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General reports and information on the August 2008 war between Georgia and Russia.

An *Amnesty International* report on the Georgia-Russia conflict, in a section titled "The War and Its Aftermath" describes the beginning of this war as follows:

> "The five-day war began on the night of 7-8 August 2008. Russian-brokered Georgian-Ossetian talks collapsed on 7 August; a Russian attempt to convene a UN Security Council emergency meeting on the situation failed to secure agreement on a text proposed by Russia calling on both sides to renounce the use of force. At 7pm Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili declared a ceasefire during a televised speech. Some four hours later at 11.30pm Georgian forces launched an offensive on the capital of South Ossetia, Tskhinvali. Statements by Georgian officials initially indicated that the assault on Tskhinvali was a response to sustained attacks on the Georgian villages of Prisi and Tamarasheni by Ossetian forces; a statement by Mamuka Kurashvili, commander of Georgian peacekeepers in the region, said that Georgia had "decided to restore constitutional order in the entire region" of South Ossetia. On 13 August President Saakashvili, however, said that "[w]e clearly responded to the Russians…The point here is that around 11 o'clock, Russian tanks started to move into Georgia, 150 at first. And that was a clear-cut invasion. That was the moment when we started to open fire with artillery." Russian officials dispute the claim and maintain that the movement of Russian armed forces into Georgia was initiated in response to the Georgian assault on Tskhinvali." (Amnesty International (18 November 2008) *Civilians In The Line Of Fire: The Georgia-Russia Conflict* AI Index: EUR 04/005/2008, p.9)

This report also states:

> "Although Georgian forces initially took control of parts of Tskhinvali and several surrounding villages, they were rapidly repelled by Russian forces, which had entered South Ossetia from North Ossetia via the Roki tunnel (through the Caucasus mountain range between the Russian Federation and Georgia). As Russian troops were taking control of South Ossetia, hostilities further extended to a number of other locations in Georgia outside of South Ossetia, including the nearby town of Gori, the Black Sea port of Poti, the western Georgian towns of Zugdidi and Senaki, and the Kodori gorge, the only part of Abkhazia under Georgian control. Russian troops, backed by air forces, quickly assumed control of these locations, some of which were far removed from the immediate conflict zone in South Ossetia. On 12 August Russian President Dmitri Medvedev agreed to a truce brokered by President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, the holder of the rotating chair of the European

> Union, and announced the end of Russian operations in Georgia; Russian forces nonetheless continued to be deployed in areas outside of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. A six-point peace plan based on the ceasefire agreement brokered by President Sarkozy was signed by President Saakashvili on 15 August and President Medvedev on 16 August. (ibid, pp.9-10)

In a section titled "Chronology Of The Violence" an *International Crisis Group* report states:

> "Close to midnight on 7 August 2008, a senior Georgian military official announced that Tbilisi had decided to restore 'constitutional order' in South Ossetia. The Georgians had declared a unilateral ceasefire several hours earlier, after another day of fighting between Georgian and Ossetian forces in and around the region's capital, Tskhinvali. But Georgia's defence ministry said South Ossetian militias had nevertheless continued into the evening to heavily shell Georgian villages and positions. By 1:00am on 8 August, Georgian troops had launched a large-scale military offensive on Tskhinvali, supported by artillery, and advanced quickly. At approximately 1:30am, tank columns of the Russian 58th Army started crossing into Georgia from the Roki tunnel separating North and South Ossetia. Apparently, the Russians had anticipated, if they did not actually entice, the Georgian move." (International Crisis Group (22 August 2008) *Russia vs Georgia: The Fallout,* p.1)

This section of the report also states:

> "From 11:30pm on 7 August until mid-morning 8 August, Georgian artillery shelled Tskhinvali, eventually taking control of most of the city and several ethnic Ossetian villages. Georgia's small air force bombed Russian tank columns advancing through the Roki tunnel in an effort to slow their advance, but by the morning of 8 August, the tanks were engaging the Georgians in and around Tskhinvali. According to a Western military observer who visited the area on the afternoon of 8 August the Georgians withdrew their forces from inside Tskhinvali before a ceasefire between 3:00pm and 6:00pm. Clashes between Georgians, Russians and Ossetians continued, with the Georgians using artillery to shell Tskhinvali, where Russian and South Ossetian forces had taken up positions. 13 The Georgian military says it withdrew its last troops from all of South Ossetia at 5:00am on 11 August." (ibid, p.2)

A report from the *Institute for War & Peace Reporting* states:

> "Everyone agrees that the Georgian army launched an attack at 11.30 pm that night. The key question is to what degree the Georgians were facing a direct threat. Government officials say that they had been confronted by unacceptable provocation in the form of attacks on Georgian villages in South Ossetia and a Russian military build-up on the other side of the mountains and had no choice but to act as they did. They say they then came up against massive Russian aggression. 'How could we have prevented the hostilities, after Russia clearly decided to start a war?' Georgian state minister for reintegration and Tbilisi's chief negotiator over South Ossetia Temuri

> Yakobashvili told IWPR. For their part, the Ossetians and Russians say the Georgian operation was a cynically planned attack to recapture South Ossetia only hours after President Mikheil Saakashvili had lulled Ossetians by announcing a ceasefire and promising them 'unlimited autonomy'." (Institute for War & Peace Reporting (22 August 2008) *How the Georgian War Began* Avaliani, Dmitry et al.)

In a section titled "August 8, 2008" a document published by the *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program* states:

> "From midnight on August 8, Georgian troops begin an attack intended to destroy the road connecting the Roki tunnel with Tskhinvali, and advance towards the breakaway capital. Georgian forces seize several South Ossetian controlled villages located on higher ground around the breakaway capital. According to Georgian authorities, at approximately 1 AM the Georgian troops succeed in shelling the road south of the Roki tunnel, thus delaying the advance of the Russian convoy. At 2 AM, Georgian ground troops reach Tskhinvali and begin firing rockets against governmental buildings in the city. The shelling of the city continues overnight. In the early morning, the Georgian side reports that additional Russian troops have passed the Roki tunnel and are advancing towards Tskhinvali. At 8 AM, the Georgian air force bombards the Gupta bridge (connecting the region of Java, south of the Roki tunnel, with Tskhinvali), delaying the advance of Russian units on approach to Tskhinvali. At 10 AM, the Georgian government announces that 1,500 of its 9,000 troops have entered Tskhinvali and that they now control the main part of the conflict zone. At approximately the same time, a first Russian military aircraft enters Georgian airspace from the South Ossetian side, firing several missiles against a radar station in the Georgian-controlled village of Shavshvebi. Air attacks are also carried out against the villages of Variani and Kareli, located 20 km outside the conflict zone, and against the city of Gori. Over the next two hours – that is, only 12-14 hours following the Russian move into Tskhinvali – Russian air and ground troops launch a heavy counter-attack in the South Ossetian conflict zone, which forces the Georgian military out of Tskhinvali. Fighting continues throughout the afternoon, with Georgian troops attempting to push back into the city, but intense artillery and air attacks from the Russian side push them back. Between 3 and 5 PM, three military bases, Vaziani, Marneuli and Bolnisi, all located within 50 km of Tbilisi, are attacked by Russian jets. The Marneuli base is bombed on three occasions, reportedly causing casualties and the destruction of three Georgian military jets and several military vehicles. At approximately 7 PM, Georgian forces come under additional intense fire from ground forces of the Russian 58th Army, which entered Tskhinvali through the Dzara bypass road, west of the breakaway capital. At approximately 8.30 PM, the Georgian troops are forced to retreat from Tskhinvali, holding their positions south of the city." (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program (August 2008) *Russia's War in Georgia: Causes and Implications for Georgia and the World* Cornell, Svante E. Popjanevski, Johanna & Nilsson, Niklas pp. 14-15)

A *BBC News* report on the first week of the war, in a section titled "Friday 8 August" states:

