Russo-Georgian War

Background:
From 7 to 16 August 2008, Russia and Georgia experienced a crisis known regionally as the Five-Day War (also known as the Russo-Georgian War or the August War). Since its independence, Georgia has struggled to stabilize major separatist movements located in three regions that are internationally recognized as part of Georgian territory: Adzharia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Both the South Ossetian and Abkhazian separatist movements are backed by Russia. This state of affairs has led to three prior crises between Georgia and Russia, the most recent occurring from June to November 2004 (see Case #445). Russian peacekeepers were sent to South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the wake of armed conflicts in both regions in the early 1990s and have remained stationed there until the present day.

PRE-CRISIS:
On 29 April 2008, Russia announced a unilateral increase of peacekeepers in Georgian-populated areas of Abkhazia. This increased tensions between Russia and Georgia. In July, several explosions in South Ossetia killed locals, including a police chief. The spokesperson of South Ossetia claimed that the bombings were assassinations conducted by Georgian secret services. Georgia claimed that the bombings were done by Russia to justify its presence in South Ossetia. Following these bombings, South Ossetia prepared for war, which provoked Georgia in turn.

Summary:
According to Georgia, Russia began moving its troops toward battle areas inside South Ossetia on 7 August 2008, which triggered a crisis for Georgia. Georgia’s major response was to mobilize its reservists and declare a 15-day “state of war” the next day, which in turn triggered a crisis for Russia. Russia initiated its major response that same day by clashing with Georgian forces in South Ossetia, while also requesting an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Russian troops were backed by separatist Abkhaz forces in their military efforts. Russia stated that its goal was to protect its peacekeepers and ethnic Russians in South Ossetia.

Five days of heavy fighting occurred between the two sides. Georgian forces were defeated in most battles and retreated on 11 August, enabling the Russians to occupy several Georgian cities.

On 9 August, Foreign Minister of the European Union, Bernard Kouchner, flew to Tbilisi together with Finnish Foreign Minister and OSCE chairman, Alexander Stubb. The following morning, they drafted a tentative ceasefire proposal on three key issues: a cessation of hostilities, recognition of Georgia’s territorial integrity, and rapid re-establishment of the status quo. On 12 August, a mediation effort conducted by the EU and OSCE began as then president of the EU, Nicolas Sarkozy, presented this plan to Russian President Dmitri Medvedev. A preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed by the parties that same day.

Based on the proposal presented by Sarkozy, he and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev drafted the “six principles” of a peace plan. On 13 August, Georgia requested revisions of the terms of the plan, to which Russia agreed. On 15 August, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili signed the revised peace agreement during a visit by the U.S. Secretary of State. Medvedev signed the agreement the following day. This terminated the crisis for both sides.

The peace agreement was unanimously supported by all members of the EU. The agreement was sent to the UNSC to be formalized. The UNSC had attempted to agree on a statement calling for a truce while the fighting was ongoing during the crisis, but it failed.
Most of the Russian forces stationed in Abkhazia and South Ossetia remained there under bilateral agreements with the corresponding governments until 2010, when Russia began troop withdrawals. Moscow claimed that the Five-Day War killed more than 2,000 civilians, but the official EU report estimated that the casualties were around 850 with over 2,000 wounded.

References: