Davis pointed out that the number of casualties was increasing and called on the sides to cease fire.⁵ Georgia, however, was not condemned.

Russia's Foreign Ministry likewise tried to appeal to the international community in an effort to convene an extraordinary sitting of the U.N. Security Council. Moscow described Georgia's actions as "perfidious."⁶

For this reason the Russian leaders officially refused to talk to the president of Georgia; the RF Foreign Ministry still hoped that the UNSC would stop Tbilisi.⁷

The UNSC declined the Russian draft of the South Ossetian resolution: Georgia and the United States refused to accept the point that obligated the conflicting sides "to renounce the use of force." Russia's foreign partners preferred the wait-and-see policy, which would have allowed Georgia to complete its operation of bringing constitutional law and order to the breakaway republic.⁸

Russian diplomats avoided direct contacts with Tbilisi and remained engaged in talks with the United States. Vladimir Putin, who was attending the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Beijing, met with President George W. Bush to discuss the South Ossetian developments. The American president responded to the Russian premier's comment that "there is a war going on in South Ossetia" by saying that nobody wanted a war. The U.S. Department of State tried to move in as an intermediary.⁹

Tbilisi alone was quite satisfied with Washington's concealed intention to keep Russia away in order to permit Georgia restore its territorial integrity by force. In a series of telephone conversations with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov explained Russia's position in so many words: "In full accordance with the Constitution and the laws of the Russian Federation, President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev intends to defend the lives and dignity of Russian citizens."¹⁰ This undermined Washington's intended brokerage.

Russia launched its military operation in diplomatic isolation. Early on 8 August it became clear that the Russian peacekeepers had been fighting Georgian troops; this fact could not be ignored. About midday Russian aviation delivered the first strikes on Georgian territory, which demonstrated Russia's firm determination. At 03:30 p.m. the media published a statement President Medvedev made at a meeting of the RF Security Council: "We shall not allow our compatriots to be killed with impunity. Those who are responsible for that will be duly punished."¹¹ Russian units entered South Ossetian territory.

The Georgian leaders found themselves in a difficult situation, which called for a new strategy. Late in the evening of 8 August in his interview to the BBC, the president of Georgia, when asked whether he was prepared to withdraw from South Ossetia, answered: "Why should I withdraw troops from Georgian territory? This is our territory and we demand an immediate ceasefire. I want international mediation. I want delimitation of forces under international control."¹²

⁵ [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1038344.html>].

⁶ [<http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226781.html>].

⁷ [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1038051.html>].

⁸ [http://www.ng.ru/world/2008-08-08/100_nato.html].

⁹ [<http://www.nregion.com/txt.php?i=25419>].

¹⁰ [http://www.ng.ru/world/2008-08-08/100_dialog.html].

¹¹ [<http://www.vremya.ru/2008/143/52/209641.html>].

¹² [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1038612.html>].

This clarified Georgia's tactics: while the military would be keeping the already gained positions at all costs, the Georgian diplomats would be trying to force Moscow, by hook or by crook, to halt and let the international intermediaries move in. Success would have allowed Georgia to change the line that separated the conflicting sides: it would have gone along the border between the Java and Znauri and Tskhinval districts; otherwise Russia could at least have been excluded from the talks.

On the diplomatic front Georgia was fighting for international, especially American, compassion. On 8 August, Mikhail Saakashvili made it clear by saying: "This is no longer Georgia's headache. This is closely related to America and its values. We are a freedom-loving nation that has been subjected to a military attack."¹³

The White House limited its support to a prompt relocation, by U.S. military transportation aircrafts, of Georgian units (about 2 thousand) from Iraq. The U.S. Department of State spared no effort to extend the widest diplomatic support to Tbilisi. As the hostilities unfolded, Russian-American relations rapidly dropped to their lowest point since the Cold War.

The European Union sided with the United States. The EU members demanded that the sides discontinue the hostilities and go back to the negotiation table, but none of them raised the issue of fundamental importance for Russia: the Georgian forces should be pulled back to the 7 August line. The Americans and Georgians, however, never managed to knock an anti-Russia coalition together. Germany and France had long been mutely displeased with Washington's foreign policy. The East European allies (Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia), however, willingly joined the bandwagon. Their support, however, did not go further than anti-Russian invectives.

Under Western pressure the RF Foreign Ministry remained firm and continued calling on the international community to come up with an adequate assessment of Georgia's actions so that to force it to pull out and sign a non-use of force agreement.

The U.N. Security Council was the main battlefield; the tension reached its height on 10 August when the United States presented an anti-Russia resolution at the third sitting on the South Ossetian conflict. The resolution failed, but the world was able to watch a heated argument between the permanent representatives of Russia and the United States.

The EU Brokerage

On 9 August it became clear that Georgia was moving rapidly toward a military defeat. The West realized that Georgia could not resist Russia. In the evening of 8 August, the "shadow CIA" (Stratfor Intelligence Corporation) said that when Russia moved in, the rest of the world was left guessing as to where it would stop.¹⁴ On the other hand, nobody expected the Russian troops to move forward that fast and that far.

On 10 August the Georgians evacuated the Znauri and Tskhinval regions. The process was accompanied by talks between the two countries at the foreign ministry level, at which it was agreed to create two "humanitarian corridors" to allow refugees to leave South Ossetia.¹⁵

The Georgian side initiated a telephone conversation between Sergey Lavrov and Eka Tkeshelashvili on evacuation of the Georgian forces from the conflict zone.¹⁶

¹³ [<http://www.nregion.com/txt.php?i=25449>].

¹⁴ [<http://www.rian.ru/world/20080808/150215484.html>].

¹⁵ [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1039028.html>].

¹⁶ [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1039130.html>].

On the same day the representative of the RF embassy in Georgia was handed a note that said in particular: “The Foreign Ministry of Georgia announced that it is prepared to start immediate talks with the Russian Federation on discontinuation of the hostilities and ceasefire. All armed forces have been removed from the conflict zone.”¹⁷

By that time the sides were no longer listening to one another, while the United States became a de facto side in the conflict. A mutually acceptable peace initiative was urgently needed.

France, which was chairing the European Union, shouldered the mission with a great chance of success since the U.S. Department of State had been unwilling to act as an adequate and impartial participant in the conflict settlement. The foreign policy ambitions of the French president promised success.

His plan consisted of three points: an immediate ceasefire; Georgia’s complete territorial integrity, and a return to the 7 August line.

Moscow could hardly agree to this since Tbilisi had entirely lost its confidence. The RF Foreign Ministry responded with: “The current humanitarian catastrophe does not allow us to pull out the support units.”¹⁸

However, the French president offered the best of the available Western alternatives. On 10 August the presidents of Russia and France spoke twice over the phone; it was agreed that President Sarkozy would come to Moscow. The Russian leaders’ firmness bore fruit: it looked as if the settlement would take Russia’s interests into account.

France was waging a complicated diplomatic game of its own. On 11 August the president of Georgia signed the peace agreement presented to him by foreign ministers of France and Finland B. Kouchner and A. Stubb. The document contained ceasefire provisions, demanded a pull out to the 7 August positions, and envisaged international presence in the conflict zone. In addition, it described Moscow as one of the sides to the conflict, and this could never be accepted by Russia. The document lacked Moscow’s central demand: non-use of force, which Sergey Lavrov pointed out when talking to Alexander Stubb.¹⁹

On the eve of the Moscow talks, France was obviously out to deprive Moscow of a leeway. Moscow, however, refused to accept the document of 11 August as the final settlement; it was obviously not enough to keep Russia within the limits the European Union had tried to enforce on it. France made an attempt to push a three-point resolution through the UNSC: immediate ceasefire; immediate evacuation of the Russian troops; and Georgia’s territorial integrity. Russia refused to accept the draft, which said nothing about the non-use of force.²⁰

To soften Russia’s position the president of France had to publicly approve of Moscow’s demands in a communique placed on the Palais Elysée website.²¹ President Sarkozy’s efforts bore fruit: a peace settlement of 6 points was signed on 12 August:

1. non-use of force;
2. stop all military action;
3. free access to humanitarian aid;
4. Georgian troops return to their previous positions before the conflict;
5. Russian troops return to the lines they held before the start of the military operation and the Russian peacekeepers take on an additional security role until an international solution is reached;

¹⁷ [<http://www.nregion.com/txt.php?i=25524>].

¹⁸ [http://www.ng.ru/world/2008-08-09/100_putin.html].

¹⁹ [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1039851.html>].