> “Russia pours troops and armour towards South Ossetia and engages Georgian forces in and around Tskhinvali. Georgia says its military bases have been attacked by Russian aircraft as President Mikhail Saakashvili says his forces control Tskhinvali. The separatists, for their part, say they control the city. President Saakashvili says 30 Georgians have been killed, while Moscow claims that 21 Russian soldiers have lost their lives. The Georgian authorities say they expect a Russian attack on the capital, Tbilisi. Georgia also announces it is withdrawing half of its contingent of 2,000 troops from Iraq, so that they can be sent to South Ossetia. International aid agencies, meanwhile, express grave concern about the plight of civilians caught up in the conflict. In Tskhinvali, many people are reportedly sheltering from the fierce fighting in their cellars. The UN refugee agency says thousands of people have fled and many homes have been destroyed. It says water and food are in short supply. An International Red Cross spokeswoman says ambulances cannot move, hospitals are overflowing, and surgery is taking place in the corridors.” (BBC News (21 August 2008) *Day-by-day: Georgia-Russia crisis*)

A *New York Times* article states:

> “During a news broadcast that began at 11 p.m., Georgia announced that Georgian villages were being shelled, and declared an operation “to restore constitutional order” in South Ossetia. The bombardment of Tskhinvali started soon after the broadcast. According to the monitors, however, no shelling of Georgian villages could be heard in the hours before the Georgian bombardment. At least two of the four villages that Georgia has since said were under fire were near the observers’ office in Tskhinvali, and the monitors there likely would have heard artillery fire nearby. Moreover, the observers made a record of the rounds exploding after Georgia’s bombardment began at 11:35 p.m. At 11:45 p.m., rounds were exploding at intervals of 15 to 20 seconds between impacts, they noted. At 12:15 a.m. on Aug. 8, Gen. Maj. Marat M. Kulakhmetov, commander of Russian peacekeepers in the enclave, reported to the monitors that his unit had casualties, indicating that Russian soldiers had come under fire. By 12:35 a.m. the observers had recorded at least 100 heavy rounds exploding across Tskhinvali, including 48 close to the observers’ office, which is in a civilian area and was damaged. Col. Gen. Anatoly Nogovitsyn, a spokesman for the Russian Defense Ministry, said that by morning on Aug. 8 two Russian soldiers had been killed and five wounded. Two senior Western military officers stationed in Georgia, speaking on condition of anonymity because they work with Georgia’s military, said that whatever Russia’s behavior in or intentions for the enclave, once Georgia’s artillery or rockets struck Russian positions, conflict with Russia was all but inevitable. This clear risk, they said, made Georgia’s attack dangerous and unwise.” (New York Times, The (7 November 2008) *Georgia Claims on Russia War Called Into Question* Chivers, C.J. & Barry, Ellen)

An *Associated Press* report published on the second day of this conflict states:

> “Fighting raged in South Ossetia for a second day Saturday as Russia sent hundreds of tanks and troops into the separatist province and dropped bombs on Georgia that left scores of civilians dead or wounded. Georgia, a staunch

U.S. ally, launched a major offensive Friday to retake control of breakaway South Ossetia. Russia, which has close ties to the province and posts peacekeepers there, responded by sending in armed convoys and military combat aircraft. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told reporters in Moscow that some 1,500 people have been killed, with the death toll rising Saturday. The figure could not be independently confirmed, but witnesses who fled the fighting said hundreds of civilians had probably died. They said most of the provincial capital, Tskhinvali, was in ruins, with bodies lying everywhere. Russian military aircraft also raided the Georgian town of Gori on Saturday. An Associated Press reporter who visited Gori shortly after the bombing saw several apartment buildings in ruins, some still on fire, and scores of dead bodies and bloodied civilians. The elderly, women and children were among the victims. It is the worst outbreak of hostilities since the province won de facto independence in a war against Georgia that ended in 1992." (Associated Press (9 August 2008) *Georgia reports new air attack near capital* Dzhindzhikhashvili, Misha)

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

Sources Consulted:

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European Country of Origin Information Network
Google
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International Crisis Group
Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
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UNHCR Refworld
US Department of State