SMALL ARMS SURVEY

6

Occasional Paper No. 6

Politics From The Barrel of a Gun:

Small Arms Proliferation and Conflict in the Republic of Georgia (1989–2001)

Spyros Demetriou

November 2002

A publication
of the Small Arms Survey

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The Small Arms Survey

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Contents

Acronyms iv
About the author v
Acknowledgements vi
Map of the Republic of Georgia viii

Introduction 1

I. The tragedy of Georgian independence 3
The roots of the conflict 3
The conflicts of independence, 1989–1993 4

II. Evolution in availability of SALW 8
Sources of small arms and light weapons, 1989–1993 8
The magnitude of small arms proliferation, 1989–1993 15

III. Opening Pandora's box: Small arms and the transformation of conflict, 1989–1993 22
Introduction 22
The progressive militarization of politics in Georgia 22
From social violence to full-scale war: Conflict dynamics in Georgia, 1989–1993 25
Facilitating Russian intervention 28
The human cost of SALW proliferation 29

IV. Consequences of SALW availability and use in the post-conflict period, 1994–2001 29
Introduction 29
Restoring order under Shevardnadze 30
The ineffectiveness of weapons collection and the new regulations 33
Where do the weapons go? 36
Continued weapons proliferation and institutional incapacity 38
Small arms and insecurity in Abkhazia 39

V. Conclusion 50
Endnotes 52
Bibliography 56

Acronyms

AK	Generic designation for Kalashnikov assault rifles
AO	Autonomous Oblast (region)
APC	Armoured personnel carrier
AR	Autonomous Region
ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
BSEC	Black Sea Economic Cooperation
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CISPKF	CIS Peace-keeping Forces
DOSAAF	Society for Support of the Army, Air Force and Navy
EAPC	Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
EU	European Union
FSU	Former Soviet Union
GCP	Georgian Communist Party
GDF	Georgian Defence Foundation
GRVZ	Group of Russian Forces in the Transcaucasus
GUUAM	Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Armenia, and Moldova (regional alliance)
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
JPKF	Joint Peace-keeping Force
KGB	State Committee for Security
KOMSOMOL	All-Union Leninist League of Youth
KGNK	Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus
KNK	Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
MVD	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NKAO	Nagorno Karabach Autonomous Oblast
OMON	Special Purpose Military Detachment
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PfP	Partnership for Peace
PMG	Paramilitary group
RPG	Rocket-propelled grenade (launcher)
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
SAS	Small Arms Survey
SPETSNAZ	Soviet Special Purposes Forces
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
TRACECA	Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNOMIG	United Nations Observation Mission in Georgia
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General
UNSO	Ukrainian Self-Defence Organization
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WWII	Second World War
ZakVO	Transcaucasian Military District

About the author

Spyros Demetriou is a graduate of the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, Switzerland. He worked as a researcher at the Small Arms Survey between 1999 and 2001, after which he was appointed as a small arms regional liaison specialist at the United Nations Development Programme.

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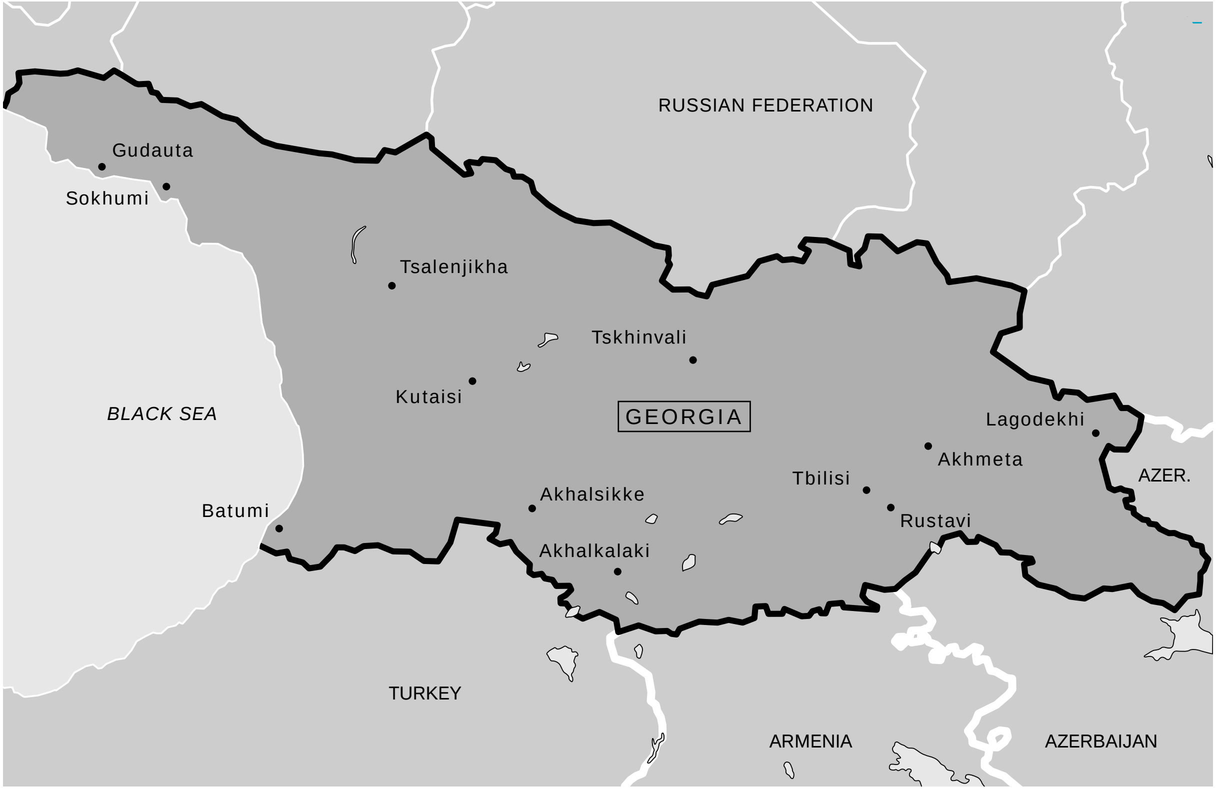
Republic of Georgia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Introduction

Over ten years have elapsed since the Soviet Union collapsed in late 1991. Radical transitions from one political system to another are by definition conflict-prone, involving fierce competition between differing visions, fluid political affiliations, social activism, power vacuums, and severe economic crises—if not collapse. In such contexts of instability and uncertainty, the recourse to armed violence—as a form of expression and an instrument of power—is an attractive option. The collapse of the USSR engendered a radical transition culminating in the creation of 15 internationally recognized states. Although for the most part surprisingly peaceful, the transition to independence in four states—Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Georgia—was marked by widespread violence.

This study focuses on one of these states, Georgia, and on one particular part of the violent transition to independence in Georgia, namely, the role played by small arms and light weapons. It attempts to shed light on how small arms proliferation and use framed the several conflicts that characterized Georgia's transition to independence, continue to perpetuate widespread insecurity and instability, and hinder development and reconstruction. In so doing, this study hopes to shed light on the human costs of Soviet collapse, and in particular the devastating impacts of armed violence as a means to achieve post-Soviet political objectives.

Georgia is a particularly interesting case to study in that, in the course of the conflict, weapons availability went from low to high. At the outset of the conflict, small arms were a scarce commodity, but, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991, arms from the Soviet military bases located in Georgia became widely available. This makes it possible to study the consequences of weapons transfers on conflict dynamics. Far more than simply being instruments of violence, small arms have served to catalyse conflict, increasing its scope and lethality, and led to the progressive militarization of politics. At the same time, it is obviously futile to ascribe causality to any single factor; small arms proliferation no more caused the Georgian conflicts than they institutionalized ethnopolitical rifts. All were elements in a contingent and dynamic environment that exploded in late 1991. In this context, small arms proliferation facilitated the violent framing of political interaction, and played a key role in the widespread suffering and cycles of instability that have ensued.

This study attempts to analyse and understand the overall role of small arms in both the conflict and post-conflict periods. Although the adjective 'post-conflict' does not describe perfectly the current situation in Georgia, it is useful in distinguishing between two different dynamics and consequences of small arms proliferation and use. In the conflict period between 1989 and 1993, widespread small arms proliferation catalysed the militarization of politics, leading to the political dominance of armed militias and paramilitary groups; augmented the scale and lethality of armed violence in the South Ossetian, Abkhaz, and Georgian conflicts; facilitated Russian attempts to alter the balance of power between belligerents; and caused widespread loss of civilian life and the breakdown of law and order. These consequences highlight both the direct and the indirect consequences of small arms availability and use. For instance, although other conventional weapons cause most casualties in conventional warfare (through collateral damage, including bombing), small arms availability determines the extent of deployable force size and operational reach, and provides the central organizational axis for launching and sustaining the various components of military operations. In addition, the human costs of small arms availability and use extend not only to direct casualties but also to forced displacement, loss of economic livelihoods, and deep social schism.

In the ‘post-conflict’ period following 1993, continuing small arms availability and proliferation have undermined attempts to consolidate law and order and to resolve the outstanding political and social conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Moreover, the inability of the security forces to control the illicit trade in weapons, together with other illegal commodities, has made Georgia a crossroads for weapons transfers to other conflict zones, fuelled corruption among security forces, and weakened state structures. But by far the most pernicious impacts of continued small arms availability are in or near the former conflict zones in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where small arms are key in maintaining exploitative and criminal economic systems based on coercion, preventing the establishment of any form of law and order, distorting social interactions and coexistence, and fostering countless other threats to human security. Weapons-related insecurity has unfortunately become a profitable business, and as a result Georgia remains a volatile and destabilizing region in the Caucasus. The lack of progress in the South Ossetian and Abkhaz peace negotiations is the most obvious manifestation of this.

These findings on the impacts of small arms proliferation in the conflict and post-conflict periods are based on detailed field research conducted in Georgia between January and June 2001, including the collection of quantitative data on weapons transfers, procurement and stockpiles, security incidents, as well as qualitative data on past and current proliferation trends and military organization. Due to the fragmentary nature of much of this data, no precise calculations can be made on weapons availability or its impacts. The emphasis has therefore been on applying analytical tools to estimate and extrapolate trends, and to correlate developments over time. A primary application of the latter technique has been to compare changes in patterns of weapons distribution before and after 1991 with developments in the organization/political primacy of armed groups and conflict dynamics. The goal has not been to ascribe a definitive and specific causal role to small arms proliferation, but rather to illustrate both its contingent and its formative role in the dynamics of transition.

The first section of this study presents an overview of the factors that created a predisposition to a violent transition in Georgia, as well as an overview of the three conflicts that occurred during 1989–93. The second section provides a detailed description of the fluctuation in arms availability during that same period. The third section then analyses the main consequences of small arms proliferation in the conflict period. The fourth section does the same for the post-conflict period, highlighting current institutional incapacity to regulate current proliferation, contemporary trafficking routes and markets, and the role of their continued availability and use in perpetuating diverse forms of insecurity in Abkhazia and obstructing progress in the peace process.

The overall objective of the study, in addition to exploring the manifold impacts of small arms in different contexts, is to inform the current debate on preventive action on small arms. It does so by drawing attention to some of the lessons emerging from the Georgian experience, including the need for better stockpile management for conflict prevention, addressing border and other regulatory capacities, and breaking the links between insecurity and chronic underdevelopment by focusing simultaneously on voluntary disarmament and economic recovery activities.

I. The tragedy of Georgian independence

The roots of the conflict

Georgia is a small state, home to an ethnically diverse population nestling between the two mountain ranges of the Caucasus. It formally became a constituent Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) of the USSR in 1921, following its occupation by Bolshevik forces. As in other Soviet Republics, centralized rule from Moscow was consolidated through time-worn ‘divide and rule’ policies. This was primarily achieved by granting political authority to distinct national groupings within a rigid and hierarchical system of local governance. This system, commonly known as Soviet ‘nationalities policy’, involved the demarcation of territorial administrative units on the basis of ‘titular’ nationalities and their respective ‘homelands’. Four types of units existed within a hierarchical system of power relations: Autonomous Region (AR), Autonomous Oblast (AO), Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), and Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) (Suny, 1993; Slezkine, 1994).

Within the Georgian SSR (constituted on the basis of the Georgian ‘nation’), two distinct nationalities —the Abkhaz and the Ossetians—were granted the status of ASSR and AO respectively. Although such institutions permitted national historical, linguistic, and cultural development, and also a limited degree of self-administration, in practice power was exercised at the level of the Georgian Communist Party (GCP). Policies of forced ‘Georganization’ and ethnic discrimination, not to mention forced migration and population displacement during the Stalinist era (1926–51), resulted in mass suffering and impoverishment, and the emergence of widespread resentment of Georgian rule. By the time of *perestroika* and *glasnost* (the policies of economic and political liberalization launched by Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid-1980s), these grievances combined with political aspirations to threaten the integrity of the Georgian SSR as a constituent unit of the Soviet Union (Anchabadze, 1999; Saroyan, 1997, pp. 135–43).

In addition to its deep social and political problems, Georgia had to contend with a significant Soviet military presence on its territory during the Cold War, as a consequence of its geostrategic position and proximity to Turkey (and hence NATO forces). These military structures, which during the Soviet period were organized as the Transcaucasian Military District (*Zakavkazskii voennyi okrug,* or ZakVO), also constituted important staging areas and resupply points for Soviet troops during the war in Afghanistan. According to a high-level ZakVO officer, this military grouping had sufficient firepower to reach and operate in the Persian Gulf for an entire month.[1]

At the height of the Cold War, an estimated 100,000 ZakVO troops were based in Georgia (Darchiashvili, 1997b), consisting primarily of motorized infantry and air defence divisions (see Table 1). Their deployment throughout Georgia corresponded with political-administrative divisions, with key bases being located in autonomous regions (Abkhazia and Ajaria) or regions with majority non-Georgian populations (the Armenian region of Akhalkalaki, for instance). For most of the Cold War, conscripts were obtained from these regions (Feinberg, 1999). Soviet forces, in other words, were not intended purely for external purposes—they also constituted the ‘armed guarantee’ of the nationalities policy. In the context of deteriorating Soviet rule and the rise of strong nationalist movements during 1986–91, these heavily stocked arsenals constituted grave threats to stability as ticking time bombs.

Table 1. Soviet ZakVO forces in Georgia, pre-1992

Regiment	Location
137th Russian Base	Vaziani
147th Motor-Rifle Division	Akhalkalaki
145th Motor-Rifle Division	Batumi
345th Parachute Infantry Regiment	Gudauta
643rd Anti-aircraft missile regiment	Gudauta
Airport-Technical Supply Battalion	Gudauta
10th Motorised rifle Division	Alkakitskhe
Motor-Rifle Division	Gudauta
Field Engineer Battalion	Kutaisi
21st Combat Airborne Brigade	Kutaisi
104th Airborne Division	Kirovabad
100th Division	Tbilisi
RU Special Forces (designation unknown)	Lagodekhi
Anti-aircraft Defence Regiment	Babushera (Abkhazia)
292nd Helicopter Regiment	Tskhinvali
Transcaucasian Border Guard	
157th Training Centre	
19th Air Defence Army	
34th Air Defence Army	
Black Sea Fleet (partial)	
Internal (MVD) Troops (incl. 8th Regiment)	
Army Units (under central control)	

The conflicts of independence, 1989–1993

In Georgia, the easing of restrictions on expression and political organization in the late 1980s led to spontaneous and large-scale nationalist demonstrations for greater autonomy and independence, which led to independence in April 1991. Institutionalized legacies of Soviet nationalities policy, however, engendered bitter ethnic tensions and political fragmentation, creating a climate of instability as non-Georgian populations increasingly regarded Georgian aspirations as a precursor to more oppressive political control. Subsequently, the Abkhazian ASSR and South Ossetian AO countered Georgian demands for independence with demands for greater autonomy within the Soviet federal system. In this context, armed violence was not inevitable, but arose due to the conjunction of two interrelated factors: the progressive militarization of politics, and the decision by former Soviet military officers to intervene in the political rivalries.

During 1991–94, two secessionist wars were fought, in South Ossetia and Abkhazia respectively, and in Georgia proper a civil war pitted supporters of the first post-independence president against the actors who overthrew him. The complexity of these conflicts is well illustrated by Table 2, which lists the militias and paramilitaries active in Georgia in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The South Ossetian conflict

The first outbreak of armed conflict in Georgia occurred in the autonomous oblast of South Ossetia, a region whose population (approximately 100,000 people) was 66 per cent ethnic Ossetian and 29 per cent ethnic Georgian (Zverev, 1996). In 1989, increasing calls by nationalist movements in Georgia for independence resulted in attempts, by South Ossetian officials, to upgrade the region's status to an autonomous republic. In response, mass rallies of nationalist groupings of Georgians and South Ossetians confronted each other outside Tskhinvali (the capital of South Ossetia) late that year, culminating in a first wave of clashes and skirmishes involving armed irregular formations on both sides.

Although this first wave of armed violence quickly subsided, further attempts by the South Ossetian leadership to detach itself from Georgian control led to the abolition of the region's autonomous status by the Georgian Supreme Soviet on 11 December 1990. The abolition of the AO polarized political relations and soon led to widespread fighting over a period of several months between Ossetian and Georgian militias and paramilitary groups (Zverev, 1996). The lack of discipline and organization among the latter illustrated both the social nature of the conflict—with erstwhile neighbours joining 'self-defence' groups against each other—and the inability of Georgian and Soviet authorities to impose any control on the situation (Cvetkovski, undated, pp. 51–2).

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991, South Ossetia's political possibilities changed radically. In response to the South Ossetian referendum of 19 January 1992 on unification with North Ossetia, the Georgian leadership renewed the conflict (*Moskovskiye Novosti*, 21 June 1992). As before, a pattern of socially driven conflict framed by polarized political stances prevailed, with the difference that Russian military units supported Ossetians and targeted Georgian forces (Urigashvili, 1992b). A quadripartite agreement on a cease-fire finally came into effect on 14 July 1992 (Zverev, 1996). With that, South Ossetia for all practical purposes passed beyond the control of the Georgian state, at the cost of approximately 1,000 people killed, 115 villages destroyed, and over 30,000 Georgians and Ossetians displaced (Cvetkovski, undated, p. 48; Greene, 1998, p. 289).

The Abkhaz conflict

The second major conflict in Georgia occurred in Abkhazia, an autonomous republic of 537,000 people, of which 17 per cent are ethnic Abkhaz, 44 per cent ethnic Georgian, 14 per cent ethnic Russian, and 14 per cent ethnic Armenian, with other ethnic groups making up the remaining 11 per cent. In contrast to the rapid polarization of views between Georgians and Ossetes over the status of South Ossetia, Georgian-Abkhaz relations between 1989 and 1992 were characterized (despite serious incidences of violence) by negotiations on the future federal or confederal status of the ASSR within Georgia (Otyrba, 1994, pp. 286–7). Despite declaring independence from Georgia on 25 August 1990 and voting to remain within the Soviet Union on 17 March 1991, Abkhaz authorities decided not to press for independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991.[2]

Instead, a new quota-based system was introduced following Georgian independence that ensured ethnic Abkhaz an over-representation in the Abkhaz ASSR parliament. Finally, despite the turmoil following the ouster of Georgian President, Zviad Gamsakhurdia (see below) and the conflict in South Ossetia, the Abkhaz in June 1992 submitted proposals to the Georgian State Council for a new

Abkhaz-Georgian treaty on confederal relations. In the absence of a response, the Abkhaz parliament unilaterally decided to reinstate the Abkhazian constitution of 1925 while still requesting negotiations (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 25 July 1992).