²⁰ [<http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1227070.html>].

²¹ [http://www.ng.ru/world/2008-08-12/8_sarkozi.html].

6. An international discussion starts over the future status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.²²

The French dropped the point that spoke of Russia as a side to the conflict, which can be described as a great success of Russian diplomacy. On 14 August the RF Foreign Ministry pointed out once more that the peace settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict is a “Russian and French initiative;” the two capitals invited the sides to the conflict “which, as is generally known, are Georgia, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia,”²³ to support the settlement.

The document contained no reference to Georgia’s territorial integrity; instead it mentioned “an international discussion over the future status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia;” this was another diplomatic success for Moscow. The Russian side made it more or less clear that there could be no return to the past.²⁴

President Medvedev suggested that the Abkhazians and South Ossets should be given the right to decide where and how to live. He used the example of Kosovo to argue that sovereignty was much more important than unstable territorial integrity.²⁵

The president of France explained that he had to retreat on the issue because it was impossible to deal with all the issues together, some of which should be put away for future settlement.²⁶

This can be described as the first success of European diplomacy; it laid a document on the table to be discussed. From that time on the diplomatic struggle shifted to the legal sphere: one of the three alternatives—Russian, Georgian, or European—was to be accepted as legally binding.

The tug-o’-war began as soon as President Sarkozy arrived in Tbilisi. The words “an international discussion over the future status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia” were lost in the process while the accent was shifted to the international negotiations related to the regions’ security.²⁷

The presidents of Russia and France agreed on the changes over the phone while on 13 August Foreign Minister of Russia Lavrov pointed out that the “phrase about providing South Ossetia and Abkhazia with steadfast security means that it cannot be achieved outside the status context.”²⁸

While the sides went on with their comments on the agreement it became increasingly clear that they interpreted many of the points differently, the greatest controversy being caused by the format of the peacekeeping operation. The president of France insisted that the status of the Russian troops stationed in the conflict areas of Abkhazia and South Ossetia should be determined later while the other points should be immediately fulfilled. The European side hinted that it regarded Russia as a side to the conflict. On 13 August the foreign minister of Russia stated in no uncertain terms that Moscow would never alter the format of peacekeeping operations in Georgia as a matter of principle but was prepared to accept a wider international presence realized by U.N. and OSCE observers.²⁹

Accepted by the Russian and Georgian sides, the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan was passed on to the EU foreign ministers. From the start some of the EU East European members sided with Georgia and insisted on holding a special summit to “condemn Russia’s aggression.”

France, as the EU chairman, did not convene the meeting until Russia declared that the operation had been completed and the agreement approved. Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland, supported by the UK, insisted that Russia should be punished for its “disproportionate use of force.” They

²² [<http://www.ccun.org/News/2008/August/>].

²³ [<http://www.vremya.ru/2008/147/52/210494.html>].

²⁴ [<http://www.vremya.ru/2008/146/52/210365.html>].

²⁵ [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1040476.html>].

²⁶ [http://www.ng.ru/politics/2008-08-13/100_sarkozy.html].

²⁷ [<http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1227152.html>].

²⁸ [<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-rss.aspx?DocsID=1011126>].

²⁹ Ibidem.

remained in the minority. The majority sided with Alexander Stubb, who said that the meeting should concentrate on the EU peace mission.³⁰

As a result, the EU sent its observers rather than peacekeepers into the conflict zone. Bernard Kouchner frankly admitted that this was prompted by Russia's ensured agreement. The European diplomats treated the signing of the agreement and its fulfillment as their priority.

On 14 August, having approved the results of the meeting of the EU foreign ministers, Russia invited the presidents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia to Moscow to attend the signing procedure in order to confirm its status of intermediary. Tbilisi was satisfied with the EU's support of its territorial integrity and sovereignty and Brussels' readiness to revise the peacekeeping process.

On 13 August, however, a telephone conversation between the foreign ministers of Russia and Georgia revealed that Tbilisi refused to sign the document until it was approved by U.N. SC. Georgia was especially displeased with the point that said: "Until an international solution is worked out Russian peacekeepers are taking up an additional security role."³¹

At this stage the U.S. Department of State moved forward to take part in the process and caused havoc. The White House obviously intended to take revenge for its earlier diplomatic defeat that cost the United States a place at the negotiation table. By attacking Russia the U.S. intended to neutralize the possibilities offered by Point Five of the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan.

On 14 August, when on a visit to Paris, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice suggested that the words "an additional security role" needed specification. The French explained that the Russian peacekeepers would control the territory of South Ossetia and patrol the adjacent strips of no more than 10 km in width. The U.S. Secretary of State agreed with this and deemed it necessary to stress that this should be a short-time measure.³²

Tbilisi was very much concerned with the changes in Point Six since the Russian side insisted that security of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was impossible without a final decision on their status. President Sarkozy and U.S. Secretary of State Rice joined forces to convince the Georgian side to sign the document, which, they argued, did not entail automatic recognition of the independence of the two breakaway republics. They both knew that Russia would not sign the agreement deprived of its Point Six. President Saakashvili was further convinced by the statement FRG Chancellor Angela Merkel made in Sochi during her meeting with President Medvedev; she confirmed her adherence to the principle of Georgia's territorial integrity.³³

On 15 August Condoleezza Rice personally brought the document that contained the six Medvedev-Sarkozy principles with her from Paris. Assured of the U.S.'s support, the president of Georgia signed the document; the next day it was approved by President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev.

On the Road toward Recognition

The diplomatic war unfolding around the Medvedev-Sarkozy agreement boiled down to a Russia-America duel in which the sides were pursuing different interests and nurtured different plans.

³⁰ [<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-rss.aspx?DocsID=1011125>].

³¹ [<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-rss.aspx?DocsID=1012528>].

³² Ibidem.

³³ Ibidem.

The American leaders, who had suffered an obvious defeat and had to listen to Tbilisi's reproaches of "perfidy," were determined to restore the 7 August status quo, which meant that Russia's peace-keeping efforts would be reduced to naught. Moscow was out to promote its interests and the results of the August events confirmed by the Medvedev-Sarkozy agreement.

The American leaders moved forward to threaten Russia with international isolation. On 13 August President George W. Bush declared that because of its actions in Georgia Russia risked being left out of the diplomatic, political, and economic international structures of the 21st century. The White House hinted that Russia might be elbowed out of the G-8 and the club of the industrially developed countries; it might remain outside the WTO and OECD, and the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi might be boycotted.³⁴ In connection with the South Ossetian events the U.S. Congress refused to annul the Jackson-Vanick Amendment and support an agreement that allowed cooperation with Russia in the sphere of civilian nuclear power production.³⁵

Simultaneously, America was obviously encouraging Georgia in the military-political sphere. On 13 August the U.S. president announced that his country had launched a humanitarian operation in Georgia with the use of military aviation and the Navy. He demanded that Russia leave the communication lines open for America to carry out its humanitarian projects.³⁶

From 19 August onwards American military transport aircrafts carrying humanitarian aid began landing in Georgia. The White House also announced that American warships loaded with humanitarian cargoes would enter the Black Sea. An attempt was also made by the White House to mobilize the NATO allies.

On 17 August, on board a plane leaving Tbilisi, U.S. Secretary of State declared that NATO would never allow Russia to triumph over Georgia and realize its strategic ambitious designs of undermining Georgia's democracy.³⁷

NATO deputy spokeswoman Carmen Romero promised that NATO would support Georgia and even assured it of NATO membership.

On 19 August the United States gathered the NATO foreign ministers in Washington for a special meeting to discuss the future of the Russia-NATO dialog.

However, the American hopes of the Alliance's concerted anti-Russian position proved futile. The foreign ministers found themselves divided into two camps. The United States, together with some of the Scandinavian countries and the absolute majority of the East European members, closed ranks over serious condemnation of Russia and promptly issuing Georgia the MAP. West European diplomats, the foreign ministers of France and Germany in particular, were dead set against this.

Four hours of heated debates produced a compromise: on the one hand, NATO was behind Georgia as far as its territorial integrity was concerned; on the other, it agreed that the guarantee of steadfast security for the two breakaway regions should be discussed at the international level. The document supported Georgia as a valuable partner and promised to restore its military infrastructure; it also set up a NATO-Georgia commission.

