

Globethics Repository



The Georgia/Abkhazia agreement

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository.
More information on Globethics see <https://www.globethics.net>. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see <https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy>.

Item Type	Article
Authors	Smith, Sarah
Publisher	Life & Peace Institute
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-07-15 11:59:19
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/203464

The 1994 Georgia/Abkhazia ceasefire agreement did not address many fundamental issues, such as the commitment problem and security dilemmas of rival parties. It ignored the status of ex-combatants, which, as this article points out, may have played a big role in renewal of fighting in 2008 between Russia and Georgia.

The Georgia/Abkhazia agreement

An unsettled peace

Sarah Smith

The unresolved dispute over the status of Abkhazia, a territory in the northwest region of Georgia, is one of the most protracted and violent conflicts of the post-Cold War era. The conflict had already started to emerge in the late 1980s with the decline of the Soviet Union. It turned violent in 1992 when, after Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union, Abkhazia also declared itself independent, leading to a 13-month long armed conflict. Following three failed attempts by Russia to broker a ceasefire, an agreement was reached on 4 April 1994 after a spate of UN Security Council resolutions. The agreement was called the Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian/Abkhazian Conflict.¹

One group, unsure of the other group's intentions, might build up its defensive military capabilities.

This article analyzes how the failure of the agreement to completely overcome the security dilemma and the commitment problem, as well as neglecting the status of ex-combatants and specifications of the power-sharing agreement, laid the foundation for renewed fighting between Russia and Georgia over Abkhazia in 2008. The events in 2008 led to Russia officially recognizing the independence of Abkhazia, the annulment of the 1994 cease-fire agreement, and the eventual end to the peacekeeping operations (PKOs) in the country.

While peace agreements between 1975 and 2011 have led to sustained peace in 35

out of 47 territorial conflicts around the globe (Högbladh, 2011), it is important to understand why 12 agreements did not lead to durable peace. This article seeks to examine possible elements, or lack thereof, within a peace agreement that might hinder the peace process using the example of the Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian/Abkhazian Conflict.

Security guarantees

The 1994 cease-fire agreement had requested a United Nations (UN) authorized PKO – which then became a PKO led by Russia under the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) – and an expanded mandate of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia, which attempted to address both the security dilemma and the commitment problem (Section 5). Fortna (2008:86) argues that peacekeeping “disrupt[s] spirals of fear and security dilemmas by reducing belligerents’ uncertainty about each other’s actions and intentions”. In other words, one group, unsure of the other group’s intentions, might build up its defensive military capabilities. The other group, seeing such development and unsure whether it is defensive or offensive, will likely build up its own defensive military capabilities, and the spiral continues (Kaufmann, 1998; Johnson, 2008). A PKO increased communication between Georgia and Abkhazia and decreased this ethnic security dilemma.

However, the agreement was vague as to the extent of each party’s commitment, stating only that they “reaffirm[ed] ... the non-use of force and the threat of the use of force” (Section 3). It did not address (a) what each party would do with its arms and equipment, (b) whether military forces would disband, or (c) the

creation of disarmament and demobilization programs. Since many of the details were still unresolved and unknown to both parties, and thus the mandate of the PKO was unclear, the security dilemma and the commitment problem were not adequately addressed. Abkhazia likely felt a continued sense of security from its relations with Russia. This probably explains why Abkhazia allowed Russian forces to enter the region and why both forces joined in driving Georgian troops out of the Kodori Gorge in 2008.

Abkhazia likely felt a continued sense of security from its relations with Russia.

Walter (2002) argues that durable peace is more likely when there is a third party that can act as a security guarantee. The presence of the observer mission reduced the commitment problem by serving as a form of communication between the parties, verifying that the parties were implementing the agreement, and ensuring the physical and economic security of civilians and combatants (Werner and Yuen, 2005). The presence of a third party can also serve to “mask the intentions behind the actions of parties to the agreement” (Hoddie and Hartzell, 2003: 316). Parties might agree to certain actions only to please the third party; such actions could thus increase the commitment problem.

The CIS and UN PKOs were mainly located along the border between Georgia and Abkhazia in the main conflict zone. Thus, they failed to act as a third-party security guarantee in all of Abkhazia, particularly in the regions border-

ing Russia. This might have resulted in many Abkhazians still feeling a closer connection to Russia than to Georgia and Abkhazia being more interested in cooperating with Russian forces. In addition, Russia had its own intentions in becoming involved in Georgia.

The role of Russia in the requested PKO deserves attention, as its role in the conflict was unclear, assisting both sides substantially through arms, equipment, and military attacks (UCDP). It also brokered three cease-fire agreements prior to the one in 1994. Thus, it could be argued that the Russian contingent entered as an unbiased but partial mediator, i.e., it cared about the outcome in some way. Its unbiased nature could, however, be questioned, particularly following events in 2008 in which Russia clearly supported separatist movements in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia (RULAC).

It could be argued that the Russian contingent entered as an unbiased but partial mediator.

Kydd (2003:599) argues that a biased mediator is more likely to succeed than an unbiased. He later elaborates on this by arguing that a mediator should “care about the issue at stake”. Richmond (1998) further contends that the symbolic meaning of a mediator’s presence, including its interests at large, can affect, either negatively or positively, its effectiveness. While both parties agreed to a Russian contingent, there is evidence to suggest that Georgia did not trust Russia throughout the conflict (Kaufmann, 1998).

This highlights the importance of a PKO serving as a security guarantee for both parties. While the Russian PKO was a security guarantee for Abkhazia, it was not for Georgia. In addition, the lack of trust between Georgia and Russia could mean that Georgia’s trust in Abkhazia was compromised, thus increasing the security dilemma and commitment problem.

The role of ex-combatants

While the cease-fire agreement addressed refugees and displaced persons, it failed to address what would happen to

combatants and ex-combatants beyond “inevitable punishment [being] inflicted” on spoilers of the peace process (Section 10). The agreement focused only on the use of arms, not whether ex-combatants had access to said arms. Demobilization and disarmament do not necessarily imply an end to the conflict (Nilsson, 2008), but the fact that neither party knew from the outset of the agreement whether or not the other side would demobilize and demilitarize left the security dilemma and commitment problem unresolved.

It was not clear whether Georgian forces would remain in Abkhazia or return to Georgia proper, or whether Abkhazian forces would be in control of the territory’s security during mediation efforts. This lack of clarity likely contributed to increased mistrust between the former belligerents, culminating in the events of 2008.

Nilsson (2005; 2008) argues that reintegration of combatants should be implemented as early in the peace process as possible; as part of a larger political process it can increase the likelihood of durable peace. Due to the fact that the cease-fire agreement did not mention reintegration, it failed to account for ethnic Georgians living in Abkhazia who fought on behalf of the Georgian forces. Reintegration into Abkhaz society would have increased the likelihood of them being able to provide for themselves and their families, as well as decreasing their fear of discrimination on the part of Abkhazia.

The lack of trust between Georgia and Russia could mean that Georgia’s trust in Abkhazia was compromised.

The agreement also failed to specify if Abkhazian forces were to be integrated into Georgian security forces. Reintegration into Georgian society might have naturally resulted from such military power-sharing. On the other hand, these ex-combatants might have experienced disapproval by their families and friends in Abkhazia for being part of a Georgian contingent. The lack of reintegration efforts, both at the local and national levels,

thus probably contributed to increased tension and mistrust between Georgia and Abkhazia, and, subsequently, to Abkhazia being more willing to rely on Russia in 2008.

Power-sharing arrangements

Power-sharing involves a wide range of practices, including consociational power-sharing, in which leaders represent a certain group, and integrative power-sharing, in which the system seeks to overcome group barriers (Sisk,

A lack of comprehensive and extensive power-sharing arrangements likely left Abkhazia vulnerable.

1996). Power-sharing should, according to Sisk, create an inclusive system for *all* ethnic groups in a multiethnic society, not just the warring parties. In addition, Walter (1999) specifies areas of power-sharing that make peace more durable: decentralized power through a federal system, parliamentary and proportional representation, and a system of checks and balances. While the agreement partially addressed the main incompatibility of this conflict, territory – i.e. Abkhazia would get its “own constitution and legislation and appropriate state symbols” (Section 6) – it did not specify whether Abkhazia would be an autonomous region with its own government or a state within a federated Georgia.

While the UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset (Höglbladh, 2012) codes this peace agreement as granting autonomy, this article questions such an assessment, arguing that the language in the peace agreement itself does not specify “control of a specific territory, the power of primary and secondary legislation, the power of executive authority and the power of fiscal matters” (ibid. p. 7). Whether or not such an arrangement was reached following the agreement is another question, but it should not be used to analyze the effectiveness of the cease-fire agreement itself.

The agreement also outlined areas in which Georgia and Abkhazia would cooperate, but it was unclear what “joint



PHOTO: MIKE GOLDWATER/GETTY IMAGES

A man takes a rest at the top of the 3,000 meter high Chuberi Pass in Georgia, sitting on his meagre possessions. He is one of the thousands who left the Abkhazian Svaneti province in 1993 to escape the advancing Russian-backed Abkhazian rebels.

action” entailed (Section 7). In other words, it did not address (a) the type of political system that would be created, (b) how each group would be represented in government, and (c) the role of those ethnic groups not directly involved in the conflict in the new power-sharing structure.

While Walter (1999) contends that the implementation of a settlement is more likely when the parties receive some form of political, military, and territorial guarantee, Jarstad and Nilsson (2008) argue that peace is only more likely when belligerents agree to military and territorial power sharing. They define political, military, and territorial power-sharing in the same way as Walter (2002:62-64). Military pacts, which guarantee some form of integration of the armed forces and/or command structures, and territorial pacts, involving some degree of regional autonomy, either through the administration of certain areas or the creation of self-governing areas, take more time to implement and are thus more costly, i.e., it is more difficult for parties to walk away (Jarstad and Nilsson 2008). Political power sharing, ei-

ther guaranteed positions in the new government or quotas in at least one government branch, is less costly, is completed fairly quickly, and is much easier to walk away from at a later stage (ibid.). It therefore does not increase the likelihood of durable peace.

Hartzell and Hoddie (2003) also look at economic power-sharing, defined as the distribution of state resources among groups (p. 320). A multidimensional power-sharing approach, they argue, is the most likely means to durable peace, because it creates a sense of security within the parties. The Georgia-Abkhazia agreement outlines six “powers for joint action” which will not be outlined here but can be found in the agreement under Section 7. None of these powers fall under power sharing as defined by Walter (2002) and Hartzell and Hoddie (2003), because they do not specify *how* they will work together on the joint actions and *how* resources and personnel will be distributed.

The UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset (Högbladh, 2012) finds no measures within the peace agreement that directly integrates rebels, either in the army,

the government, the civil service, or an interim government.³ Using Jarstad and Nilsson’s argument (2008), this article argues that the costs of implementing these “joint actions” were low and, subsequently, durable peace unlikely. While more research is needed, a lack of comprehensive and extensive power-sharing arrangements likely left Abkhazia vulnerable due to its unclear role in the future security and governance of Georgia. Thus, instead of integrating Abkhazia into Georgia, the agreement left the door open for Abkhazia to continue its relations with Russia. Abkhazia’s reliance on Russia as a security guarantee likely played a role in the Russia-Georgia conflict in 2008.