The Georgian response to the unilateral Abkhaz act was to deploy troops in Abkhazia, ostensibly for the purpose of defeating the forces of the recently deposed Gamsakhurdia still active in western Georgia. This move, viewed as an invasion by Abkhaz authorities, led to all-out war and the Georgian invasion of Sukhumi (the capital of Abkhazia) on 18 August 1992 (Zverev, 1996). Despite the initial military preponderance of the Georgian armed formations in Abkhazia, the Abkhaz managed to turn the tide of the war with mercenaries and volunteer troops from the Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus and, eventually, Russian military assistance (Anchabadze, 1999, pp. 139–43). Due to the disorderly and undisciplined nature of the Georgian armed formations, the Abkhaz managed to reoccupy all of Abkhazia by 30 September 1993, in the process displacing approximately 250,000 Georgians (Billingsley, 1999, pp. 149–56).[3] With the Moscow agreements of 4 April–14 May 1994, a cease-fire and political principles on a settlement of the dispute were agreed to, leading to the deployment of a Russian peacekeeping force and a United Nations Observer Mission (Zverev, 1996). Like South Ossetia, Abkhazia also fell out of the control of the Georgian state.

The Georgian civil war

The conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia took place in a context of civil war in Georgia proper. In contrast to other former republics in the Soviet Union, the holding of free elections in 1990 plunged Georgia into a protracted political crisis that eventually turned into armed violence in late 1991. The victory of the opposition leader, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, over Communist Party incumbents in 1990 alienated large segments of the fragmented opposition, as Gamsakhurdia denied them access to power. In an increasing climate of instability, ethnic conflict, and uncertainty, Gamsakhurdia's policies were considered by many to be adding to the troubles of an already beleaguered transition. The failed August 1991 coup against Gorbachev in Moscow, and Gamsakhurdia's alleged support of the military putschists, served as a pretext for his opponents to demand his resignation.

Between September and December 1991, massive street demonstrations gradually escalated into violence and culminated in the attack on and seizure of Parliament House by armed paramilitary groups. Following the routing of Gamsakhurdia, his followers (including a faction of the National Guard—one of the main paramilitary groups—that did not defect to the opposition) redeployed to western Georgia, where they waged an insurgency that lasted until late 1993. This fighting, which overlapped in complex ways with the conflict in Abkhazia, led Eduard Shevardnadze (the Georgian head of state under the new government) to seek Russian military assistance, culminating in the accession of Georgia to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In addition to thousands of casualties, the Georgian civil war also resulted in the political and economic supremacy of Georgian paramilitary groups—thus completing the militarization of politics—until 1995 at the earliest.

Table 2. Georgian militias and paramilitaries, 1988–1991

Name	Founders	Manpower	Background
Georgian militia and paramilitary groups			
Falcon Legion	Tsiklauri	50	Founded 1988, composed of inductees who refused to enter the Soviet army
Sachkhere Squadron	Beso Kutateladze	200-500	Founded 1989 in western Georgia, later incorporated into National Guard
'Imedi' (Hope)	Nodar Natadze	200	Military wing of the opposition organisation 'Popular Front', later incorporated into National Guard
Union of Afghans	Nodar Giorgadze	–	Founded 1989, composed of soldiers returning from Afghanistan. Functioned as a political organization
Union of Georgian Traditionalists	–	–	Also functioned as a political organization
Merab Kostava Society	Vazha Adamia	200	Also functioned as a political organization. One of the main militias that fought in South Ossetia in 1990–1991.
'Tetri Georgi' (White George)	–	–	Armed faction that split from the Mkhedrioni paramilitary group in late 1990 and joined Gamsakhurdia's 'Round Table' political organization
'Tetri Artsivi' (White Eagle)	Gia Karkarashvili	120	Militia organised in response to South Ossetian clashes in 1990, later incorporated into National Guard
Mkhedrioni	Guram Mgeladze and Jaba Ioseliani	Several hundred	Emerged as part of the broader national independence movement and constituted the first attempt at creating a Georgian army
National Guard	Tengiz Kitovani	Several hundred	Amalgam of 'national self-defense' groups, first attempt at a national army
South Ossetian militia and paramilitary groups			
Adamon Nykhas and other militias	–	Several hundred	Armed wings of political opposition groupings
OMON	–	700–800	Special purpose military detachments, institutionalized within the region's administrative structures
Republican Guard	–	<100	
Abkhaz militia and paramilitary groups			
Aidgylara militia	–	100	Armed wing of main political opposition group
National Guard	–	250	Established by Abkhaz ASSR authorities, consisting of ex-servicemen
Abkhaz MVD battalion	–	Several hundred	Internal troops

Sources: Irakli Aladashvili (2001); Georgian Defence Foundation archives; Tengiz Gogotishvili (2001); Cvetkovski (undated)

II. Evolution in availability of SALW

Sources of small arms and light weapons, 1989–1993

On the basis of information collected on the procurement, availability, and use of weapons by most armed groups in Georgia, a watershed in weapons proliferation dynamics can be identified following August 1991. Before that time, small arms—in particular assault rifles, machine guns, and rocket-propelled systems—were extremely scarce and expensive, and as a result armed groups were poorly and inconsistently armed. Following August 1991, however, Russian commanders and officers began to freely distribute or sell massive quantities of weapons to all belligerents, drastically increasing both the scale and the types of weapons in circulation. This shift in weapons availability and proliferation can be clearly highlighted by examining the inventories, sources, and acquisition modalities for weapons before and after 1991.

From a time of scarcity, 1989–91…

Between 1989 and 1991, and despite the historical political and social events unfolding around them, the Soviet military remained passive for the most part. Despite several incidents where Soviet military or MVD troops intervened violently to suppress civil agitation, notably in Georgia in April 1989 when MVD troops reportedly killed 60 unarmed and peaceful demonstrators, they for the most part heeded Gorbachev's injunctions to not offend international opinion and to let events unfold naturally. Security remained relatively strict in military installations throughout Soviet territory and its eastern European satellites, and the cohesion of the armed forces remained intact.

In this context, very few weapons from Soviet military forces leaked (whether accidentally or on purpose) into the hands of civilians in the areas where civil disturbances occurred. Nonetheless, most armed groups in Georgia did manage to obtain certain quantities of weapons from a variety of sources.

Police and postal guards (subordinate to local authorities) were raided on several occasions. During the ethnic riots in Abkhazia in July 1989 (prompted by attempts to open a separate Georgian branch of the university in Sukhumi), for instance, demonstrators armed themselves with weapons stolen from police stations.[4] Such activities were considerably facilitated by the passivity of Soviet authorities following the 9 April 1989 massacre, which guaranteed impunity for these attacks. Moreover, these local units, often composed of local Georgians, Abkhaz, and Ossetians, often sympathized with the demonstrators and willingly gave or sold them their weapons. The importance of police and postal guard weapons in the inventories of armed formations is evident from the large numbers of revolvers (usually the poor-quality NAGAN model) procured.[5]

The Voluntary Society of Supporters for the Air Force and Navy (DOSAAF) was another important source of weapons in the period prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Defence, DOSAAF was designed for the military training of civilians, and consisted of a massive network of bases, warehouses, and airfields throughout Soviet territory. Georgia alone had 52 installations located in each of its administrative regions. DOSAAF, due to its proximity and the ease with which weapons could be purchased or 'lost', constituted one of the main sources for weapons (albeit training models which, for Kalashnikovs, fired only in semi-automatic mode) for armed formations during this period, and especially during the conflict in South Ossetia.[6]

During the Soviet period, local Komsomol and other Communist youth organizations stocked weapons in secondary schools and universities for youth military training. Consisting largely of replicas or training models, these also proved easy to get hold of.[7]

Other sources for weapons during this period consisted of personal weapons, usually hunting rifles, and WWII-era 'Mosin' rifles, 10,000 of which had originally been handed out to the inhabitants of Caucasian mountain villages to protect them against invading German forces.[8] Given the Caucasian tradition of possessing weapons as prestige symbols, as well as means of protection in remote areas, it can be inferred that the quantity of these weapons was not negligible.

In sum, although weapons were difficult to obtain, substantial quantities could nevertheless be procured. Although detailed evidence of weapons procured in this fashion is sketchy, enough exists to provide three key insights into the nature of such procurement. First, because armed formations were forced to obtain weapons from a variety of different sources, none of which was legal, overall quantities were not large—there was no question of systematically equipping a large number of men with standardized weaponry and ammunition. This is reflected in information on known weapons inventories for the National Guard and White Eagle, listed in Table 3, which can be considered fairly standard for all armed formations operating in Georgia at the time. Second, and to judge from what fragmentary evidence exists, not all armed formation members in practice carried weapons. In the Abkhazian incident cited above, for instance, only 100 out of approximately 500 people participating in the fighting carried weapons, while the rest used clubs and farming instruments.[9] Third, because the weapons inventories of the police, the DOSAAF, and so forth primarily consisted of pistols, rifles, and Kalashnikov assault rifles, armed formations were unable to obtain other and heavier weapons types, such as RPGs or machine guns. This considerably restricted the scope of possible military action, and prevented the heavy casualties usually associated with such weapons.

Table 3. Initial weapons inventories for selected Georgian armed groups, 1990–1991

Armed formation	Weapons inventory (pre-August 1991)	Manpower	% armed
National Guard	25 AKM (replicas)	250	60
	57 AKM (training)		
	15 AKM (fully-functional)		
	3 AK74		
	1 AKS		
	35 pistols (various models)		
	15 rifles (hunting and Mosin)		
	Unspecified quantity of other weapons, including sawn-off shotguns		
White Eagle	50 AK47	120	61
	3 AKS74		
	20 AKS-U		
	Unspecified quantity of hunting rifles		
	Unspecified quantity of police revolvers		
	50 cases of grenades		

Source: GDF archival documents for period 1990–1991

…to a time of plenty, 1991–93

Following the August 1991 attempted putsch in Moscow, large amounts of weapons became readily available to all armed groups in Georgia due to Russian military assistance. Officially, Russian military authorities denied that Georgia had been provided with weapons, either in accordance with the terms of the May 1992 Tashkent Treaty (whose provisions relating to Georgia were formally suspended due to the instability there), or as a result of the sales from military depots.[10] The evidence of the period 1991–93, however, clearly reveals that the vast majority of weapons originated in ZakVO stockpiles on Georgian territory, and that they were obtained with the tacit or explicit complicity of Russian military officers. As a result, belligerents in all three conflicts were suddenly able to procure and put into use significant quantities of small arms (and also heavier weaponry, vehicles, and aircraft) that dramatically escalated the intensity of the conflicts and opportunities to pursue objectives that would not have been within reach in any negotiated process.

Although for the most part of the same origin, different modalities governed weapons transfers. These modalities, due to shifts in Russian policy, varied from year to year and also according to the proximity of specific units to installations, weapons stockpile levels in particular installations, and the willingness of local commanders to release their stocks. Information on known weapons acquisitions reveals four types of transfer modalities from Russian military stockpiles: free distribution, seizure/theft, sale, and regional trading. In addition, there was some external procurement.

Explaining weapons proliferation in Georgia: The role of the military forces

What explains the radical transformation—literally overnight—of Soviet military stockpiles from tightly guarded and centrally controlled armouries into distribution centres for Georgian, Abkhaz, and Ossetian armed groups? Three main factors can be delineated.

Disintegration of command and control. Between the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union (December 1991) and the rebirth of ZaKVO as the GRVZ (Group of Russian Armed Forces in the Transcaucasus) in late August 1992, the former Soviet military forces in Georgia existed in a state of legal and operational limbo. Because its relationship both within the Russian Armed Forces and with the Georgian government remained undefined (there was no status of forces agreement between Georgia and Russia until after the Abkhaz war), there were no clear chains of authority and accountability, thus eroding—from the top—the command and control hierarchy. Local unit and division commanders took advantage of this regulatory vacuum to implement their own policies in Georgia, aiding and abetting different sides in accordance with personal sympathies and regardless of policy from Moscow (Zverev, 1996). Thus, one cannot rightly speak of a co-ordinated and centralized policy of arming belligerents in the Georgian conflicts; responsibility often lay with individual commanders and not the Russian military or political establishment as a whole.

Contradictory Russian policies towards Georgia. In his attempt to define and implement foreign policy objectives in the post-Soviet sphere, Russian President Boris Yeltsin clashed with the prerogatives of conservative and hard-line political and military actors. In Georgia, these disputes manifested themselves in a duality of policy towards the conflicts. Yeltsin favoured a process of dialogue, negotiation, and co-operation with the Georgian government. Russian military leaders, however, viewed the preservation of Russian military influence and strategic assets in the geostrategically important Caucasus as a primary goal to be attained even at the expense of Georgian independence and through whatever means possible. As a result, the Russian military conducted its own 'foreign policy' in Georgia. The goal of this 'foreign policy' was to counter Georgia's rejection of any ties with Russia, such as within the CIS. The means were destabilization and the creation of a situation in which substantial and long-term Russian assistance (in the form of troops and installations) would be required. By fuelling belligerents on all sides of the conflicts with weapons and other *matériel*, Russian military leaders accomplished both of these objectives.

Impoverishment and lack of morale. The transformation of the ZaKVO into the GRVZ was accompanied by its substantial impoverishment as Soviet funding structures and sources vanished. As a result of this and an accompanying drop in morale and professionalism, many individual mid- and low-level officers turned to selling weapons as a means to supplement their insufficient salaries (Dragadze, 1994). This was often promoted by the fact that many conscripts shared the ethnicity of the region they were based in. As a result, small weapons leaving (unaccounted) from Russian bases became the basis of a flourishing black-market trade.

Seizure of weapons stockpiles

Beginning in late 1991 and intensifying in 1992, assaults against ZakVO forces and installations and the theft of weapons became commonplace. Most occurred with impunity due to the widespread belief that such actions had received official sanction by the decree issued by Gamsakhurdia in November 1991 nationalizing all Soviet weapons, ammunition, equipment, and other property (Litoykin, 1991). During this period, over 600 incidents of assault were recorded, together with the deaths of an estimated 100 Russian servicemen (Zverev, 1996; Darchiashvili, 1997b). In the majority of cases, this was the work of small groups acting independently of the main militias and paramilitary formations. For example, in October 1991 National Guard documents record that members of the White Eagle (one of the groups fighting in South Ossetia which eventually merged with the National Guard) attacked and looted a Soviet army convoy containing SVD Dragunov rifles, PK Kalashnikov machine guns, 200 cases of Kalashnikov assault rifles (approximately 800 units), and a truck containing two million rounds of Kalashnikov ammunition (National Guard Archives, 2001). GDF archives also record the robbing, in early 1992, of Russian weapons convoys en route to Armenian rebels in Nagorno-Karabakh, by National Guard and Mkhedrioni forces (GDF archives). In general, the Mkhedrioni was the only large military formation that organized such raids on a larger scale.

Free distribution by Soviet and Russian forces

An unspecified number of what were formally identified as incidents of theft or assault masked what were in fact unauthorized sales or free distribution of weapons (Darchiashvili, 1997b; Aladashvili, 2001). Two reported major incidents of free weapons distribution to armed formations occurred in Georgia between 1991 and 1993. The first took place during the 'Tbilisi war' of December 1991–January 1992, when the Deputy Commander of the ZakVO, Lieutenant General Sufiyan Beppayev, allegedly distributed small, light, and conventional weapons (including tanks) to both Zviadist and opposition armed groups.[11] According to one source, Beppayev initially distributed weapons free of charge, and then began to charge money for them.[12] For the period 21 December 1991 to 6 January 1992, GDF records show that the National Guard received 200 AK-74s, 50 RPG-7s, two SVD Dragunov sniper rifles, and 200 Makarov PM pistols under Beppayev's orders. Moreover, on 10 January 1992, the 'Chamnabade Battalion' was created as the National Guard's main assault force, and equipped from Russian military bases with 150 AKS-U, 3 BMP (armoured personnel carriers), 15 RPG-7, and 150 RPG rockets.[13]

The second incident of free weapons distribution to armed formations occurred following the signing of the Tashkent Treaty, which regulated the transfer of Soviet military property to several former Republics, and the beginning of the withdrawal of GRVZ (former ZakVO) forces from the Transcaucasus.[14] Although signed on 15 May, Georgian armed groups did not receive weapons until the eve of the Abkhaz war in July/August because of the instability in South Ossetia.[15] At that time, the National Guard and Mkhedrioni received large quantities of weapons from Russian installations in Akhalkalaki and Alkhatsikhe.[16] Evidence suggests that all weapons of the entire 147th motorized rifle division (8,000–10,000 strong) in Akhalkalaki were distributed to the National Guard,[17] and that large quantities of weapons were also received from the 10th motor-rifle division based in Akhaltsikhe (Darchiashvili, 1997b).[18] Moreover, in late 1992 ZakVO forces withdrew from the base in Lagodekhi. Panteleimon Giorgadze, a former Soviet general and high-ranking KGB official (and in 1992 head of the Georgian border forces), used his contacts to take control of weapons located in the Lagodekhi depots, which were then distributed to Georgian armed forces (allegedly 1,500 rifles) and also sold to local weapons dealers and criminal elements.[19] During 1992, there was apparently a surplus of weapons, engendering significant redistribution and trade within and between armed groups.[20] The Mkhedrioni, for instance, allegedly acquired 4,000 weapons from Russian stockpiles between May and July 1992, nearly double the amount needed to equip their members.[21]

Georgian armed formations were not the only groups to benefit from Russian military assistance. While Russian forces were transferring weapons to the National Guard from Akhaltsikhe in early August, 1992 (days before the beginning of the war in Abkhazia), Abkhaz groups also allegedly obtained weapons from the same source (Aladashvili, 2001). According to an Abkhaz source, Russian army units in Abkhazia not subordinated to the ZakVO also provided weapons.[22] Moreover, on 16 August Abkhaz groups seized the approximately 1,000 automatic weapons of a Russian anti-aircraft defence regiment stationed at Babushera airfield, near Gudauta, reportedly with the consent of its commanding office.[23] Earlier, on 14 August, Abkhaz forces allegedly received 1,000 assault rifles and 18 machine guns from the 643rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment stationed in Gudauta.[24] According to the same sources, several armoured vehicles, hundreds of machine guns, and grenades were also distributed from the depots of the Airport-Technical Supply Battalion in Gudauta. Finally, there are also reports that Abkhaz groups received Russian weapons flown in from Khankala, in Chechnya (CAST, 2000). In South Ossetia, Ossetian militias, moreover, were reported to have received assistance from North Ossetian authorities and non-governmental groups in the form of weapons (small arms but also armoured vehicles and anti-tank weapons), money, and volunteers, often with the tacit support of local military forces and possibly the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (Bowers, 1994).

Sales from Russian military stockpiles

Following the initial phase of covert distribution to Georgian armed forces, evidence reveals that Russian military officers—if not the commanders of military installations themselves—sold weapons to belligerents. According to the archives of the Georgian Defence Foundation, significant amounts of small arms, light weapons, and associated ammunition were sold to the National Guard during 1993, often with the authorization of commanding officers. In March–April 1993, for instance, a high-ranking Russian officer at the Akhalkalaki military base informed the GDF of a ZU-23 'Shilka' twin-barrel anti-aircraft heavy machine gun it had available for sale (at an estimated price of USD 1,200), in addition to assault rifles and other weapons. According to the GDF procurement report, several officers with access to weapons depots wanted to sell as many weapons as possible due to fears that the base would soon be closed (GDF, 1993).

According to the same report and price lists acquired from Russian military bases in 1993, the weapons available for sale ranged from Kalashnikov assault rifles to heavy artillery and T-62 tanks (see excerpts from price lists in Table 4). The involvement of high-ranking officers in the sale of weapons ammunition from Russian bases has been proved by a series of documents attesting to the sale and delivery of several orders of ammunition,[25] and a procurement request from the Georgian Ministry of Defence that specifically mentions several high-ranking ZakVO officers as key sources.[26] Such documents reveal that, for the most part, sales of large quantities of weapons (in hundreds of units) were organized on the one hand by the GDF, acting on behalf of the National Guard and Georgian Ministry of Defence, and on the other hand either directly by Russian officers (majors and colonels) or through the intermediation of retired high-ranking officers.[27]

Table 4. Stated prices for weapons from GRVZ stockpiles in early 1993

Weapon type	Price (Roubles)	Price (USD)*
PM Makarov Pistol	125,820	135
AKM, AK-74, AKS-74	275,000	295
AKMS, AKS-74U	350,000	376
PK 7.62mm, RPK 7.62mm, RPK 5.45mm	650,000	697
SVD ‘Dragunov’	1,281,500	1,375
DShk 12.7mm	1,686,920	1,810
SPG 9	2,446,500	2,625
RPG-7	325,000	349
RG-42, RG-43, RGD-5	3,000,000	3,219
F-1	4,000,000	4,292
120mm mortar	2,069,040	2,220

** Using annual exchange rate for 1993 of 932 roubles/dollar*
Source: Russian weapons price list (1993), GDF (1993)

As in the cases of free distribution, Abkhaz forces were also able to purchase weapons from Russian military forces, allegedly through the intermediation of high-ranking military officers (admirals and generals) in Moscow (Dragadze, 1994). Although detailed and substantiated evidence is lacking, one source (a classified Georgian intelligence document on Russian assistance to the Abkhaz) claims, on the basis of testimonies provided by Abkhaz prisoners of war, that Admiral Kolesnikov Ivan Vassilievitch, former commander of the Onej Fleet, handled Abkhaz weapons procurement during the 1992–93 war. According to this information, the financial operations relating to the payment of weapons deliveries were organized through the Foundation for Scientific Research Assistance of the Center for Scientific-Technical and Social Initiatives Activities, an organization based in Saint Petersburg and headed by E. A. Rudakova.[28]

Regional trade in surplus Soviet weapons

In addition to weapons procured within Georgia, Georgian paramilitary groups benefited from Russian-abetted small arms proliferation in neighbouring Azerbaijan and Armenia. As a result of the stalemate in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in late 1992, large quantities of surplus weapons became available for sale. These weapons originated in Russian military bases: the Azeris acquired their weapons from the takeover or transfer of military installations in 1991–93 (Allison, 1993, pp. 65–6), while Armenian forces received direct contributions of military hardware from Russian forces based in Georgia (Berryman, 2000).[29] Because most of these weapons had been either stolen or obtained for free from Soviet installations, their prices were often 20–40 per cent lower than those on sale from military bases in Georgia, thus creating a lucrative commerce for all concerned.[30]

For the most part, these weapons were sold to Georgian armed groups through intermediaries such as the GDF and ethnic Azeri and Armenian residents in Georgia. The trade itself took the form of direct purchases and bartering. With regard to the first, procurement agents negotiated small (less than USD 10,000) transactions with dealers, who then obtained the required weapons (small amounts of SALW for the most part).[31] According to dealers, deals took place every five to ten days (GDF, 1993). An example of such a transaction, based on eyewitness testimony, consisted of five AKM assault rifles, 90 RGD-5, and 50 RPG-7 grenades, purchased by a joint Mkhedrioni/National Guard unit.[32] In the Lagodekhi region of Georgia, this trade was semi-legal, with local authorities using their administrative power to facilitate (and profit from) the activities of local dealers.[33]

Georgians also bartered weapons between Armenian and Azeri traders, thus creating a profitable redistribution of weapons between the three sides depending on military necessity and available stocks. According to the former Deputy Director of the Georgian Defence Foundation, for instance, Azeri forces had a shortage of close combat weapons while Armenian forces lacked long-range weapons. Georgian intermediaries would then obtain ‘Karabakh’ close-range machine guns (Armenian production) from Armenia for two RPG-7s and then trade two of the former to Azeri procurement agents for one SVD Dragunov sniper rifle. This allowed Georgian forces to obtain SVD rifles for approximately USD 400 cheaper (the average price of an SVD was USD 1,200, while the price of an RPG-7 was USD 200).[34]

External procurement

Although the majority of the weapons used in the Georgian conflicts were obtained from Russian stockpiles in the Caucasus, a minority were purchased from Romania and the Czech Republic. With regard to the former, evidence exists of two transfers during the conflict period. In late 1991, then-President Gamsakhurdia reportedly purchased approximately 1,000 AK-47s for a total of USD 150,000, or approximately USD 150 per unit (Aladashvili, 1998). This shipment, however, arrived in the Ajarian AO only after Gamsakhurdia had been deposed, and was subsequently appropriated by the Mkhedrioni and other criminal elements.[35] Despite the inferior quality of these weapons, the Georgian government again ordered Kalashnikovs (reportedly several thousand) from Romania in the spring of 1993, though this time 5.45mm AK-74s (Aladashvili, 1998).

An additional source for weapons was the Czech Republic. Under Defence Minister Nikusha Kekelidze, small quantities of 7.62mm AKM assault rifles and ‘Cz’ pistols were imported and distributed to elite National Guard units in early 1993 (Aladashvili, 1998). Further transfers from the Czech Republic ceased, however, following the assassination of Kekelidze, allegedly in an attempt by the Russian military industrial complex and its backers in Georgia to force Georgian armed formations to purchase Russian weapons (Aladashvili, 1998).[36] Parallel to these purchases, the Mkhedrioni also allegedly imported weapons from the Czech Republic via Austria, utilizing Czech and Russian criminal networks and syndicates in the region.[37]

The magnitude of small arms proliferation, 1989–1993

A description of the sources and modalities of weapons proliferation says little about the overall quantities of weapons obtained by armed groups during the conflict period. An understanding of the magnitude of weapons proliferation and distribution is important not only in gauging the impact of small arms on conflict—especially in a context where the quantity of weapons possessed determined the deployable force size of armed groups—but also in understanding their consequences in the post-conflict period. Moreover, such measures provide important criteria for disarmament and weapons collection initiatives.

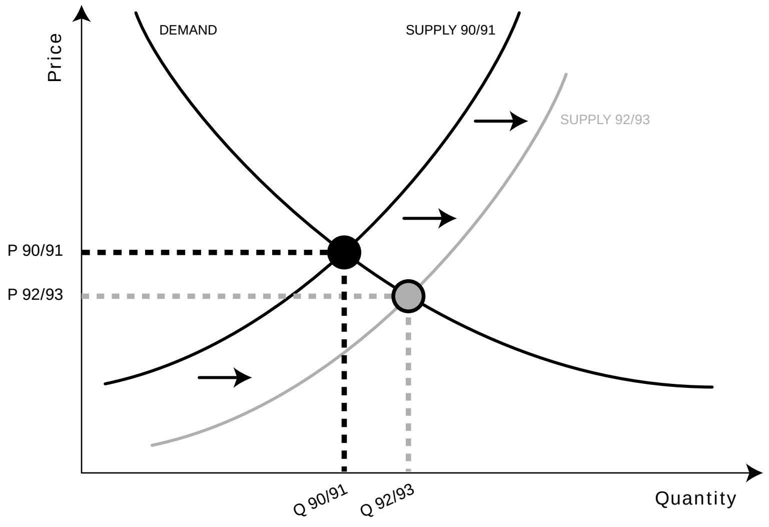
Several indicators provide important insights into the scale of weapons proliferation, and permit the calculation of a rough estimate of total availability during the conflict period. These indicators include a market/price analysis of weapons, an assessment of the scale of supply from particular sources, and estimations of weapons availability on the basis of armed group force levels. Taken together, these indicators reveal a society saturated with weapons beyond military needs.

Market price analysis

Between 1989 and 1993, the militarization of politics and society combined with three separate conflicts to produce consistently high levels of demand for weapons. If we assume that these levels of demand were constant throughout the conflict period, conventional supply-demand analysis can provide important insights into supply. Low weapons prices most usually indicate low demand relative to supply, while high weapons prices usually indicate high demand relative to supply (Small Arms Survey, 2002, pp. 65–9).

In Georgia, prices for Kalashnikov assault rifles dropped drastically between 1990–91 and 1992–93. During 1990–91 the price of an AKM and AK-74 ranged between USD 250 and USD 300, while during 1992–93 the same weapons cost between USD 120 and USD 150.[38] Figure 1 represents this shift graphically, showing how this increase in supply from stockpiles in a situation of constant high demand lowered the SALW prices.

Figure 1 Shift in supply of weapons, 1992–1993



The drastic price difference underscores the analysis above, pointing to the Soviet collapse as a turning point in weapons proliferation. While before December 1991, weapons were scarce commodities, they suddenly became plentiful following the start of distribution from Russian stockpiles. The price list in Table 11 also shows how the range of weapons available shifted over time. Between 1990 and 1991, the only weapons available for sale were several models of AK-74 and the PM Makarov pistol. Following the Soviet collapse, however, almost the entire range of Soviet assault and other rifles, general purpose machine guns, heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, and small mortars were available for sale throughout the country. Of special interest is the fact that Makarov pistols were two to three times more expensive than a Kalashnikov rifle. This is explained more by its value as a symbol of prestige and power, in addition to its economic scarcity, than by its military usefulness.

According to several sources, weapons during the conflict and the early post-conflict period in effect served as a form of currency in a barter-dominated economy. Hyperinflation in Russia during that time meant that Russian roubles (Georgia's currency until 1995) were an unstable medium of exchange. Because they were available in large (and constant) quantities and not sensitive to fluctuations in the currency market, weapons thus substituted for the rouble to a certain degree. One teacher of English in Tbilisi, for instance, recollected having been paid in grenades for lessons he had provided to an elderly woman.[39] Similarly, the Mkhedrioni were able to acquire significant influence in criminal and political clientalistic networks through the distribution of weapons as 'gifts' to powerful underground figures, economic directors, and political patrons.[40]

Comparing the Georgian weapons market with those in other conflict or post-conflict settings provides additional insight into the scale of weapons availability. Data on prices for second-hand weapons around the world places Georgia roughly in the middle of a continuum of market types that ranges from situations of marked oversupply of weapons to a context of high demand matched with low relative supply (Karp, 2000a). The former is epitomized by Kalashnikov prices less than USD 50 in such countries as Mozambique and Albania, where huge amounts—1.5 million and 0.5 million weapons respectively—are estimated to be in circulation in a post-conflict setting. In the latter case Kalashnikov prices reach USD 1,500–3,000 as they do in, for instance, the Palestinian West Bank, where demand, due to ongoing conflict, is high, but weapons are scarce and difficult to obtain (Karp, 2000a). Georgian Kalashnikov price ranges of between USD 120 and USD 300 for the 1990–93 period indicate a more balanced market. Hence, it can be inferred that the availability was neither massive (that is, far beyond military needs) nor extremely small (that is, less than one weapon per combatant). If either had been the case, this would in all likelihood have been reflected in markedly different prices. As it stood, Kalashnikov prices were close to the official price—a new AK-47 cost USD 135 in 1992 (Karp, 2000b).

Table 5. Average prices for used Kalashnikov rifles

Average price (USD)	Country/Region	Year
6	Swaziland	1999
12	Namibia-Angolan border	1998
15	Mozambique	1999
25	Honduras	1997
35	Albania	1997
48	Namibia-interior	1998
100	Central America	1996
135	Georgia	1992–1993
180	Burma-Ruili	1994
360	Burma-Kunmin	1994
375	El Salvador	1996–1998
375	Pakistani Punjab	1992
400	Haiti	1994–1995
400	South Africa	mid-1990s
500	Pakistan-Karachi	1992
576	Pakistan, NWFP	1994
650	Albania	1998
870	Kashmir	1991
1,200	Pakistan NWFP	mid-1980s
1,800	Uttar Pradesh	1997
3,000	West Bank	1999
3,000	Pakistan-Karachi	1980s

Source: Karp (2000a; 2000b)

Weapons procurement sources and distribution patterns

A second indicator of the magnitude of weapons proliferation is the scale of procurement from different sources (i.e. the number of weapons obtained, on average, from a given source), and the geographic distribution of weapons in the country.

Although information from recorded weapons transactions does not permit a precise and comprehensive calculation of weapons quantities obtained (primarily because it is not known what percentage of total inventories they represent), they do provide, when broken down according to source and procurement modalities, an understanding of their average size. Table 6 lists the main sources and modalities of weapons procurement for both conflict periods and the average size of the corresponding transactions (broken down into tens, hundreds, or thousands of weapons) based on information from known transactions. Table 7 lists the main sources by weapon type, and reveals the significant increase in sources for weapons between 1991 and 1992. Both tables together illustrate the radical transformation of the situation following 1991, and the fact that in all probability, thousands of weapons were obtained by all armed formations.

Table 6. Weapons procurement modalities and sources in Georgia

Period	Modality/Source	Weapon types	Average quantities Obtained
pre-1991	Police and postal guards	Primarily revolvers, some assault rifles	Small (tens)
	DOSAAF and Komsomol structures	Training assault rifles	Small (tens)
	Schools and universities	Replica assault rifles	Small (tens)
	Personal weapons	Hunting and Mosin rifles	Small (tens)
post-1991	Seizure from Russian military installations	Assault rifles, RPGs, grenades	Small (tens) to medium (hundreds)
	Free distribution from Russian stockpiles	Assault rifles, RPGs, machine guns, grenades	Large (thousands)
	Sale from Russian military stockpiles	All SALW types	unknown
	Regional trade in surplus Soviet weaponry	All SALW types	Small (tens)
	International procurement from central and eastern European states	Assault rifles	Medium (hundreds)

A second related indicator concerns availability of surplus weapons. Evidence suggests that, in certain regions or among particular groups, the quantities of weapons obtained surpassed the number of combatants. The resulting surplus was redistributed within a particular paramilitary group, stockpiled, given away, or sold to other armed groups (both in Georgia and outside) and to weapons dealers. Due to their proximity to major weapons sources, for instance, National Guard battalions in Lagodekhi and Akhalkalaki often redistributed their weapons to other Guard battalions in areas where weapons were not as readily available, such as in western Georgia or South Ossetia.[41] The Mkhedrioni used their extensive non-military economic and criminal networks and structures not only to equip their forces, but also to sell surplus weapons abroad, most notably to Chechnya (CAST, 2000). The Mkhedrioni were also known to stockpile weapons (usually foreign models) for powerful politicians as a way to both enter certain clientalistic networks and consolidate their political bases.[42]

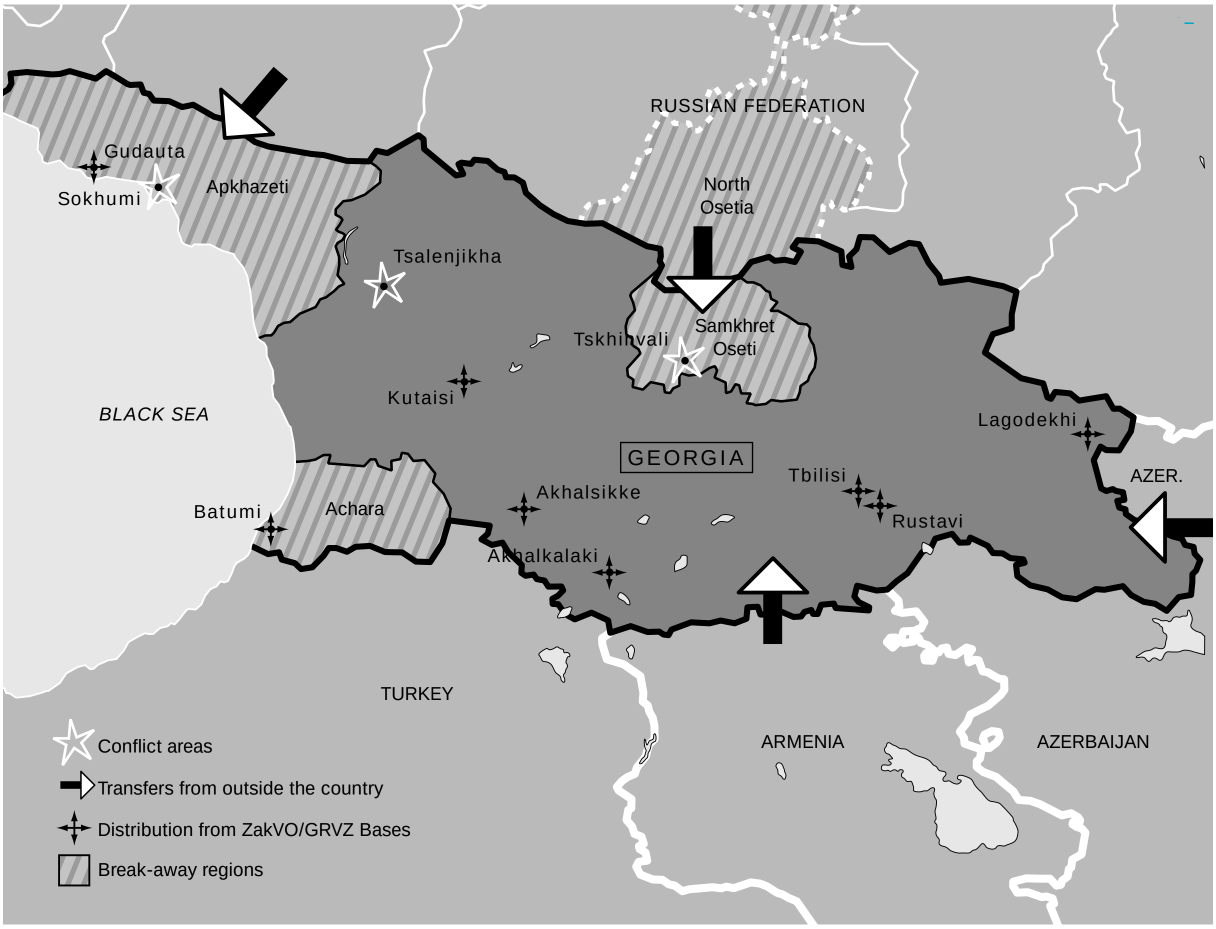
Table 7. Weapons sources and pipelines in Georgia

Weapon type	1990–1991	1992–1993
AKM (Kalashnikov assault rifle model)	DOSAAF stocks, and school/university stocks (usually training models)	Russian military bases Azerbaijan (NKAO surplus)
AK-74, AK-74S (Kalashnikov assault rifle models)	Not available at that time	Russian military bases Azerbaijan (NKAO surplus) Romania (Mkhedrioni)
AKS-U (Kalashnikov rifle) **SVD 'Dragunov'** (sniper rifle)	Not available at that time	Russian bases (Akhalkalaki, Vaziani, and Lagodekhi)
PM Makarov pistols	Police Russian base (Vaziani)	Russian bases (Akhalkalaki, Vaziani, and Koda)
RPG, PG (rocket-propelled grenade launchers)	Not available at that time	Russian bases (vast majority) Georgian production at Factory No. 31 (approximately 10 per cent)
Mortars	Not available at that time	Azerbaijan (NKAO surplus) Armenia (NKAO surplus)
RPK (5.45mm), PK (machine guns)	Not available at that time	Russian military bases Czech Republic

The location of ZakVO bases throughout Georgian territory guaranteed wide distribution of weapons throughout the country, as illustrated in Figure 2. Although most weapons were distributed in close proximity to the bases, significant dispersal of weapons did occur.[43] In addition to the redistribution and sale of weapons mentioned above, it is important to note that weapons were also obtained by a variety of criminal groups, in addition to paramilitary groups and militias.[44] This leakage, albeit not on the same scale as the former, put considerable quantities of weapons into circulation throughout Georgia via the black market. Another factor guaranteeing the wide distribution of weapons was the organization of the armed groups themselves.

As structures consisting of irregular troops and for the most part lacking effective command and control hierarchies, the paramilitary groups could not control weapons once distributed, much less the phenomenon of combatants returning from leave without their weapons. This phenomenon, which entails the 'leakage' of weapons from paramilitary stockpiles to personal holdings (usually in home towns or villages) or the black market, explains the trend for irregular armed formations to procure far more weapons than needed to fully equip their forces.[45]

Figure 2 Map of Georgia illustrating the sources and distribution patterns of weapons


RUSSIAN FEDERATION
Gudauta
Sokhumi
Apkhazeti
North Osetia
Tsalenjikha
Tskhinvali
Samkhret Oseti
Kutaisi
BLACK SEA
Lagodekhi
GEORGIA
Tbilisi
AZER.
Akhalsikke
Batumi
Achara
Rustavi
Akhalkalaki
TURKEY
ARMENIA
AZERBAIJAN
Conflict areas
Transfers from outside the country
Distribution from ZakVO/GRVZ Bases
Break-away regions

Estimating the availability of weapons in the conflict period

The above indicators yield some idea of the nature and distribution of small arms in the conflict period. Together with information on known militia and paramilitary group force strengths, a rough estimate of total weapons availability can be calculated on the basis of a 'weapons multiplier', or the estimated ratio of weapons to men for particular armed groups. On the basis of this approach, and as listed in Table 8, it can be estimated that approximately 40,000 weapons were in the possession of armed groups in Georgia during the conflict period.

The multipliers for each group are estimated on the basis of known information on procurement. For Abkhaz external forces, it is common knowledge that mercenary forces rarely bring more than their personal weapons with them, while volunteer forces usually need to be equipped by the force they are assisting. For this reason, a multiplier of a single weapon per man has been applied to them. For the Abkhaz and Georgian National guard, a multiplier of 1.5 has been applied to account for reserves and surplus. The Mkhedrioni and South Ossetian paramilitary groups differ from this pattern due to the additional function of the former as a commercial and criminal organization, and its corresponding ability to acquire large stocks of weapons not directly destined for military use, while the latter in all likelihood possessed little or no weapons reserves or surplus stocks due to the absence of Russian military installations and the dependence on weapons arriving from North Ossetia.

The figure of 40,000 weapons, while not high in comparison with other conflicts such as Mozambique and El Salvador, is extremely high in view of the short time span during which they were acquired (less than a year, as opposed to decades for the other countries mentioned). Moreover, the actual quantity of weapons in circulation during the conflict period is most probably higher due to the diversion of significant weapons stocks to non-military (i.e. criminal) elements. For the time being, and in the absence of additional data, there is no way to measure the extent or magnitude of the latter. For these reasons, the figure of 40,000 can be considered to represent a likely order of magnitude for the quantity of weapons in circulation, which, when viewed in relation to the market analysis above and in the following section, makes intuitive sense. Georgia did not experience a 'weapons glut' as Mozambique or Albania did, nor did it experience a deficit in arms. Hence the expectation that supply and demand should be roughly equal—i.e., that there are enough weapons to meet immediate military needs—seems to be borne out.

Table 8. Estimate of weapons availability in Georgia, 1992–1993

Militias/paramilitary groups	Troops (average)	Multiplier	Weapons
Abkhaz Secessionist National Guard Regiment	4,500	1.5	6,750
Abkhaz volunteers (Russian/Cossack mercenaries, KNK volunteer contingents)	4,500	1	4,500
South Secessionist National Guard	2,200	1	2,200
Zviadist forces (National Guard faction)	2,167	1	2,167
Mkhedrioni	2,500	2.5	6,250
Ukrainian Self-Defence Organisation (UNSO) volunteers	1,500	1	1,500
National Guard	12,000	1.5	18,000
Total	**29,367**		**41,367**

** Average of figures cited in multiple sources*
Sources: Jane's Sentinel Assessment (1999); Army and Society (January 1998 and September 1999); MacFarlane (2000); Izvestia (19 August 1992); Cvetkovski (undated); Tengiz Gogotishvili (2001); Irakli Aladashvili (2001); GDF (2001); Feinberg (1999); and Georgian Chronicle (May/July 1993)

III. Opening Pandora's box: Small arms and the transformation of conflict, 1989–1993

Introduction

The chaotic nature of Georgian politics during the transition to independence, not to mention the multitude of actors involved in the various conflicts that ensued, makes analysis of this period complex and difficult. Isolating and analysing the contribution of one factor in particular—in this case small arms proliferation—can therefore only be an imprecise science at best. Nonetheless, as seen above, enough data exists to describe why and how Georgia was flooded with weapons between 1991 and 1993, explaining the disastrous consequences this had on the dynamics of conflict.

The weapons obtained from Russian military stockpiles—through processes described in detail above—had four main consequences for the 1991–94 conflict period: catalysing the militarization of politics, and the slide to armed conflict; transforming conflict dynamics and augmenting the scale and lethality of armed violence; facilitating Russian attempts to alter the balance of power between belligerents; and causing widespread loss of life and the disintegration of law and order.

The progressive militarization of politics in Georgia

Page 22 Although armed groups did exist prior to Soviet collapse, they constituted marginal political actors or the armed 'security' appendages of established political organizations. Following the violent ouster of Gamsakhurdia soon after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, however, armed groups—and especially the large paramilitary formations—were catapulted to positions of political prominence due to both the entrenchment (and the visible success) of violence as a means to secure political ends, and the massive quantities of weapons that began to leak from Russian stockpiles. The sudden and widespread availability of weapons also transformed political interactions between Tbilisi and the autonomous regions. The possibilities for using force which appeared with widespread availability of weapons seemed to offer an alternative and more effective way to resolve thorny political questions—representing a 'final solution' for the Georgian government and paramilitary groups to unify the country, and a 'last stand' for Abkhaz and South Ossetian authorities who believed that no further dialogue or negotiation was feasible.

Ranging from motley gangs of 50 or so people to quasi-military formations of several thousand men, the irregular armed formations took the form of either *irregular private militias* (groups forming the armed wings of political organizations) or *paramilitary groups* (armed units loosely affiliated to—but possessing considerable autonomy from—state structures). As products of the power vacuum created by the collapse of Soviet authority and institutions, and in the absence of any viable post-Soviet 'republican' army, these groups rapidly evolved from 'appendages' of political groupings to become dominant political institutions, incarnating the militarization of politics.

Not coincidently, this latter stage of their evolution corresponded with the massive availability of weapons following August 1991 and the intensification of the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the Georgian civil war. These groups undertook massive recruitment drives, obtained considerable weapons arsenals, and used the corresponding increase in firepower to create political facts 'on the ground', constraining the ability of moderate leaders to keep dialogue alive. By illustrating how the major changes in the development of armed groups corresponded to widespread weapons proliferation following August 1991, the relationship of the latter to the militarization of politics can be established.

From a timid beginning…

In the early period, most militias in Georgia were organized on the basis of neighbourhood self-defence or vigilante groups, consisting of small numbers of relatives and friends linked in 'brotherhoods', who took up arms in response to perceived threats to their families, community, or leaders.[46] While most 'political' militias were small in size in 1989–91, acting as the private bodyguards or thugs for political personalities and their entourages, the Georgian paramilitary groups were attempts to create a 'national' army. (The militias and paramilitary groups active in Georgia, as well as their manpower, are listed in Table 2.)

During 1988–91, two main paramilitary groups, loosely affiliated to state structures, emerged. The first, and most notorious, were the Sakartvelos Mkhedrioni (Georgian Horsemen), established under the tutelage of the Georgian minister for agriculture.[47] The Mkhedrioni was national in scope, with units formed throughout Georgia, and had, as already mentioned, links to the criminal underworld spanning the breadth of the Soviet Union, which in turn was related, through complex clientalistic networks, to the Soviet *nomenklatura* (Feinberg, 1999; GDF, 2001). In January 1991, the Mkhedrioni was outlawed by the Gamsakhurdia regime, forcing most of its members underground.[48]

The second main paramilitary group in Georgia was the National Guard, a loose amalgam of 'national self-defence' groups (numbering no more than several hundred men) created in late 1989 in response to the incipient South Ossetian conflict. Also seen as a possible basis for a future national army (but this time by members of the opposition), in December 1990 it was given quasi-official status by Gamsakhurdia.[49] Although formally under the command of Tengiz Kitovani, the Georgian Defence Minister, the National Guard in practice consisted of a number of regionally based units (known as 'battalions') that acted with a high degree of autonomy.[50]

In South Ossetia, a similar pattern of armed mobilization developed in response to what many in the region perceived as violent threats by Georgians against their communities. Beginning in 1989, several militias and paramilitary groups were established, including the armed wings of local political organizations, South Ossetian OMON units (special purpose military detachments), and the Committee for Self-Defence (also known as the Republican Guard) (Bowers, 1994; GDF, 2001). Of the first, the armed wing of Adamon Nykhas (the South Ossetian Popular Front organization) was the most prominent, consisting of a small group of armed men without connection to Soviet structures (GDF, 2001).

Finally, during 1989–91, and following the first wave of ethnic unrest and violence in Abkhazia, two armed formations were established to protect the interests and rights of the ethnic Abkhaz community. As in South Ossetia and Georgia proper, the main Abkhaz political organization Aidgylara (Unity) possessed an armed contingent (Aladashvili, 2001). Moreover, by the end of 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union imminent, Abkhaz authorities established a National Guard, consisting of approximately 250 ex-Soviet servicemen. Parallel to this, a battalion of internal troops several hundred strong was also established under the authority of the Abkhaz MVD (Aladashvili, 2001).

…to the primacy of armed groups

These various militias and paramilitaries underwent a period of expansion and increased coherence, moving from small disorganized rabbles into large-scale military units whose albeit irregular nature was more than made up for by the massive amounts of weapons they were able to obtain, and assistance in men (volunteers and mercenaries) provided by external actors. Overall, and based on a variety of different sources, the armed formations totalled approximately 30,000 combatants (see Table 9).

The Georgian National Guard

The National Guard quickly absorbed most of the smaller 'political' militias in Georgia and launched a nationwide conscription programme. By the end of 1991, some estimated that it contained approximately 8,000 men-in-arms,[51] organized in the form of regionally based 'guard battalions' that often represented the interests and power of local strongmen turned warlords.[52] Although formally subordinated at the highest level under Tengiz Kitovani, the activities of the Guard battalions were still at this time only with difficulty controlled or co-ordinated from the centre. In practice, units, subordinate only to their immediate commanders, took tactical, strategic, and even political decisions on their own, deploying and fighting in accordance with their own interests (Darchiashvilli, 1996, p. 9). During the opposition to Gamsakhurdia and the resulting civil war, the National Guard split into two factions. One remained loyal to Gamsakhurdia. It numbered an estimated 2,500 men, and established its base in western Georgia. The other became the armed force of the Supreme Military Council which took power in January 1992 (Urigashvili, 1991). Despite their numerical superiority in Georgia, the lack of cohesion within and between Guard battalions, and poor (or non-existing) logistical or administrative infrastructure, led to their military defeat in Abkhazia in 1993 (Billingsley, 1999). By 1994, the National Guard lost any semblance of organized structure, with most combatants either dead or dispersed, and the rest continuing to exist as roving criminal bands.

The Mkhedrioni

Although driven underground by Gamsakhurdia for most of 1991, the Mkhedrioni resurfaced with the latter's downfall in December 1991. Within the space of a month, Ioseliani managed to reconstitute the Mkhedrioni as a force composed of an estimated 2,000–5,000 members, and organized into the Mengrelian and Kakhetian divisions, representing the western and eastern halves of Georgia.[53] Allied to the 'winning' faction of the National Guard, the Mkhedrioni actively participated in the South Ossetian, Abkhaz, and intra-Georgian conflicts between 1992 and 1993, and attained a level of cohesion and military organization unmatched in Georgia.[54] This was primarily due to the fact that the Mkhedrioni was but the most visible aspect of what was fundamentally a large criminal syndicate with strong international links. By controlling economic activity (all forms of legal and illegal trade, including weapons) and administrative structures in areas captured in battle, as well as exploiting positions of power in government accorded by Shevardnadze for their assistance in the conflicts, the Mkhedrioni were able not only to sustain, equip, and organize their troops, but also to profit financially from the war (Feinberg, 1999, p. 31). Although formally linked to the government, and (by 1994 at least) deeply integrated into political clientalistic networks, the goals and objectives of the Mkhedrioni were in principle opposed to those of the state due to its dependency on radical uncertainty and social chaos (Aves, 1996).

South Ossetian and Abkhaz armed formations

Little information exists on the organization, structure, and cohesion of either Abkhaz or South Ossetian armed formations for the period running from late 1991 to 1993, beyond estimates of manpower which place the Abkhaz National Guard at between 4,000 and 5,000 (Jane's Information Group, 1999; MacFarlane, 2000), and the South Ossetian National Guard at between 2,000 and 2,500 men (Jane's Information Group, 1999; Cvetkovski, undated). Existing information does indicate, however, that the armed groups in South Ossetia resembled those of the Georgian political militias in the 1989–91 period: i.e. inherently fractious, mutually antagonistic, and organized on the basis of neighbourhood or family clans or 'brotherhoods' (Izvestia, 12 June 1992).

In contrast to Georgian armed formations, Abkhaz armed groups received important reinforcements from outside the country. In response to the alleged Georgian 'invasion' of Abkhazia in August 1992, volunteer forces from most of the north Caucasian republics were organized and deployed in Abkhazia by the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (KGNK, later KNK), an umbrella organization and unofficial parliament created in November and consisting of movements and associations from the region (Zverev, 1996).[55] The KNK, according to several sources, allegedly ordered the deployment of contingents of 60–100 men from each of its Shapsug, Adyge, Abazin, Cherkess, Kabardin, Ossetian, and Chechen ethnic constituents in Abkhazia (Zverev, 1996; Urigashvili, 1992e). In addition to KNK troops, the Abkhaz also received assistance from irregular mercenary units of Cossacks and Russian servicemen from the breakaway Trans-Dniester republic (Zverev, 1996). Altogether, these external sources were reported to number between 4,000 and 5,000 men (Jane's Information Group, 1999; Urigashvili, 1992).

Table 9. Armed formations in Georgia, 1988–1991 and 1991–1993

Militias / Paramilitary Groups	Troops 1991–1993 (average)*
Abkhaz Secessionist National Guard Regiment	4,500
Abkhaz volunteers (Russian/Cossack mercenaries, KNK volunteer contingents)	4,500
SO Secessionist National Guard	2,200
Zviadist forces (National Guard faction)	2,200
Mkhedrioni	2,500
Ukrainian Self-Defence Organisation (UNSO) volunteers	1,500
National Guard	12,000
Total	**29,400**

** Average of figures cited in multiple sources*

Sources: Jane's Sentinel Assessment (1999); Army and Society (January 1998 and September 1999); MacFarlane (2000); Izvestia (19 August 1992); Cvetkovski (undated); Tengiz Gogotishvili (2001); Irakli Aladashvili (2001); GDF (2001); Feinberg (1999); and Georgian Chronicle (May/July 1993)

From social violence to full-scale war: Conflict dynamics in Georgia, 1989–1993

Before the end of 1991, armed groups lacked the means and organization to render force a practical instrument for altering political realities. In South Ossetia, for instance, armed confrontations consisted of skirmishes that were neither militarily decisive nor sufficient to alter the balance of power between political actors. In 1992, this situation changed radically. Armed groups expanded in size, approximating conventional military units (brigades and battalions), organizational coherence and command and control improved, and, most importantly, large quantities of weapons were obtained with which to launch large-scale military operations for the occupation and control of territory. The widespread procurement of small arms, although only one element in this larger process, was central in launching and sustaining the various components of military operations. Although in terms of sheer destructive capacity the use of heavy weapons (notably tanks, artillery, and aircraft) almost certainly exerted a greater toll on civilian life and property, the availability and use of small arms was indispensable for creating (literally—since, as in other conflicts involving irregular forces, the number of small arms directly influenced the size of armed groups) the attacking forces which bore the responsibility of taking and securing territory. In this sense, the precise contribution of small arms to the destruction wrought by war is secondary to its role in providing the backbone for increased operational reach, organizational coherence, and hence the overall lethality of armed groups.

Comparing the fighting before and after 1991 reveals a shift from predominantly 'social' violence (consisting of skirmishes between unorganized bands of poorly-armed men) to full-scale warfare involving large military formations and heavy weaponry with air support. An examination of the sequencing of the main engagements in the various conflicts reveals that the watershed in conflict dynamics was August 1991, once again illustrating the relationship between weapons proliferation and the structure and prevalence of armed violence. Although the sudden availability of weapons following 1991 was not the sole, or even determining, factor in explaining the transformation in conflict dynamics, it must be considered as a dominant element alongside other political, military, and social factors.

From the violent skirmishes of 1989–91…

During 1989–91, the escalation of political crises, in the form of ethnic tensions and the outbreak of civil unrest and violence, was restricted in scope and destructive power because most parties lacked sufficient manpower to launch large-scale or decisive attacks on their opponents. Although other factors were undoubtedly important in influencing the intensity of conflicts at this stage—notably the restraining influence of Soviet MVD troops—restrictions on available firepower did limit both casualties and opportunities for further conflict escalation.

In South Ossetia, the first outbreak of violence (November 1989–January 1990) was prompted by the organization of a mass demonstration by ethnic Georgians against South Ossetian autonomy in late November 1989 (Zverev, 1996). The second outbreak of fighting (December 1990–March 1991) followed the abolition of South Ossetia's autonomous status by the Georgian Supreme Soviet and the establishment of a state of emergency in the region (Kochetkov, 1990; *Pravda*, 23 January 1991). Despite stringent security, incidences of armed violence took place between South Ossetian armed groups, Georgian militias, and paramilitaries (notably the Merab Kostava Society and National Guard, which deployed 80 combatants), resulting in the destruction of a few villages and less than 100 casualties (Bowers, 1994; Zverev, 1996).

For the most part, fighting during both these periods took the form of sporadic armed confrontations in Tskhinvali (the capital of the South Ossetian AO), in some of the mixed villages, and along the road leading north to the Russian border. These confrontations largely consisted of small-scale, hit-and-run or retaliatory operations conducted by small groups of men belonging to one or another of the armed formations.[56] Confined to Kalashnikovs, bolt-action rifles, and pistols, these operations did not result in significant collateral or civilian casualties (though indeed civilians were targeted). During the second period of fighting, one participant estimated that all the South Ossetian armed groups consisted of no more than 700–800 men, while the Georgians did not number more than 200.[57] Neither group had sufficient arms for all their members. Finally, the presence of 1,000 MVD troops effectively checked larger-scale confrontations, though they did not prevent (or hinder) smaller engagements elsewhere.

Abkhazia likewise is characterized by two periods of violent confrontation: July 1989 and the full-scale war during 1992–93. With regard to the former, mass demonstrations of ethnic Abkhaz protesting the decision to open a branch of the Tbilisi State University in Sukhumi (the capital of the Abkhaz

ASSR) culminated in violence, and led to armed confrontations between Georgian groups (notably the 'Imedi' militia) and local Abkhaz self-defence groups (Arsenyev, 1989a). Armed for the most part with farming tools, hunting rifles, and weapons stolen from police stations, these confrontations spread throughout most of Abkhazia, resulting in 22 deaths and hundreds injured in predominantly rural areas (Zaikin, 1989; Shenfield and Minear, 1996). As in South Ossetia, the presence of Soviet MVD troops exerted a restraining influence, but were unable to prevent the activities of small groups of armed men who undertook acts of sabotage, the burning of villages, ambushes, kidnappings, and retaliatory actions against other groups (Arsenyev, 1989b).

…to the wars of 1991–93

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, two factors drastically altered the nature and intensity of the conflicts in Georgia. First, the moderating influence exerted by Soviet forces ended due to jurisdictional and organizational flux. Second, important opportunities for acquiring weapons arose with the 'opening' of Russian military depots, for the reasons described above. The large quantities of small arms, light weapons, and heavier armour and weaponry that suddenly became available drastically increased available firepower, permitted the organization of larger military units, and increased the scale of operations. During 1992–93, these two factors together contributed to the spread of large-scale warfare in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and western Georgia, and an increase in the scale of material and economic destruction, as well as human suffering.

The South Ossetian conflict intensified in January 1992. Taking advantage of political paralysis in Tbilisi due to the ouster of Gamsakhurdia, the South Ossetians declared their intention to unite the region with North Ossetia, and hence with the Russian Federation. Using its newly-obtained weapons and in particular artillery, Georgian National Guard and Mkhedrioni forces began a siege of Tskhinvali and outlying villages that lasted until mid-1992. During this time, the Ossetian National Guard, outfitted with anti-tank weapons and armoured vehicles, responded in kind, resulting in a military stalemate that led to widespread destruction and instability which spilled across the border into North Ossetia (Bowers, 1994). Following a period of intense fighting in which Russian troops were also involved against Georgian forces (Urigashvili, 1992b), Shevardnadze and Yeltsin on 24 June signed an agreement which, initialled by North and South Ossetian leaders, established a cease-fire, a mixed peacekeeping force of North Ossetian, Georgian, and Russian troops, and principles for the resolution of the conflict. With that, South Ossetia for all practical purposes passed beyond the control of the Georgian state, at the cost of approximately 1,000 people killed, 115 villages destroyed, and over 30,000 Georgians and Ossetians people displaced (Cvetkovski, undated, p. 48; Greene, 1998, p. 289).

The occupation of Abkhazia by Georgian paramilitary groups in August 1992 was due, in large part, to their acquisition of thousands of small arms and light weapons in the preceding months. This enabled them to equip several thousand combatants with a range of weapons and armoured vehicles, and lured them to believe that military force would be the most expedient solution to the thorny problem of Abkhazia's political status. Although at first unable to stem the Georgian advance, Abkhaz forces were rapidly organized into a defensive posture owing to their own weapons acquisitions. As a result, two fronts stabilized—along the Gumista river north of Sukhumi and along the Ochamchira-Tkvarcheli axis—and the conflict settled into a pattern of positional warfare (*Georgian Chronicle*, January–May 1993). In sharp contrast to the earlier fighting in July 1989, armed confrontations now involved large numbers of organized and equipped troops whose sheer numbers facilitated acquisition and control of territory. Attacks (notably the several failed assaults by the Abkhaz of Sukhumi in early 1993) were often preceded by intense mortar and artillery bombardments, followed by infantry attacks involving light weapons and armoured vehicles and tanks. In the months leading to the final occupation of Sukhumi and the routing of the Georgians by Abkhaz forces in mid-September, the latter received significant reinforcements from North Caucasian and Russian mercenaries. The final assault, consisting of large co-ordination movements of Abkhaz troops and *matériel*, overpowered the less-organized Georgian forces, and sparked the mass displacement of approximately 250,000 ethnic Georgians. Although small arms and light weapons were only one component in an array of factors that differentiate the 1992–93 fighting from previous incidents, they were a central element of all military action. Casualty estimates in the Abkhazian conflict stand at 3,000 Abkhaz and 5,000 Georgian combatants killed, and up to 20,000 civilians killed (Aves, 1996, p. 27; Slider, 1997, p. 172).

As in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Georgian civil war, the last stage of which unfolded between September and October 1992, involved the use of small arms and light weapons as a keystone for achieving political objectives. Driven from political institutions in Tbilisi through the use of force, Zviadist forces resorted to the use of arms to physically occupy territory in western Georgia. Taking advantage of the military weakness of pro-government paramilitary groups following their defeat in Abkhazia, Zviadist forces managed to occupy most of western Georgia (the region of Samegrelo). Weapons were critical factors in both reducing government opposition to their advance and, more importantly, in establishing, through coercion, the structures and administrations needed to sustain their campaign. Following their defeat by elements of the National Guard and Mkhedrioni, together with Russian forces who participated following the accession of Georgia to the CIS in early October 1993, elements of the former simply supplanted the structures established by the Zviadists and installed their own coercion-backed economies.

Facilitating Russian intervention

Weapons distribution from Russian military installations, whether as part of a larger systematic policy or the actions of individual officers, directly influenced the balance of power between belligerents and their perceptions regarding political solutions, and led to the entrenchment of the Russian military in Georgia in the post-conflict period. Military assistance was clearly decisive in providing Abkhaz forces with the capacity to first resist, and then defeat, the occupation of Abkhazia in 1992. Similarly, assistance accorded to South Ossetian armed groups enabled them to create a military stalemate in the region. Both regions, it must be remembered, won de facto independence from central Georgian authority as a result of their military actions. The arming of Georgian armed groups facilitated the use of violence in ousting Gamsakhurdia, ensured a violent civil war, and provided the means to impose a military solution to the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts.

This situation benefited Russia in its attempts to consolidate its hold on what was now its ‘near abroad’. By presenting itself as a ‘neutral’ guarantor of peace negotiations, Russia obtained a mandate to deploy peacekeeping forces in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Moreover, in exchange for Georgia entering the CIS and agreeing on the retention of Russian military bases,[58] Russia provided military assistance to the Georgian government in order to guarantee the latter’s victory over Zviadist forces in late 1993. Its troops also helped Schevardanze restore a semblance of order after the conflicts on Georgian territory had ended (see section IV for further details).

The human cost of SALW proliferation

Although small arms were not directly responsible for causing all the casualties or material destruction in the three Georgian conflicts, they served as a key factor determining its scope. In this manner, small arms indirectly contributed to the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians and combatants, the destruction of hundreds of villages and towns, and the forced displacement of more than 300,000 people. In addition, widespread SALW availability provided favourable conditions for the criminalization of society and the economy. Armed formations and organized crime—which were sometimes linked—disrupted, and took control of, local administrations and economic life in the areas they occupied or in which they were active. As a result, the economy was dominated by coercion-backed extraction and large-scale protection rackets, and accompanied by violence and the disintegration of law and order. Economic and social activity, in other words, reverted to a quasi-feudal system wherein weapons and conquest constituted primary organizing principles. Conflict also benefited smaller organized criminal groups and individuals who could commit robberies and assaults and engage in illegal trade with impunity. The criminalization of society and the economy was a major contributing factor to the widespread and extreme impoverishment of the population, not to mention the ineffectiveness of state regulatory institutions, and lasted until Shevardnadze was able to impose a certain degree of order in late 1995.

IV. Consequences of SALW availability and use in the post-conflict period, 1994–2001

Introduction

As recent studies have shown, the termination of armed conflict does not necessarily entail the end of the dangers posed by widespread small arms availability.[59] In Georgia, the immediate post-conflict period (1993–95) was marked by widespread lawlessness and impoverishment, and the inability of state institutions to carry out their basic functions. By 1995, however, the process of political and institutional consolidation initiated by Shevardnadze in late 1993 began to bear fruit. By imprisoning the leaders of the Mkhedrioni and other armed formations, and by undertaking a policy of disarmament, Shevardnadze managed to reduce the influence of warlords in politics. Simultaneously, widespread crack-downs on smaller criminal groups throughout Georgia significantly reduced levels of crime in urban and rural settings. By 1996, Georgian was seemingly recovering from the experience of conflict, and slowly rebuilding its economic and institutional-administrative infrastructure.

The problem of small arms has not, however, been adequately tackled. This first part of section IV illustrates how, despite Shevardnadze's policies, large quantities of weapons remained in circulation. Although their direct effects are difficult to measure due to the lack of reliable crime data, a number of indirect consequences reveal the severity of the problem today. First, continued weapons proliferation through the lucrative and large-scale arms trade on the Georgian black market makes the consolidation of state regulatory structures more difficult. It helps feed the rampant corruption, including in the Georgian security agencies, as well as a vibrant underground economy. Although other factors, such as the underfunding of government institutions and the extensive underground economy as a whole, definitely play a role, the consequences of SALW availability should not be underestimated in any explanation of the failure to consolidate state structures.

The second impact of widespread weapons availability is economic, social, and political insecurity, notably in the former conflict areas of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Samegrelo. As the case study of Abkhazia in the last part of this section shows, small arms availability and use obstructs peaceful conflict resolution, perpetuates violence and economic disenfranchisement among civilian populations, and impedes attempts to provide much needed humanitarian and development assistance and to establish effective public administration and security in all sectors. Although most marked in the former conflict areas, the cycles of insecurity fuelled by small arms are a widespread phenomenon throughout Georgia itself, adding to the immense burdens its population—still having to recover from several years of warfare—has to shoulder.

Restoring order under Shevardnadze

The consolidation of law and order under Shevardnadze began with a crack-down on crime and political violence that eventually became a method for eliminating the power of the paramilitaries. Despite compromising Georgian state sovereignty, the decision taken in late October 1993 to enter the CIS, deploy Russian soldiers, and retain Russian military bases not only contributed to the defeat of the Zviadist insurgency, but also reduced the influence of the military warlords in politics. This was due both to the threat of direct Russian military intervention and to its control of key transport junctions, border posts, and military installations (Zverev, 1996). With these security guarantees, Shevardnadze imposed a state of emergency between September 1993 and February 1994 and launched a full-scale attack (using police and internal troops) against petty criminals and the mid-size ‘local’ mafias (*Georgian Chronicle*, December 1993). Rough indicators of the effectiveness of this operation reveal that the mere symbolism of state action was an effective deterrent and signalled the end of rampant lawlessness.[60]

Rooting out criminals and warlords at the heart of Georgia’s political institutions was far more difficult. Taking advantage of the blow to *matériel* and morale suffered by the Mkhedrioni and National Guard in Abkhazia, Shevardnadze began a series of political manoeuvres destined to gradually remove their leaders from power. This process, which culminated in late 1995, involved, first, the disbanding of smaller paramilitary formations by the Mkhedrioni; second, the demotion of both Jaba Ioseliani (Mkhedrioni) and Tengiz Kitovani (National Guard) to less central positions; third, their arrest (together with the entire leadership hierarchy) in connection with the attempted assassination of Shevardnadze in 1995; and, finally, the disbanding and disarmament of both Mkhedrioni and National Guard (Darchiashvili, 1997a, pp. 16–17). By the end of 1995, Shevardnadze had consolidated his own power base (through personal appointees) in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, State Security and Defence (Nodia, 1996). As a result, law and order was restored and the more obvious criminal structures were dismantled.

Disarming the paramilitary groups

The crack-down on crime and paramilitary groups involved not only the breakup of illegal networks and the imprisonment of their leaders, but also a systematic policy of compulsory weapons collection. Between late 1995 and early 1996, the Ministry of Internal Affairs implemented 25 rounds of weapons collection throughout Georgian territory, with the exception of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. According to the personal records of Givi Kviraia, then Minister of Internal Affairs, 60 per cent of the weapons were collected from former Mkhedrioni members, 28 per cent from National Guard members, and 12 per cent were voluntarily turned in by civilians. In all, a total of 9,717 small arms and light weapons were collected, as well as nearly 28,000 grenades, missiles, and mines (see Table 10). This data does not include weapons collected from the Mkhedrioni before their disbanding, weapons in the possession of MIA special forces troops that operated in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (also disbanded and disarmed), or the weapons of several army infantry units implicated in the plot to assassinate Shevardnadze that were subsequently disbanded and disarmed. Of the weapons collected by the MIA, 25 per cent (mainly Kalashnikov assault rifles and pistols) were destroyed, while the remainder were distributed to the MIA, border guard service, and Ministry of State Security. Hunting rifles were for the most part sold to shops in Tbilisi.

Table 10. Weapons collected by the MIA, 1995-1996

Small arms/light weapons	
Rifles	**4,770**
Kalashnikov (47–74 all models)	1,655
SVD Dragunov Sniper	12
SVT (Tokarov)	5
Mosin (WWII)	29
Mosin (Cavalry)	57
Foreign production rifles	6
Hunting rifles (incl. Short)	3,006
Pistols and revolvers	**2,344**
Makarov and Nagano	2,344
Machine guns	**348**
PPS - PPSH (WWII)	67
K6-92 ‘Karabagh’	201
RPK-74 (5.45mm)	46
PK	25
DshK (12.7mm) - 4 vol. surr.	6
RPD	3
Grenade launchers	**2,253**
RPG-7	320
RPG-18	1,872
PG-7	58
AGS-17 ‘Plamya’	3
Missile launchers	**2**
Strela launcher	2
Total	9,717

Explosives	
Hand grenades (approx.)	**10,700**
RG-43	2,000
RG-D5	3,500
F1 ‘Limonka’ fragmentation	5,000
RGD-7 Anti-tank	200
Grenades and missiles	**12,726**
RPG-7 Grenades	2,006
PG-7 Grenades (AP, AT, fragmentation, etc.)	9,873
Strela Missiles	27
Anti-Tank Missiles (PTURS & NURS)	820
Explosives (kg)	**9,150**
Dynamite	5,000
TROTIL	3,500
Plastic explosive	650
Mines	**4,172**
AP Mines	1,022
AT Mines	400
Timed and trip-wired mines	2,750
Total units	27,598
Total kg	9,150

Source: Personal archive of Givi Kviraia, former Georgian Minister of the Interior

When examined carefully, the results of the weapons collection undertaken by the MIA reveal that a comprehensive disarmament of Georgian paramilitary groups and civilians did not occur. At the most general level, the figure of approximately 10,000 small arms and light weapons represents only a part of total estimated availability which, according to the analysis above, is in the order of 30,000 weapons (not including quantities estimated to be in the possession of Abkhaz and South Ossetian forces). When disaggregated, the data reveals an even more disturbing picture. Of the nearly 5,000 rifles collected, a mere 1,700 were contemporary Soviet military assault and sniper rifles, while the rest were WWII Mosin and hunting rifles. Given the estimated quantities distributed from Russian military installations, there were in all likelihood far greater numbers of military assault and sniper rifles in circulation. In addition, modern general-purpose machine guns (PKs, RPKs, and RPDs) were collected in rather negligible quantities, in contrast to the local Armenian produced K6-92, an inferior weapon. Finally, it is questionable whether the collection of 1,800 RPG-18s is a significant result, as these are single use, disposable weapons that, in all likelihood, were surrendered with the projectile already fired.

This suggests that the government was able to collect only a fraction of available weapons. Moreover, the fact that most of the collected weapons were distributed to internal troops and police does not mean that they were necessarily removed from circulation. As the following section explains, these agencies are reportedly key actors in the current black market trade in weapons; it cannot be taken for granted, in other words, that these weapons did not leak back into circulation following their collection. On the whole, while the weapons collection might have reduced supply of weapons and weakened the capacity of paramilitary groups, it certainly did not result in the comprehensive disarmament of Georgian society.

National and regional measures to control SALW proliferation

In parallel with weapons collection programmes, considerable progress was made in creating a legislative basis for arms control measures at both the national and the regional levels.

At the domestic level, individual possession and sale of weapons is regulated by the *Law of the Republic of Georgia on Firearms*, adopted on 15 March 1994, and seven subsequent amendments.[61] The types of weapons authorized for individual sale are specified in a ‘state cadastre’ of weapons types (consisting mainly of hunting, sporting, and collection firearms), and regulated by a permit system. Additional measures place restrictions on the use, transportation, and storage of military firearms (which are limited to offices and subject to special authorization).[62] In addition to this legislation, the export, import, and transit of weapons in Georgia is regulated by the *Law on Control Over the Export of Arms, Military Equipment and Dual-use Products*, adopted by the parliament on 28 April 1998. This law, and a number of accompanying pieces of legislation, establish an arms control system consisting of export and import licences, authorizations for transit of military goods, and end-user certificates for all export transactions.[63] For both laws, the Ministry of Justice (together with the Standing Inter-Agency Military-Technical Commission of the National Security Council of Georgia in the case of the latter law) has a co-ordinating function. The actual enforcement of the various measures relating to weapons is split between a number of state agencies, including the Ministry of Interior, State Security and Defence, and the Customs Department (Pataraia, April 1999).

At the regional level, Georgia takes part in a number of inter-governmental arrangements that, among other things, attempt to regulate and harmonize controls on small arms proliferation. Some, including GUUAM (a regional alliance composed of Georgia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova) and BSEC (Black Sea Economic Co-operation) affirm the intention to co-ordinate policies on arms control and share information, but do not move beyond symbolic declarations of intent. Others, such as the NATO-organized EAPC (Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council), provide a framework for assistance in the domains of stockpile management, developing national control mechanisms, border control and information-sharing, while the EU-funded TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) establishes a framework for harmonizing and co-ordinating procedures for transporting goods. To date, concrete assistance in the area of small arms and light weapons has been negligible. The only organizations or arrangements with measurable impacts today include the bilateral *Georgia Border Security and Law Enforcement (BSLE) Assistance Program*, administered by the US government to reinforce the capacities of the Georgian customs department, but heavily focused on weapons of mass destruction; and the joint activities of the OSCE and EU in monitoring and reinforcing Georgian customs facilities along the border with Chechnya (Pataraia, 2000).

The ineffectiveness of weapons collection and the new regulations

The ineffectiveness of the government weapons collection exercise, as well as the rather strict regulations on civilian possession in significantly reducing the number of small arms and light weapons in circulation, is clearly revealed by an analysis of black-market price data for the post-conflict period. As Table 11 reveals, black-market prices for weapons fluctuated only slightly for most common weapon types throughout the period 1992–2001. The government weapons collection, in other words, barely made a dent in market dynamics. Moreover, and as is explained in greater depth below, these prices

Table 11. Black market weapons prices in Georgia, 1990–2001

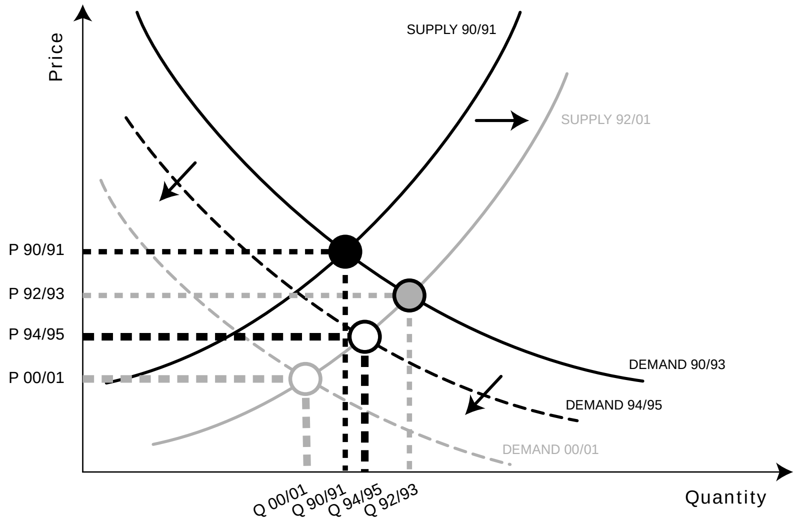
	Prices (USD)			
Model	90–91	92–93	94–95	2001
Continuous price decline				
AKM AR	250–300	120–150	100–150	100
AK-74 AR	250–300	120–150	100–120	100
AK-74S AR	350–400	200–250	150	100–150
RPG-7	Not available	150–200	100	100
PM Makarov (pistol)	500–1000	500–800	300–400	250–350
Price rise, then decline				
AKMS AR	500	300–500	400–500	Not known
SVD ‘Dragunov’ SR	Not available	900–1,200	1,500–2,000	1,200–1,500
AK-74SU AR	Not available	500	700–1,000	500
RPG-18	Not available	80–100	150–200	100–150
Continuous price increase				
PSM	Not available	1,500	2,000–2,500	3,000
OZ-14 ‘Groza’ AR	Not available	2,000–2,500	3,500–4,000	4,000
PG (under-barrel grenade launcher)	Not available	1,000–1,500	2,000	Not known
RPK (5.45) GPMG	Not available	200–300	150–200	300–400
RPKM (7.62) GPMG	Not available	200–300	200–300	300–400
PKM (7.62) GPMG	Not available	300–350	400–500	1,200–1,700
SKS rifle	Not available	400–500	500–700	700
SVT SR	Not available	1,000–1,200	1,000–1,200	1,500

Source: Information gathered by the GDF Deputy Director for the SAS also support the assertions that widespread availability has been facilitated by—but also in turn served to aggravate—government inability to effectively control subsequent weapons proliferation. A closer look at the data below reveals three trends in black-market prices, each of which provides important insights into the nature of small arms availability in the post-conflict period.

Continuously falling prices

Prices for standard Kalashnikov models, the RPG-7, and PM Makarov pistols dropped continuously between 1990 and 2001. In general, this can be explained by the fact that these weapons constitute the cheapest and most easily accessible Soviet-era weapons. They were thus obtained in large amounts during the conflict period, in all likelihood far outnumbering all other small arms weapon types. Hence, a trend of continuously falling prices can be explained by the existence of low demand for such weapons relative to supply, which further drove down prices in later years as most groups in need of weapons were in all likelihood already well-stocked and in need of larger-calibre or more sophisticated weapons to obtain military advantage. This trend is represented graphically in Figure 3. The lack of price fluctuation suggests that supply did not alter, leading to the conclusion that between 1993 and 2001 the availability of the most common weapon types has not changed since the wars.[64]

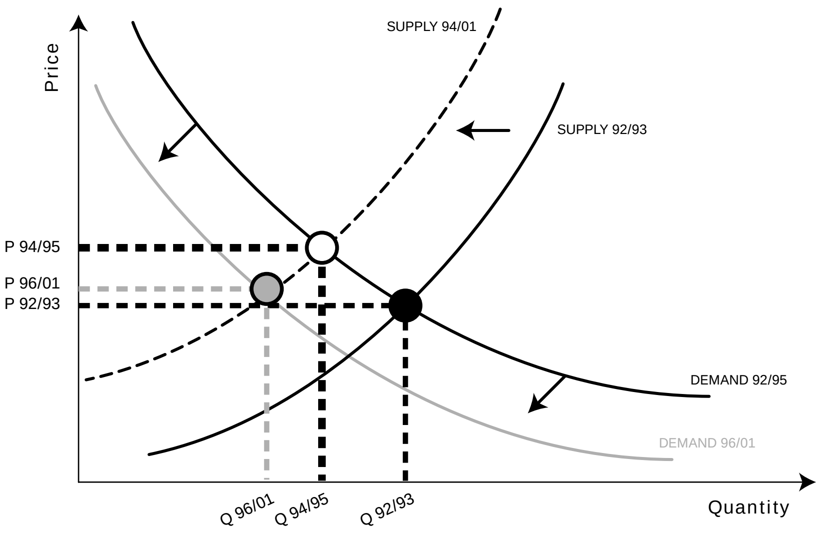
Figure 3 Continuously falling prices, 1990–2001



Fluctuating market prices

In contrast, certain weapon types exhibit fluctuations in their prices—either a price increase followed by decline, or decline followed by increase—that points to a trend in which both supply and demand shifted. This group of weapons, in contrast to the preceding, are more complex, expensive, and hence scarce weapons, and have different military capabilities. The AK-74SU assault rifle, for instance, is a 'snub-nosed' Kalashnikov rifle favoured by special forces troops for urban combat settings, the SVD 'Dragunov' is a high-precision sniper rifle, while the RPG-18 is a single-use rocket-propelled grenade launcher with high destructive power. As illustrated in Figure 4, the most likely explanation for this trend is a contraction in supply during 1994–95, followed by (or occurring simultaneously with) a contraction of demand. The decline in supply would indicate that fewer quantities were available for sale following the conflicts, due either to scarcity or to their higher military value. The decline in demand, as in the first group of weapons, represents a general drop of demand for weapons after the conflicts.

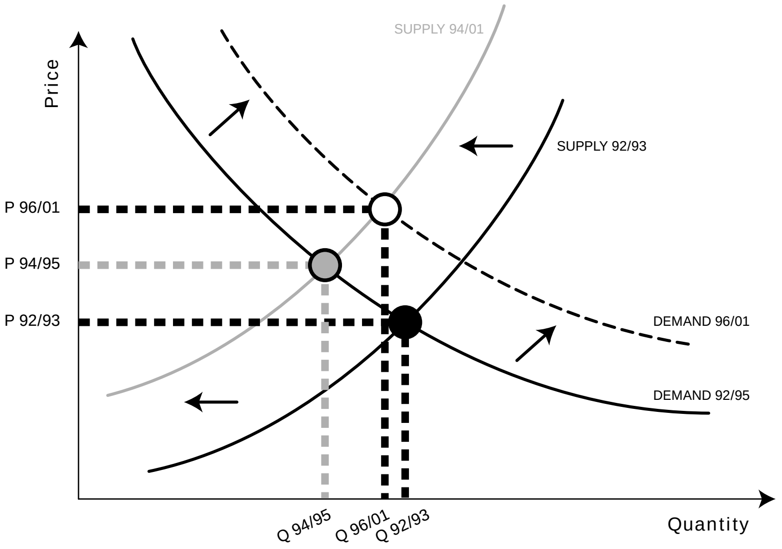
Figure 4 Price increase, and subsequent decline, 1992–2001



Continuous price increase

Price trends for the third group of weapons reveal a continuous increase over the period 1992–2001. These consist of advanced assault rifle designs (notably the OZ-14 ‘Groza’), general purpose machine guns (the RPK, RPKM, and PKM models), and sniper rifles. In all probability, these weapons were available in far smaller quantities than the preceding weapons groups, and are precisely the types of weapons expected to provide armed groups with a military ‘edge’ in contexts saturated with ordinary Kalashnikov rifles. As Figure 5 illustrates, prices for these weapons have consistently risen since 1992, pointing to a context in which, despite a decline in supply (again, a function of fewer weapons being placed on the market due to greater regulation, among other factors), demand has increased. Although no further conflicts took place on Georgian soil following the 1992–93 wars (barring sporadic flare-ups of violence in Abkhazia), an increase in demand is explained by the conflicts in Chechnya and the role of Georgia as both a source and a transit route for small arms (see below).

Figure 5 Continuously increasing prices, 1992–2001



Where do the weapons go?

High weapons availability, weak border controls, rampant corruption within government bodies, and the unresolved territorial status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia provide the conditions for a flourishing illicit trade in weapons that is closely connected to other forms of smuggling. These factors offer an explanation for the trends in both demand and supply for weapons outlined above, and highlight the scope of the problems associated with continued weapons proliferation.

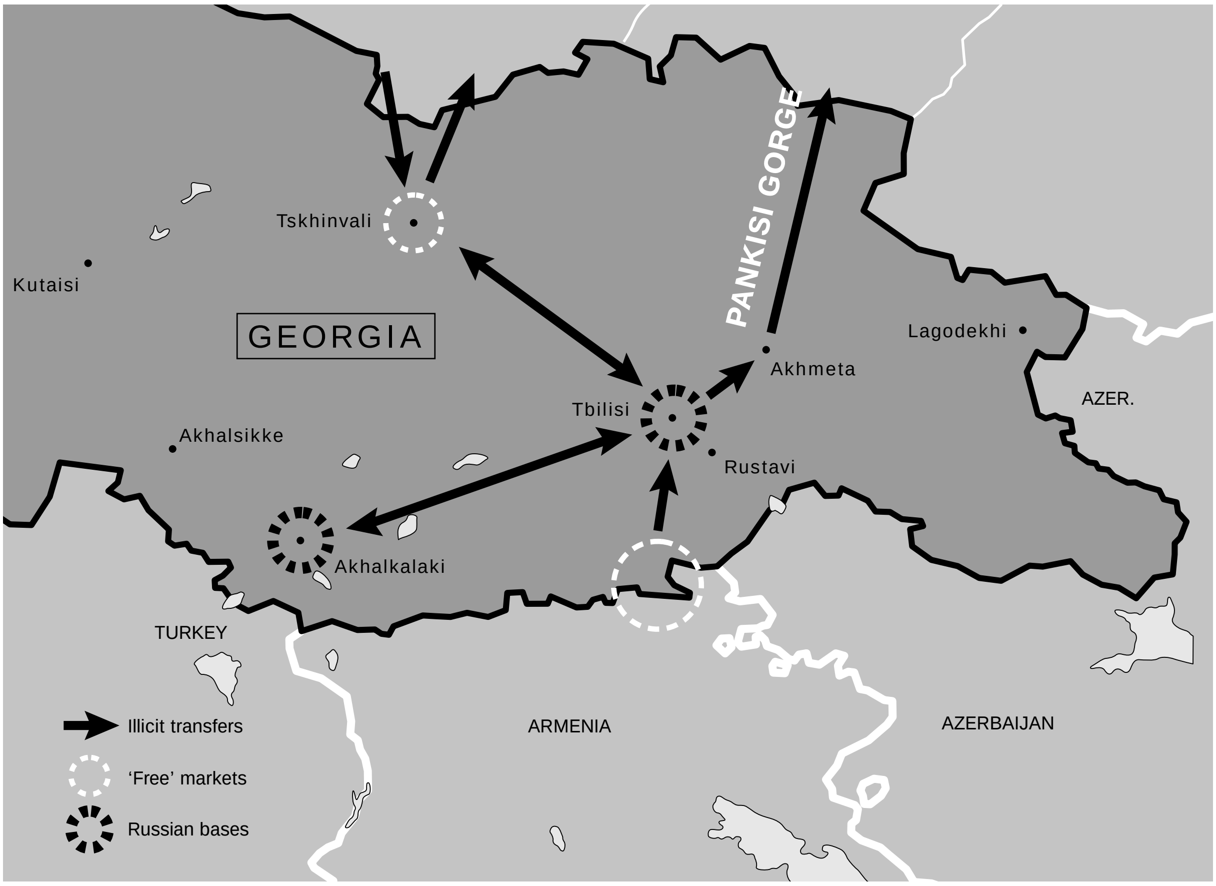
Weapons proliferation in the post-conflict period

Numerous indicators suggest the existence of a strong trade in illicit weapons within and across Georgian borders. Throughout the post-conflict period, the strongest source of demand has been Chechnya, owing to the autonomous republic's ongoing conflict with Russian central authorities. Sources of supply include civilians' weapons and continued petty trade of weapons from Russian bases still in Georgia. Although evidence of the contemporary illicit trade in weapons is extremely fragmentary in nature, partly due to poor security conditions, enough exists to sketch out the broad contours of this phenomenon.

Chechen demand. In late 1999, with renewed conflict in Chechnya, approximately 7,000 refugees and an undisclosed number of combatants crossed into the Pankisi valley, which is home to the Kist, a population with close ethnic affinities to the Chechens. This region, which was gradually sealed off from the rest of Georgia by Georgian Interior and Defence forces, became both an economic hub for smuggled goods and a rear-base for Chechen combatants fighting Russian forces.[65] According to some reports, drugs (mainly heroin) are smuggled through mountain passes from Chechnya into Georgia, while weapons flow in the opposite direction (*Army and Society,* November 2000). Despite a ring of checkpoints controlling the movement of vehicles and people into the region, this trade has continued to flourish, allegedly due to the complicity of local officials who profit from the illegal trade.

According to information obtained from Tbilisi-based weapons dealers and other individuals close to illegal smuggling of goods in general, two main pipelines for weapons currently exist in Georgia serving to supply combatants in Chechnya (and allegedly in the Pankisi Gorge in eastern Georgia), (see Figure 6). The first pipeline originates in South Ossetia where, taking advantage of the fluid border with Russia and disputed border with Georgia, considerable amounts of weapons are sold, together with a variety of other illegally traded goods including drugs, petrol, kerosene, and scrap metal. This pipeline runs through Tbilisi to Akhmeta, which is the first town directly outside the security zone established by Georgian authorities in the Pankisi Gorge. From Akhmeta, the pipelines run through the security zone into the Caucasus Mountains and from there into Chechnya via numerous footpaths. The second pipeline allegedly begins in Akhalkalaki, runs to Tbilisi, and then merges with the first. Together, these have served as the main transit routes for weapons to Chechen rebels. Moreover, it is alleged that police and other security forces currently deployed in the security zone are complicit in this illegal trade to Chechnya, thus explaining how weapons are able to bypass official scrutiny.[66] Although there is little information on the types of quantities of weapons involved, it appears that Chechen insurgents use Georgia to procure high-quality weapons. According to one source, there is a great demand for a new modified sniper rifle from Russia that is apparently twice as effective as the SVD Dragunov. In April 2001, Chechen commanders were attempting to obtain 50 units (at USD 5,000 each) from Tskhinvali via the Roki pass that connects Georgia to Russia.[67]

Figure 6 Map of Pankisi region showing weapons pipelines and sources


Tskhinvali
Kutaisi
GEORGIA
PANKISI GORGE
Lagodekhi
Akhmeta
AZER.
Tbilisi
Akhalsikke
Rustavi
Akhalkalaki
TURKEY
ARMENIA
AZERBAIJAN
Illicit transfers
'Free' markets
Russian bases

Weapons sources. As Table 12 illustrates, between 1994 and 1995 (the late phase of the first Chechen war) Russian military bases (notably Vaziani and Akhalkalaki) were still actively involved in the illegal sale of weapons, particularly advanced assault rifle designs, sniper rifles, mortars, and machine guns. In early 2000, for instance, officials from the Ministry of State Security detained a truck coming from the Vaziani base, loaded with 45,000 Kalashnikov rounds, 30 Makarov pistols, and one RPG-9 bound for Tskhinvali, where they were to be transferred, by foot, over the mountains to Chechnya (*Army and Society*, January 2000). By 2000–1, however, the degree of trafficking had decreased significantly, in all likelihood due to the gradual withdrawal of Russian forces and *matériel* from bases in Georgia in accordance with the OSCE Istanbul Summit decision of November 1999.[68] Additional weapons sources include the large market outside Tskhinvali, where weapons smuggled in from Russia are sold, and small networks of Azerbaijani and Armenian dealers who sell surplus weapons from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the Sadachlo market, which straddles the border between Armenia and Georgia.[69] In May 2001, for example, a small network of five weapons dealers were arrested in Gori (half an hour south of Tskhinvali) with ten portable missile systems, nine grenade launchers, and several thousand cartridges (ITAR-TASS, 10 May 2001).

Table 12. Weapons pipelines and sources, 1994–2001

Weapon type	1994–1995	2001
AKM (Kalashnikov assault rifle model)	No demand at that time	No demand
AK-74, AK-74S (Kalashnikov assault rifle models)	No demand at that time	No demand
AKS-U (Kalashnikov rifle) **SVD 'Dragunov'** (sniper rifle)	Warehouses (RU Transcaucasus Military District)	Contraband from Russia
PM Makarov pistols	Warehouses (RU Transcaucasus Military District)	No demand
RPG, PG (rocket-propelled grenade launchers)	Not known	Tskhinvali market (South Ossetia) Akhalkalaki markets (small %)
Mortars	Azerbaijan (NKAO surplus) Armenia (NKAO surplus) Tskhinvali market (South Ossetia)	No demand
RPK (5.45mm), PK (machine guns)	Russian base (Vaziani): 40% Tskhinvali market (South Ossetia): 20% Akhalkalaki: 40%	Tskhinvali market (South Ossetia)

Continued weapons proliferation and institutional incapacity

The consolidation of political power and authority under Shevardnadze between 1994 and 1996 was achieved primarily by drawing in and appeasing key political actors who were awarded important posts and instructed to preserve the status quo. With the emphasis on appeasement and not reform, these actors engaged in corruption, self-aggrandizement, and the rebuilding of clientalistic relations that had survived from the Soviet period. In this manner, financial and other resources were redirected from the state to the informal economy or extended family or clan units.[70] By 2001, criminal groups and state officials had merged to such an extent that both actively work to prevent the consolidation of state institutions that could damage their interests and practices. Moreover, the capacity of state institutions to fulfil their functions has been hampered by the lack of qualified personnel and severe financial shortages. Consequently, institution-building has been largely achieved only on paper, and public assistance in all sectors of life severely constrained. Consequently, tax and customs duty collection are negligible, and funds from the state budget and international organizations rarely reach their intended beneficiaries (UNDP, 2000, pp. 67–74; Ensadze, 2000).

In this context, the capacity of the Georgian border forces to exercise customs control and the police to effectively regulate the possession and domestic sales of weapons is feeble. With the withdrawal of the Russian Federal Frontier Service troops from Georgian borders in 1999 (Russian forces had occupied this role in accordance with the military treaty concluded between Russia and Georgia in 1994), all equipment was also removed, and in some cases the customs facilities themselves were destroyed. The Georgian border forces that have replaced them have not been able to operate effectively due to the absence of necessary educational and technical skills, computer and communication equipment, vehicles, other equipment, and manpower.[71] Although Georgia has received bilateral and multilateral technical assistance in the form of training and specialized communication and detection equipment, notably for use in the Pankisi area, its limited scope means that its impact is also limited. As a result, there is little effective control over goods moving across borders, and considerable incentive for border guards to abuse their authority.[72] The two border areas visited by the author—the de facto border with South Ossetia and the border between Armenia and Georgia (where the two largest 'free markets' are found)—were notable for the absence of any controls whatsoever, save for police officers who 'taxed' locals transporting personal goods, often under coercive pressure.[73]

Compounding these problems is the existence of pervasive corruption and lack of official oversight among government—and especially police—officials. Given the dominance of the black market in the economic life of Georgia, it is no surprise that a variety of officials actively try to benefit from it by subverting government policy. Police in Georgia rarely carry out their officially designated functions, but instead implement a variety of schemes to extract bribes for petty offences. In addition to this neglect, police officers are thought to be involved in most forms of smuggling and black-market activity, turning their backs on illicit transactions in return for a cut of the profits. Pankisi police, and other MIA forces are in a position to control the flow of weapons to Chechnya, and reportedly do so with involvement of the highest echelons, including the General Prosecutor of Georgia.[74] Finally, according to Georgian government officials, authorities exercise almost no effective oversight over the transport of material from Russian military installations by rail, road, or air.[75] This in essence has allowed Russian forces to transport weapons within and out of Georgia with almost complete impunity, and certainly provided favourable conditions for their participation in illegal weapons trafficking.

Small arms and insecurity in Abkhazia

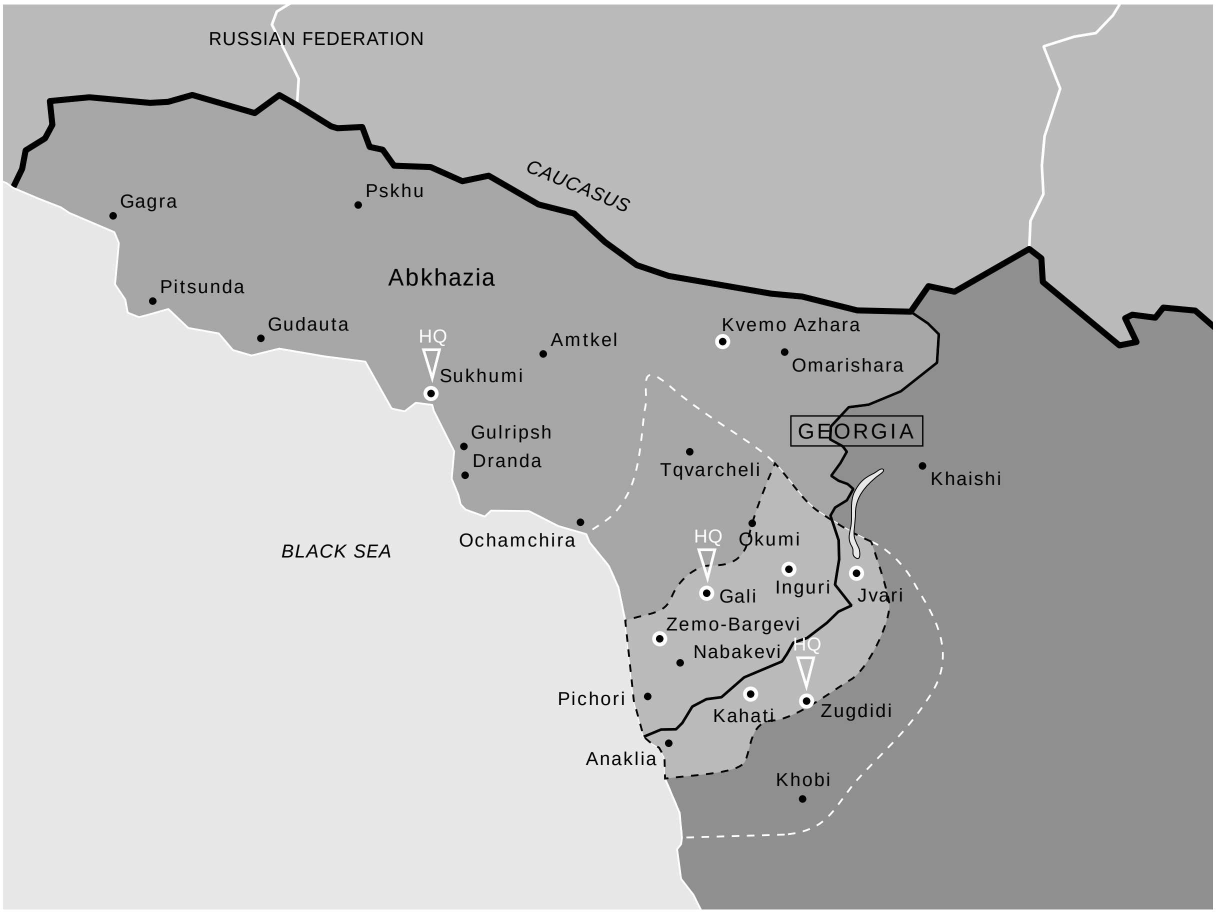
As demonstrated elsewhere, widespread small arms availability and use has deleterious consequences on human welfare, political and social stability, and the provision of humanitarian assistance (Small Arms Survey, 2001; Muggah and Berman, 2001; Muggah and Batchelor, 2001). In Georgia these impacts are most pronounced in the regions bordering the Abkhaz-Georgian cease-fire line, originally home to a majority ethnic Georgian population. In these areas, small arms catalyse and perpetuate instability and a range of interlocking threats to social, political, and economic security. A direct consequence is a high rate of casualties due to armed skirmishes, acts of sabotage, and criminal violence. Indirectly, small arms perpetuate cycles of displacement, prevent the provision of humanitarian and development assistance, obstruct access to basic social entitlements, and hamper economic activity.

The root of such insecurity is not merely the absence of a political settlement to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Rather, the lack of opportunities for economic growth serves both to perpetuate instability and to inhibit outside investment flows. Tragically, this vicious circle has not only created profitable and self-fuelling dynamics of armed violence, but has also obstructed political negotiations, for which a minimum degree of security is required for building confidence and trust. In order to highlight the magnitude of these problems, this part of section IV provides a discussion of the various dynamics and forms of insecurity in Abkhazia, the role of small arms therein, and their impacts.

Watching the no-man's land: The CISPKF and UNOMIG

Following the defeat of Georgian forces in Abkhazia in September 1993, a series of agreements were signed in May 1994 between the belligerents, Russia, and the UN on the principles for the political settlement of the conflict, provisions for the return of IDPs and refugees, the implementation of a cease-fire, and the separation of forces.[76] These 'Moscow Accords' also provided for the deployment of a CIS peacekeeping force (CISPKF) to monitor the observance of its terms,[77] and a UN observation mission (the UN Observation Mission in Georgia, UNOMIG) to monitor both adherence to the Accords and the activities of the CISPKF.[78] The two forces were stationed on both sides of the cease-fire line. CISPKF maintains approximately 1,800 troops deployed in checkpoints throughout demilitarized zone established by the Accords.[79] UNOMIG consists of approximately 100 unarmed military observers deployed in Sukhumi, Gali town, and Zugdidi town, from where they launch air, foot, and vehicle patrols in the demilitarized zone, as well as investigations of politically-motivated acts of violence. In the absence of a permanent resolution of the conflict, both forces are constrained to preserve the status quo within the demilitarized zone and prohibited from undertaking any direct action to influence activities or operations under their purview.[80]

Figure 7 Map of Abkhazia showing demilitarized zone and UNOMIG Sector HQs


RUSSIAN FEDERATION
CAUCASUS
Gagra
Pskhu
Pitsunda
Abkhazia
Gudauta
HQ
Sukhumi
Amtkel
Kvemo Azhara
Omarishara
GEORGIA
Gulripsh
Dranda
Tqvarcheli
Khaishi
Ochamchira
HQ
Okumi
BLACK SEA
Gali
Inguri
Jvari
Zemo-Bargevi
Nabakevi
HQ
Pichori
Kahati
Zugdidi
Anaklia
Khobi

Source: UNOMIG

The many faces of insecurity

Following the defeat of Georgian forces in Abkhazia in 1993, an estimated 250,000 people fled their homes and settled temporarily in major cities (such as Tbilisi and Kutaisi) or towns directly outside the cease-fire line (Zugdidi, Khobi, and Senaki). Since the signing of the Moscow Accords, a large proportion of the Gali population (an estimated 40,000–60,000 people) has attempted to return. The lack of security and effective law and order in the demilitarized zone, however, has rendered such ‘spontaneous return’ dangerous, with returnees leading a precarious existence deprived of most essential goods and services. In addition to the region of Gali, the region of Zugdidi is also extremely unstable and insecure (albeit to a lesser degree) due to its proximity to the cease-fire line. Based on UNOMIG security incidents data and a range of interviews with local inhabitants, officials, and international workers on both sides of the cease-fire line, three broad dynamics of insecurity can be identified. In practice, all three are interconnected and caused by the activities of groups such as Abkhaz militia and MVD forces, organized and ‘petty’ criminals, and Georgian partisan groups.[81]

Social insecurity. Since the end of hostilities in late 1993, little progress has been made in restoring some form of centralized authority in the regions adjoining the cease-fire line. Although institutions are weak throughout Georgia, the situation here is far worse due to the ravages of war and continuing instability. There are very few structures capable of providing basic services to local inhabitants, or mitigating the impact of criminal and political violence. In Gali region, the almost total absence of local administration—save in some areas where inhabitants have created informal organizations themselves—has been compounded by the presence of Abkhaz militia (MOD) and MVD troops (around 200–300 men). Lacking formal command structures, these groups, far from instilling trust in local populations or mitigating insecurity, prey on them for subsistence and undertake heavy-handed and ethnically discriminating reprisals. The absence of effective authority and the blatant misuse of policing authority by security forces has thus eroded social security in both the short term (immediate well-being) and the long term (access to basic social entitlements).

Economic insecurity. As in conflict frontier-zones in other parts of the world, the black-market trade thrives on, and serves to perpetuate, insecurity in Gali and Zugdidi regions. The lack of regulatory control has transformed the Sochi-Zugdidi road into a primary trade route for smuggled goods including petrol (which costs half the price in Russia), cigarettes, drugs, scrap metal, and weapons. Inevitably, this trade has been accompanied by the emergence of organized criminal groups consisting of the 'old mafias' from the Soviet era, smugglers (usually Abkhazians and Georgians), Georgian partisans (see below), and Abkhaz militia and customs officials.[82] These groups are often interlinked, with the result that Abkhaz and Georgians both within Abkhazia and across the cease-fire line work in tandem as organized cartels.[83] Goods smuggled from Russia and through Abkhazia end up in the Zugdidi market, which is reportedly controlled by Dato Shengalaia, leader of the Forest Brothers, a Georgian partisan group (see below).[84] In Gali, these criminal groups also dominate the market for locally-produced hazelnuts, mandarins, wood, and corn—primarily by extorting unofficial 'taxes' from returnees on cultivation, land, and transportation, or through organized protection rackets. Finally, in addition to organized crime, both Gali and Zugdidi suffer from the activities of petty criminals who take advantage of the lawless environment to rob, intimidate, and assault local producers—something which occurs on a smaller, but far more violent, scale. Taken together, these activities sap the economic livelihood of the local population by drastically reducing productivity and access to normal markets.

Political insecurity. Although combat activities officially ceased in 1993, small-scale military operations continue in Abkhazia, perpetrated by irregular Georgian 'partisan' groups, mainly the White Legion and the Forest Brothers, which attempt to prevent the consolidation of Abkhaz authority and keep the question of Abkhazia 'alive'. Although not officially supported by the Georgian government, these groups are often assumed to be operating with the complicity of the Georgian Ministries of Internal Affairs and State Security and the ethnically Georgian Abkhaz 'parliament in exile'.[85] Beginning with the return of IDPs to Gali region in 1995, these groups—numbering about 150–200 men each[86]—take advantage of the porous cease-fire line to infiltrate into Abkhazia and carry out attacks against Abkhaz or CISPKF installations, sabotage key infrastructures, and lay mines on key roads (UNSG, 1998c). These acts have on at least two occasions (May 1998 and October 2001) escalated into medium-size armed confrontations involving hundreds of men (UNSG, 1998a). Predictably, reprisals by Abkhaz authorities are heavy-handed (usually in the form of 'search and destroy' or 'sweep' operations) and target all Georgians in Gali indiscriminately—including IDPs who return on a seasonal basis to tend to their lands (UNSG, 1996a; 1996b). Finally, similar to Abkhaz forces, Georgian partisans depend on local Gali inhabitants for both sustenance and accommodation, and are often involved in criminal and smuggling activities to finance their activities and armaments.[87]

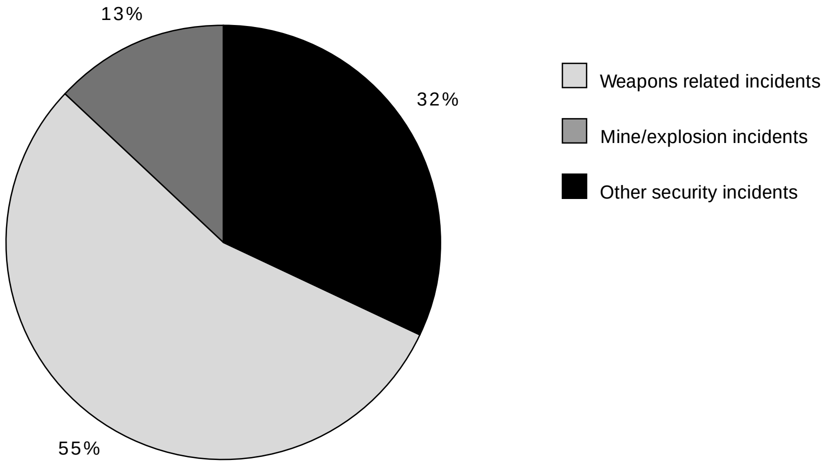
Small arms availability in Abkhazia

In Abkhazia and the surrounding regions, large quantities of military weapons remain in the possession of civilians and former combatants, reflecting the general pattern in Georgia as a whole.

According to UNOMIG, the civilian populations on both sides of the cease-fire line possess ‘large numbers of unauthorized weapons’, while police and militia are equipped with a wide range of weapons types, including Kalashnikov assault rifles, grenade launchers, and machine guns (UNSG, 1995).[88] Although current security conditions precluded an in-depth investigation of weapons distribution patterns, anecdotal estimates indicate that in Zugdidi, a Kalashnikov assault rifle is possessed by every two to three families,[89] while in Abkhazia every male household member is thought to have at one point possessed a weapon.[90] A large proportion of Abkhaz ex-combatants are thought to have acquired more than one weapon, some of which were either distributed to fellow combatants or surrendered during extensive weapons registration and collection operations undertaken by Abkhaz authorities following the end of the 1993–94 conflict.[91]

Moreover, according to the de facto Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, 2,000 military weapons have been confiscated from the civilian population and 5,000 registered.[92] Transfers of new weapons, not surprisingly, are small or negligible as the market is saturated. Instead, the bulk of the illegal armaments trade in Abkhazia concerns ammunition, which is scarce.[93] Taken together, testimonies provide a rough indication that weapons availability is high, correlating with the patterns and magnitude of proliferation in Georgia assessed earlier.

Figure 8 Weapons and non-weapons related security incidents, May 1997–April 2001



The direct effects of SALW availability and use in the demilitarized zone

The consequences of widespread weapons availability and use can be assessed in terms of their direct and indirect effects on well-being and security. Direct effects consist of the deaths and injuries caused by small arms and light weapons. Indirect effects refer to the *instrumentality* of small arms in causing, sustaining, or catalysing specific threats to political, social, and economic security, including armed criminality and other acts of violence, forced displacement, disruption of social services and economic productivity, societal dysfunction, and obstruction of humanitarian and development assistance. In the zone bordering the cease-fire line, widespread weapons availability has resulted in casualty rates approximating conflict conditions, and provided the tools for a particularly violent system of regulating social and economic conflicts.

Table 13. Typology of security incidents

Type of security incident	Freq.	Killed	Injured
Incidents involving SALW			
Ambush	76	95	88
Killing	52	77	22
Shooting	328	33	46
Attack	45	13	20
Theft	270	9	39
Abduction	85	1	176*
Violent assault	15	1	2
Hijacking	15		
Armed intimidation	20		
Total	**906**	**229**	**217**
Incidents involving mines/explosives			
Mine	139	53	143
Explosive	74	9	107
Total	**213**	**62**	**250**
Other security incidents			
Accident	29	12	24
Arson	11	3	
Operation	81	2	3
Arrest/detention	35	1	1
Blockade/demonstration	56		
CIS PKF Ops	11		
Patrol obstruction	5		
Release/exchange of hostages	19		
Vandalism	1		
Violation of Moscow Accords	273		
Total	**521**	**18**	**28**

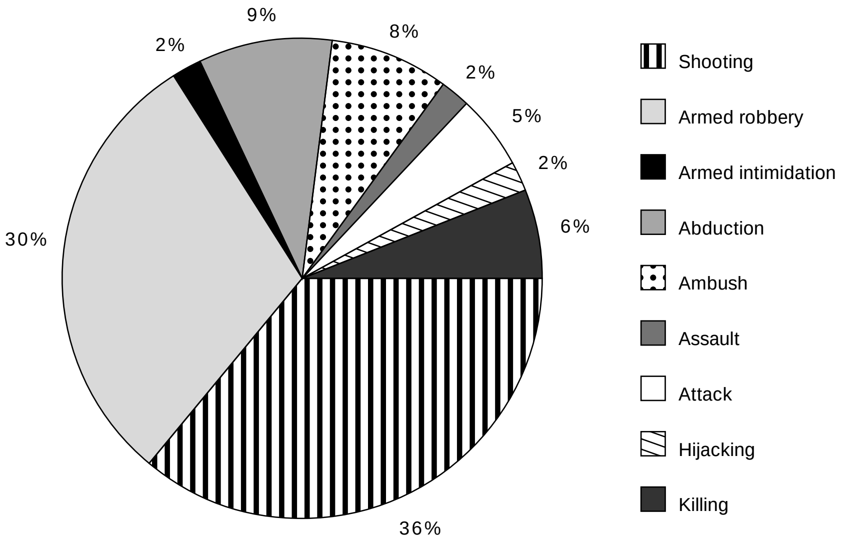
** denotes number of abductees*
Source: UNOMIG
N.B. Each incident can involve more than one individual.

According to data collected by UNOMIG patrols on a daily basis between May 1997 and April 2001, of a total of 1,640 recorded security incidents, 906 (or 55 per cent) involved small arms or light weapons, 213 (or 13 per cent) involved mines or other explosives, while 521 (or 32 per cent) did not involve weapons (see Figure 8). Given that most non-weapons related security incidents consisted of violations of the Moscow Accords, it can be inferred that small arms were critical in carrying out the vast majority of security incidents. Moreover, they had different impacts on different target groups (i.e. civilians, Abkhaz militia and MVD, CISPKF troops, and UNOMIG).