The document described Russia's actions during the conflict as disproportionate and unfit for a peacekeeper and concluded with a statement that the consequences of Russia's actions would be carefully analyzed; no sanctions, however, were mentioned. Nothing was said about a possible curtailment of cooperation within the Russia-NATO Council even though its work was suspended until Russia had fulfilled the Six Points. No exact dates for the MAP for Georgia were mentioned.³⁸

³⁴ [<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-rss.aspx?DocsID=1011329>].

³⁵ [http://www.ng.ru/economics/2008-08-21/4_gazprom.html].

³⁶ [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1041155.html>].

³⁷ [<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-rss.aspx?DocsID=1013607>].

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

Despite the document's moderate nature, the promise to rearm Georgia showed that the United States and its NATO allies chose to ignore Russia's interests. Some of the planned joint Russia-NATO exercises had been annulled to let Russia contemplate the dangers of its cooler relations with the Alliance.

Moscow was left with only one option: taking a firm stance in its relations with the United States and NATO. In response to the resolution of 19 August, Russia's Foreign Minister Lavrov accused NATO of siding with an "aggressive and criminal regime" and made it clear that Moscow did not regret the suspension of the Russia-NATO Council.³⁹

The final accord sounded on 20 August when an agreement on the U.S. ABM system in Poland was signed. The RF Foreign Ministry responded with a harsh statement in which it expressed its complete mistrust of the United States as a partner.⁴⁰

On 21 August the NATO Headquarters received a letter from the RF Defense Ministry that informed the Alliance of a complete halt to military cooperation.

Meanwhile, Washington and Brussels needed the Russian Federation for their continued war efforts in Afghanistan. The leading American experts agreed that Moscow held a longer list of potential sanctions against NATO than the North Atlantic Alliance had against Russia.⁴¹

The United States endangered its strategically important cooperation with Russia. It seems that the White House was vexed by its diplomatic defeat while Moscow demonstrated that it could stand up for itself. On the other hand, Washington probably feared that Russia would not withdraw its troops from Georgia.

Meanwhile, Tbilisi and Moscow concentrated on getting confirmation of the Six Points from the UNSC. Georgia tried to shift the discussions onto the French settlement plan to insist on the point about its territorial integrity.⁴²

Russia, in turn, wanted the resolution to repeat the Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan word for word,⁴³ which would have allowed it to launch the Kosovo variant to achieve a new status for South Ossetia and Georgia. The task was not an easy one.

Moscow could count on Paris for support, although the French and their partners were very much concerned with Russia's pullout from Georgia.

On 17 August the French president declared that Russia should remove its troops from all large Georgian cities despite the Medvedev-Sarkozy point about the Russian peacekeepers' "additional security role."⁴⁴ The French Foreign Ministry leaked information into the media that on 17 August President Sarkozy had warned President Medvedev over the phone about the possible consequences if Russia failed to live up to its obligations under the Six Points Agreement. The Russian Foreign Ministry had to denounce this by saying that "Russia together with France is actively working toward a resolution of the U.N. Security Council that should fully register the agreements achieved in Moscow on 12 August." The U.S. and UK, said the statement, are "trying to distort post factum the content of these agreements."⁴⁵

The U.N. Security Council and the meeting of the NATO foreign ministers coincided, which affected the positions of the European allies. The Security Council was offered a resolution, which demanded that Russia should live up to its ceasefire and pullout obligations. Russia had to decline the draft: it insisted that the resolution contain the Six Points signed by Georgia and Russia with French

³⁹ [<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-rss.aspx?DocsID=1013607>].

⁴⁰ [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1044379.html>].

⁴¹ [http://www.ng.ru/world/2008-08-25/5_sanktsii.html].

⁴² [<http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1227280.html>].

⁴³ [<http://www.nregion.com/txt.php?i=25646>].

⁴⁴ [<http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1227342.html>].

⁴⁵ [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1043211.html>].

brokerage. In an effort to return the U.N. Security Council to “earnest efforts to produce a fundamental resolution in support of the ‘six principles of Medvedev-Sarkozy’,” Russia urgently compiled and submitted its draft resolution, which was declined, in turn, on 21 August.

Russia’s European partners were irritated by the fact that Russian troops remained in control of part of Georgia’s territory. Western representatives arrived in Georgia to discover that Russian troops indeed controlled parts of Georgia beyond South Ossetia and the security zone. On 21 August representatives of the PACE and the French ambassador to Georgia were detained at the Russian checkpoint outside Gori; the incident stirred up passions. Instances of the destruction of Georgian military infrastructure after the end of the hostilities were interpreted as disturbing. Military equipment was removed from the republic, military bases destroyed, Georgian warships sunk—the Western states refused to accept this as part of the mission of the Russian military formation that had arrived to support the peacekeepers in South Ossetia.

The West was especially irritated with the slow withdrawal of the Russian troops from Georgia, which was completed between 18 and 22 August, three days later than expected.

The European diplomats refused to include the Six Points in the U.N. resolution, and not only because of the slow pullout. The agreement of 12 August was a tactical gambit in a great diplomatic game designed to restore the prewar situation. The European Union needed a ceasefire and troop withdrawal more than anything else.

The fact that on 12 August, when in Moscow, the European diplomats had dropped the point on Georgia’s territorial integrity did not mean that they had abandoned it altogether. The Western partners could not allow Russia to launch the Kosovo variant in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This left Russia with only one option: unilateral recognition of the republics’ independence.

This did not look tempting: after February 2008, when Kosovo had acquired its independence, Moscow gained a weighty argument in favor of independence of the two republics even though it was clear that none of the leading world players would follow suit. Georgia’s signature under the agreement on the non-use of force, confirmation in the U.N. of the status of the Russian peacekeepers, and an international discussion on the two republics’ political status were much more attractive options. However, these aims have not been achieved.

In fact, Russia was faced with a mission impossible: the European partners started talking about replacing the Russian peacekeepers with international servicemen. America and NATO resolutely promised Georgia that it would receive the MAP in the near future and that its military potential would be completely restored. Meanwhile, Tbilisi refused to adhere to the non-use of force principle, which allowed the West to annul the results of the August war from which Russia had, on the whole, profited.

Having moved Russian troops into South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the Russian leaders had to remain consistent and logical: they had to move on toward recognition of the independence of these states in order to create the legal basis for its continued military-political presence in the region.

While expecting that the international discussion of the future status of the two republics would gain momentum, Russia confirmed the peacekeepers’ positions on the strength of Point Five of the agreement. Moscow increased their numbers and announced that the security line established under the previous agreements had been restored.⁴⁶

On 17 August Russian peacekeepers moved into the Leningori District of South Ossetia previously under Georgian control. A security zone with two lines of checkpoints was organized along the South Ossetian administrative border: the first line ran slightly to the south of the border and had eight

⁴⁶ [<http://www.nregion.com/txt.php?i=25662>].

checkpoints used for observation and reconnaissance. The second line was located on South Ossetian territory; eighteen Russian checkpoints organized into two lines were placed along the border between Georgia and Abkhazia.

Under the pressure of its worsened relations with the U.S. and its NATO allies, Russia changed its intention about the length of the zone controlled by the Russian peacekeepers. On 22 August the RF General Staff extended it to the military airdrome in Senaki (35 km away from Zugdidi) and the southern part of Poti,⁴⁷ thus giving Russia another trump card in its game with the European partners.

On 23 August President Sarkozy thanked President Medvedev for the pullout of the Russian troops and raised the question of their presence in the Poti-Senaki area.⁴⁸ This opened another round of the diplomatic struggle.

The Last Round: The 8 September Agreement

The Western partners harshly responded to Russia's unilateral recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, however the tension gradually subsided.

On 1 September Brussels hosted an EU summit which condemned Russia but refused to introduce sanctions against it. The EU leaders limited themselves to postponing the talks on a new strategic agreement until the troops were pulled out from Georgia to the 7 August line. This moderation is easily explained by the EU's fear of infringing on Moscow's interests on the eve of the talks about Russia's withdrawal from the buffer zone in Georgia.

On 8 September the talks in Moscow were crowned with a document entitled "Implementation of the Plan of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and French President Nicolas Sarkozy," 12 August, 2008, which said in part: "Russia will withdraw all of its peacekeepers from the Poti-Senaki line within a maximum deadline of seven days and from the zones adjacent to South Ossetia and Abkhazia within ten days, following the deployment of international mechanisms in these zones, including at least 200 observers from the European Union;" the document also envisaged "the complete return of Georgian armed forces to their bases by 1 October, 2008."⁴⁹

Russia agreed to remove its troops in exchange for Georgia's consent not to use force against Abkhazia and South Ossetia. At the press conference that followed the signing of the document the French president announced that he had brought a letter with him from President Saakashvili that guaranteed the non-use of force.