Conclusion

This article makes two general conclusions regarding peace agreements and durable peace. First, the security dilemma and the commitment problem were, at best, only partially solved due to a partial third-party security guarantee and the lack of clarity regarding demobilization and disarmament. Second, it did not specify the integration of political,



Abkhazian leader Sergei Bagapsh addresses tens of thousands of Abkhazians at a rally in Sukhumi, capital of Georgian breakaway province of Abkhazia in August 2008. Participants of the rally demanded independence from Georgia.

territorial, military, and economic powers of the two parties. For these reasons, it is not surprising that the cease-fire created at best an unsettled peace that ended in 2008. While the success of other peace agreements is dependent upon local context, the example of Georgia/Abkhazia reveals the importance of including as many details and specifics in an agreement as possible, ensuring the unbiased nature of a third-party security guarantee, and specifying integrative power-sharing measures. 🌸

- 1 The text of the agreement is available at <http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/services/cds/agreements/pdf/geo4.pdf>.
- 2 The dataset does code for both some form of military and territorial provisions in the agreement. It does not code for any political provisions.

References

"Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian/Abkhazian Conflict." 4 April 1994. Available at: <http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/services/cds/agreements/pdf/geo4.pdf>.

Fortna, V. P. (2008). *Does Peacekeeping Work?: Sharing Belligerents' Choices After Civil War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Hartzell, C. and Hoddie, M. (2003). "Institutionalizing Peace. Power Sharing and Post-Civil War Conflict Manage-

ment", *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 47, no. 2

Hoddie, M. and Hartzell, C. (2003). "Civil War Settlements and the Implementation of Military Power-Sharing Arrangements", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 40, no. 3

Högbladh, Stina (2011). "Peace Agreements 1975-2011 - Updating the UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset Peace in the UCDP Dataset." In *States in Armed Conflict 2011: Uppsala University: Department of Peace and Conflict Research Report* 99, ed. Therése Pettersson and Lotta Themnér. Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, pp. 39-56

Högbladh, Stina (2012). *Peace Agreement Dataset Codebook*. Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University

Jarstad, Anna and Desirée Nilsson (2008). "From Words to Deeds: The Implementation of Power-Sharing Pacts in Peace Accords." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* vol. 25, no. 3

Johnson, C. (2008). Partitioning to Peace : Sovereignty , Demography , and Ethnic Civil Wars. *International Security*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 140-170. Available at: <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/isec.2008.32.4.140> [Accessed March 14, 2013].

Kaufmann, Stuart (1998). "Options for Resolution of the Conflict in Abkhazia." *PONARS Policy Memo* 32. University of Kentucky.

Kydd, Andrew (2003). "Which Side Are You on? Bias, Credibility, and Mediation." *American Journal of Political Science* 47 (4). Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1540-5907.00042/full>

Nilsson, A. (2005). *Reintegrating Ex-Combatants in Post-Conflict Societies*. Stockholm: Sida. Available at: <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:106715> [Accessed March 12, 2013].

Nilsson, A. (2008). *Dangerous Liaisons: Why Ex-Combatants Return to Violence*. Vol. 0123. Uppsala. <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:172980>

Richmond, O. (1998). "Devious objectives and the disputants' view of international mediation: A theoretical framework." *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 35, no. 6, pp. 707-722. Available at: <http://jpr.sagepub.com/content/35/6/707.short> [Accessed March 14, 2013].

Sisk, T. D. (1996). *Power sharing and international mediation in ethnic conflicts*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, Carnegie Corporation of New York : U.S. Institute of Peace

"The Rule of Law in Armed Conflict Project: Russia Peace Operations", *Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights*. accessed on (11 June 2013) at http://www.geneva-academy.ch/RULAC/peace_operations.php?id_state=184

Walter, B. F. (2002). *Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars*. Princeton University Press: Princeton

Walter, B. F. (1999). "Designing Transitions from Civil War: Demobilization, Democratization, and Commitments to Peace." *International Security*, vol. 24, no. 1, (1999) pp.127-155. Available at: <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/016228899560077> [Accessed March 8, 2013]

Werner, S., and Yuen, A. (2005). 'Making and keeping peace' *International Organization*, vol. 59, no. 2