The next day the EU delegates conducted talks in Tbilisi. The Georgian president agreed with the Moscow document; after signing the Implementation of the Plan, however, he made it clear that his interpretation differed from the Russian: "I have signed the document under which the Russian military will be replaced with international forces." A day later the Georgian Foreign Ministry published a declaration of the President of the European Council and President of the European Commission signed by President Sarkozy and President of the European Commission J.M. Barroso and passed on to President Saakashvili which said that the EU was prepared to deploy international observers on Georgian territory, including Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

⁴⁷ [<http://www.nregion.com/txt.php?i=25880>].

⁴⁸ [<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-rss.aspx?DocsID=1016134>].

⁴⁹ [http://www.un.int/russia/new/MainRoot/docs/off_news/080908/newen.2.htm].

The situation looked even stranger when on 11 September Giorgi Bokeria, Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia and an influential member of the Georgian president's closest circle, announced that Mikhail Saakashvili had not signed any other documents except the 12 August ceasefire agreement, also known as the Sarkozy Plan. It seems that the Georgians had fallen victim to Europe's diplomatic maneuvers.

The published declaration was the "carrot" which tempted the Georgian president to sign the agreement of 8 September. He signed a letter (if there was such a letter in the first place), which guaranteed the non-use of force against Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The point about the deployment of European observers across Georgian territory, including the two republics, meant nothing without Russia's signature. The Georgians, realizing that they had been tricked into signing, tried to beat a retreat.

Meanwhile, Russia offered its own explanations about the document signed in Moscow: on 9 September Foreign Minister of Russia Lavrov said that the European Union was the main guarantor of the non-use of force against Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Brussels offered no comment. Despite the obviously vague situation, the Russian troops were removed from the Poti-Senaki line by 13 September.

On 15 September the council of the EU foreign ministers set up an EU monitoring mission in Georgia of 350 people, including 200 observers. On 22 September it was announced that it would open its offices in Zugdidi, Poti, Gori, and Tbilisi. Simultaneously, Moscow confirmed its military-political presence in the region. On 9 September it established diplomatic relations with Sukhum and Tskhinval. On 17 September the sides signed agreements on friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance.

Conclusion

The military operation Georgia launched on 8 August in South Ossetia upset the stability maintained since the 1990s. Under the pressure of American-Russian rivalry, the two largest players in the Southern Caucasus, the conflict assumed acute forms from the very beginning. Washington was out to deprive Russia of its peacekeeper status and legal justification of its continued military-political presence in the region. Moscow, in turn, fought to the end for status quo in the conflict zone as befitting its interests.

On the eve of the hostilities Russia had retreated on certain points to force Tbilisi and Tskhinval to start talking, which explains why Moscow regarded the war as perfidious and insulting. The attack made direct talks impossible. One of the large international players should have shouldered the task of brokerage; the United States moved in to claim the role.

However, Washington, as a de facto side to the conflict, failed its mission. Russia, which found itself in diplomatic isolation, decided to interfere in the conflict. The armed confrontation between Russia and Georgia was fraught with the region's complete destabilization, which forced the European Union, in turn, to interfere. President Sarkozy's foreign policy ambitions played a certain role too.

France's peace mission was crowned with the six principles of Medvedev-Sarkozy. This was an important step toward the final settlement since it helped to reach a ceasefire and stabilize the situation. The negotiations on the agreement revealed that the Russian and Georgian sides remained in an impasse. The Six Point agreement was adopted thanks to the skills of the European and Russian diplomats, who worded the document in a way that permitted different interpretations.

As soon as the document was signed, an even fiercer diplomatic struggle for legal confirmation of the results of the August conflict began.

The agreement can be described as a great success of Russian diplomacy while the U.S. Department of State suffered a defeat. In an effort to take revenge, Washington did not allow the U.N. SC to adopt the Six Points as part of its resolution. On the other hand, the European Union feared that Russia might launch an international discussion of the future political status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia according to the Kosovo variant. The Russian leaders were forced to unilaterally recognize the independence of the two republics in view of the promises of the U.S. and NATO to restore Georgia's military potential and extend NATO membership to it.

The Agreement of 12 August and Moscow's official recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia provided Russia with a legal basis for its military-political presence in the region.