Of the category of security incidents involving small arms use, the most deadly—though not most prevalent—are organized **ambushes** of vehicles or groups of individuals. For the most part, the victims of such incidents were Abkhaz militia and MVD troops ambushed by Georgian partisan groups in Gali region. However, a significant proportion involved civilians (32 per cent of all fatalities) in economically motivated ambushes of mandarin or hazelnut harvests, or attacks motivated by personal animosities.

Killings (deadly attacks perpetrated against individuals, but not necessarily organized) resulted in the highest percentage of civilian casualties of all incident types (74 per cent of all fatalities). Such incidents reflected a variety of motives, including political assassinations, robbery attempts, personal animosities, and revenge.

Figure 9 Types of weapons-related incidents, by frequency



Source: UNOMIG

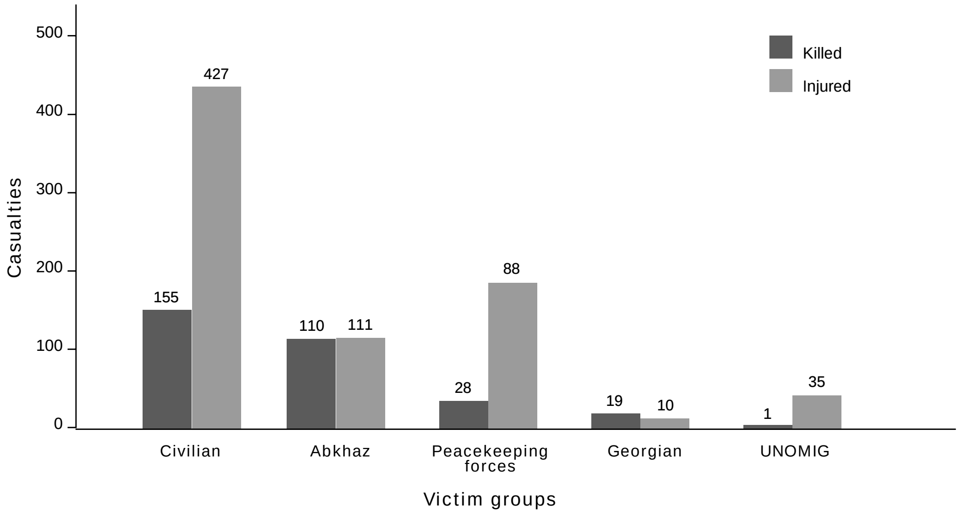
Shooting incidents constitute by far the most frequent type of security incident, and include all known reports of shooting in the vicinity of Abkhaz, Georgian, and CISPKF checkpoints, whether as part of an organized attack or simply random firing. They also include exchanges of gunfire between Abkhaz and Georgian positions across the cease-fire line. Civilians account for the highest number of injuries, but CISPKF have the highest number of fatalities due to attacks on their checkpoints. While shooting across the cease-fire line is politically motivated, other shooting incidents reflect predominantly the same motivation as killings.

Attacks include organized military operations on a small scale against military and civilian targets. The majority of incidents of this type were directed against Abkhaz militia and MVD forces by Georgian partisans, while the second highest casualty rate is civilian (31 per cent of fatalities), a consequence of Abkhaz militia and MVD retaliatory attacks.

Violent assaults, involving the threat of armed force in order to intimidate, threaten, rape or coerce, disproportionately affected civilians (67 per cent of all incidents).

Armed intimidation is mainly targeted UNOMIG and CISPKF officers, to force them to divert their patrols or prevent them from carrying out investigations.

Figure 10 Casualties by victim group, May 1997–April 2001



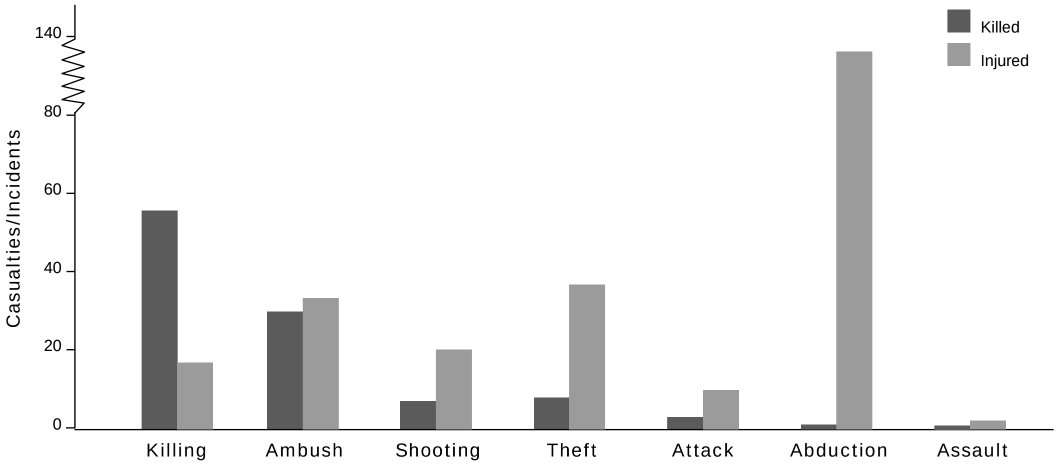
Source: UNOMIG

Abductions disproportionately target civilians (78 per cent of all victims) and involve a variety of motives, including political (some are high-ranking officials or powerful figures), economic (ransom), retaliation, or revenge, and forced drafting into the Abkhaz militia. UNOMIG observers have also been targeted in a series of high-profile abductions.

Armed robberies constitute the second most frequent type of security incident, disproportionately targeting civilians (75 per cent of all cases). Most cases of armed robbery target the hazelnut and mandarin harvest, as well as the transportation of petrol to Georgia. Cases of armed robbery are perpetrated by both organized criminal groups and petty criminals.

Finally, hijackings, which predominantly affect civilians, are targeted at the theft of vehicles, most often buses.

Figure 11 Casualties by type of incident, May 1997–April 2001

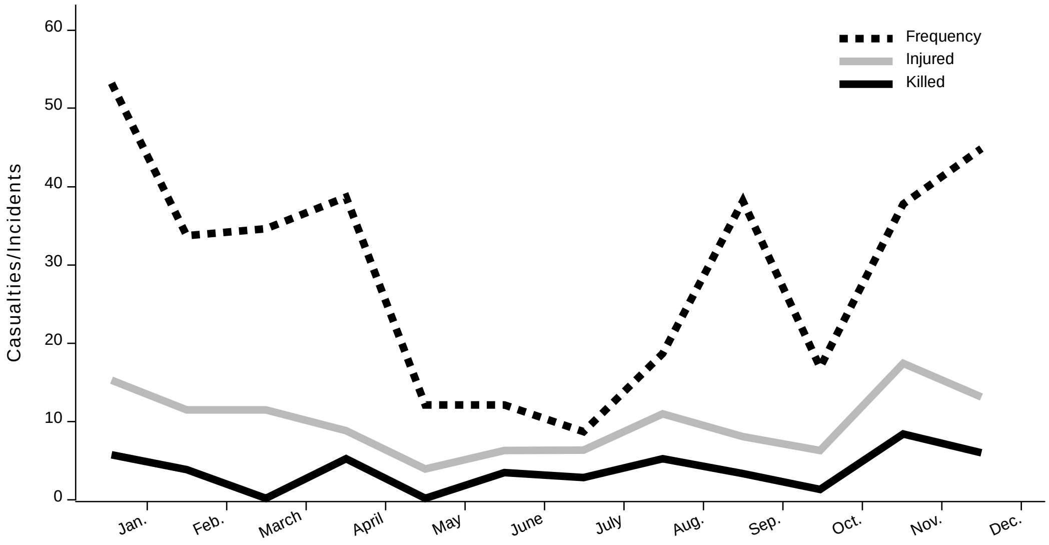


Source: UNOMIG

In terms of overall frequency, and as illustrated in Figure 9, shooting incidents constitute by far the most prevalent type of security incident (36 per cent), with armed robberies at a close second (30 per cent). Killings and ambushes, however, despite their relatively low frequency (six per cent and eight per cent, respectively) resulted in a disproportionately high level of casualties. Such figures reveal a highly unstable security environment, in which the majority of casualties are caused by organized and targeted operations. In total, violent security incidents result in an average of 60 deaths per year, yielding a rate of 120 deaths per 100,000 people. This figure is extremely high, even when compared with reputedly violent countries such as Brazil (25/100,000), Kenya (10–15/100,000), Colombia (50/100,000) and the southern Colombian region of Putamayo (180/100,000), arguably the most violent region in the world (Muggah and Batchelor, 2001). Most violent incidents occur in Gali region (268 deaths and 67 per cent of all incidents) as opposed to Zugdidi region (98 deaths and 29 per cent of all incidents).[94] Finally, when broken down demographically, incidence data reveals that half the fatalities are civilian, followed by Abkhaz militia and MVD (36 per cent), CISPKF, Georgian partisans, and UNOMIG (see Figure 10).[95]

Civilians are most directly affected by organized killings (more than half of the total civilian fatalities) which, as has been described previously, are usually related to economic, political, or social reasons. The second most fatal form of insecurity are economically motivated ambushes of civilians on roads (robbing of harvests). There is a direct link between ambushes and armed robberies which illustrates the seasonal cycles of violence and insecurity affecting civilians. As illustrated in Figure 12, the frequency and lethality of ambushes and armed robbery follow patterns in the agricultural cycle, with most incidents occurring during the harvest season for hazelnuts, mandarins (September–December) and the corn/wood gathering season (until the spring). Finally, civilians are also the main victims of abduction, again usually for economic reasons and due to the fact that they constitute the easiest targets.

Figure 12 Ambushes and armed robberies targeting civilians, cumulative totals for 1997–2001



Source: UNOMIG

The indirect effects of SALW availability and use in the demilitarized zone

Among the civilian population of Gali, the cumulative indirect effect of high rates of violent insecurity is recurring cycles of displacement and return, lack of access to basic entitlements, obstacles to economic productivity, and lack of humanitarian and development assistance.

With respect to displacement, the population of Gali is impeded from permanently resettling in the area owing to the continuing low-level insurgency being waged by Georgian paramilitary forces, and the constant risk of retaliatory and indiscriminate actions of Abkhaz militia and MVD forces (Dale, 1997). To date, approximately 40,000 IDPs (out of an original population of 89,000)[96] are semi-permanently settled in the lower parts of Gali (the northern part being considered too far from the cease-fire line and hence dangerous), with most returning only for planting and harvest. In addition to the constant risk of abduction, armed intimidation, and armed assault and robbery, which inhibits permanent resettlement, occasional flare-ups in fighting between Abkhaz and Georgian partisan forces continue to trigger waves of displacement. During the fighting in Gali in May 1998, for instance, 40,000 people once more fled across the Inguri river, while an estimated 1,500 homes were destroyed in the region (UNSG, 1998b).

Recurring waves of violence, together with displacement, have drastically reduced access to key basic entitlements such as education and health. It has also prevented the reconstruction of key infrastructures destroyed by war, the resuming of basic services (such as electricity, water, and gas), and even the creation of necessary administrative structures through which such initiatives could be planned and implemented. This situation is, moreover, compounded by the discriminatory attitude of Abkhaz authorities towards Georgian inhabitants. Finally, the need to constantly react to short-term changes in the security environment and remain mobile means that most of the population are incapable of long-term planning and investment.

High rates of armed violence in Gali also negatively affect economic productivity by increasing uncertainty (in terms of both lack of market information and access) and disrupting the modalities of both production and trade through armed robberies and intimidation. As a result, economic activity is erratic and subject to sudden declines. Moreover, the dominance of organized criminal groups in the economic life of the region has established a controlled market system that is highly disadvantageous for the local population. Extortion—in the form of a variety of 'taxes' on production and transport—sap the resources of local farmers. The various protection rackets offered by criminal groups, and accepted by the local populations in the absence of centralized law and order, also divert important resources from economic activity. All this—against a backdrop of constant 'petty' criminal activity that preys on the economic activities of local populations—has drastically reduced the social and economic welfare of the Gali population, keeping them one step away from starvation.

Although international organizations and expatriates are rarely directly targeted in Gali, prevailing security conditions (in particular mines and armed violence) considerably restrict the scope for humanitarian and development intervention. The few organizations that are active in Abkhazia—in particular the ICRC, MSF, and the HALO Trust—do not directly operate in Gali region due to perceptions of high security threats. The only international presence in this region is UNOMIG, which is able to operate by virtue of stringent security measures including the use of armoured vehicles for patrolling, curfews, escorts to all destinations in Gali town, and a heavily guarded headquarters. Security incidents affecting expatriates can be divided into three groups: politically motivated abductions (UNOMIG, for instance, experienced six abduction incidents between 1997 and 2001); criminally motivated ambushes; and armed robbery (the most prevalent type of security incident). CISPKF forces, who are armed and are reported to have become involved in local smuggling activities, are repeatedly targeted by ambushes, assaults, and attacks, and have as a result lost approximately 90 peacekeepers since 1994.[97] As a result of a weak international presence, little humanitarian and development assistance has reached Abkhazia. The last engagement of the development in community took place in early 1998, when a UNDP-led mission undertook a mission to assess development needs in Abkhazia. The initiative, however, was suspended following the outbreak of fighting in 1998, and since then there have been no further attempts in this regard. Tragically, this neglect further serves to perpetuate current conditions.[98]

Small arms, the Abkhaz-Georgian peace process, and the South Ossetian precedent

The intractability of the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict is due to a complex constellation of political, historical, ethnic, and economic factors that defy easy explanation. At the level of current peace negotiations, however, two main factors explain why talks have been deadlocked for years. The first concerns the inability of all parties to agree on a political formula for the settlement of the conflict. The Abkhaz maintain their demand for a 'union' of sovereign states, while the Georgians insist on a confederal—but ultimately unitary—structure. Perhaps more importantly, however, local conditions in the vicinity of the cease-fire line prevent the emergence of certain guarantees and measures that could increase grassroots co-operation and confidence building, and ultimately translate into greater tolerance and room for compromise at the level of the peace negotiations. In this context, the inability of Abkhaz authorities to provide solid security guarantees for returning IDPs—a requirement of the Moscow Accords—is a major sticking point. Moreover, the profitability of organized criminal and smuggling activities in the region, and the involvement of important state actors therein, makes the Georgian government apparatus (and especially the security agencies) less disposed to engage in a process of gradual and piecemeal reconciliation, preferring instead to capitalize on the situation. In the absence of a political and international commitment to remove the principal causes of insecurity in Abkhazia, political negotiations continue to founder on mutual animosity and distrust.

The widespread availability and use of small arms and light weapons in this context is key in fuelling the myriad forms of insecurity discussed previously. It is also, however, a potential avenue for addressing political problems. In South Ossetia the Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPKF), deployed following the cease-fire in 1993, has launched a limited weapons collection project with the assistance of the OSCE and EU that has had a noticeable impact on reducing insecurity and building confidence among the divided populations. Since early 2000, the JPKF has collected approximately 900 small arms, light weapons, missiles and explosives by using local peacekeepers (for instance, the Georgian battalion in Georgian-populated areas) and authorities to persuade local communities to surrender their weapons.[99] Although collection results are not high in comparison with other voluntary weapons surrender programmes, the Ossetian case is notable due to its dependence not on an exchange of goods for weapons but rather on the trust and goodwill of the local communities. In the process, roughly equal amounts of weapons have been collected from Georgian and Ossetian communities, including ethnically mixed villages that have long been sources of tension.[100] According to Ossetians, Georgians, and JPKF and OSCE officials, locals trust the authority and protection of the JPKF, which in turn serves as the principal interlocutor between communities.[101] Although the South Ossetian conflict is far from being resolved, the collection of weapons is catalysing a process where a bridge between the two communities is slowly but surely being built in the form of the JPKF. By surrendering their weapons, both Georgians and Ossetians thus signify their increasing readiness to look beyond weapons and immediate self-defence and to explore alternative avenues for durable livelihoods and existence not premised on mutual hostility.

Table 14. Stages in the collection of weapons in South Ossetia

In South Ossetia, Georgian, Russian and Ossetian JPKF battalions work closely with local police and administrative authorities to persuade local communities to surrender their weapons.
Several steps are involved in this process:

1. Public awareness/sensitization campaign utilizing print and broadcast media, and involving JPKF, local authorities, and community representatives.
2. Organization of meetings with local leaders and representatives of villages and districts to discuss weapons collection and identify collection sites.
3. Analysis of suggestions and observations from both Georgian and Ossetian community representatives; collation of information.
4. JPKF Commander meets with heads of local administration to present collection plan and schedule.
5. Definition of weapons collection procedures.
6. Weapons collection at agreed-upon sites, involving JPKF, police and local community representatives.
7. Destruction of weapons, preceded by ceremony involving JPKF, Georgian and Ossetian representatives, and representatives of international organizations.

Source: JPKF Commander

V. Conclusion

This study has attempted to assess the role of small arms proliferation, availability, and use in Georgia over the past ten years, and to highlight its deleterious consequences for the evolution of the conflicts in the early 1990s and social and political stability and reconstruction in the post-conflict period. The evidence collected, analysed, and interpreted in this respect shows that, unfortunately, Georgia is an excellent laboratory for studying the complex and multi-dimensional impacts of small arms.

Small arms proliferation and conflict

Viewed from the perspective of small arms proliferation, Georgia is an anomaly compared with most other contemporary conflict zones because the vast majority of weapons obtained by non-state groups originated in domestic stockpiles. To a certain extent, this is due to the unique conditions of Soviet collapse, where significant amounts of Soviet military forces and equipment were suddenly transformed into alien assets in foreign countries. The consequent 'mass haemorrhaging' of weapons in Georgia, however, clearly draws attention to the role of weapons stockpiles in fuelling conflicts primarily fought between irregular armed groups, and in contexts where there has been a widespread disintegration of law and order. Three main factors are important here.

To begin with, the mass leakage of weapons from military stockpiles, and their effect in transforming the scale and lethality of conflicts in Georgia, reveals clear connections between supply, demand, and the nature of conflict. In contrast to conventional analyses of weapons proliferation that treat supply and demand of weapons separately, the Georgian case illustrates how supply can transform the very contours of conflict, and hence affect patterns of demand for weapons. The sudden availability of weapons in late 1991 drastically altered the dynamics of political interaction and competition, leading to the militarization of politics, the narrowing of negotiating space, and the recourse to force to settle disputes. Moreover, widespread weapons availability increased the organization and scale of military action, thus rendering it a viable instrument to achieve political results.

Despite its uniqueness, the Georgian case also highlights the importance of stockpile management and control as a conflict prevention measure per se. Had Soviet-era stockpiles been kept securely under lock and key, it is questionable whether the conflicts—and the history of present-day Georgia—would have evolved in the same way. In contexts where law and order are on the verge of disintegrating, national and international actors have a responsibility to ensure that weapons stockpiles do not fall into the wrong hands and are used to pursue narrow interest-based armed violence.

Finally, the Georgian case also highlights how, in addition to a military instrument, small arms proliferation and transfers can be used for political ends. By providing all belligerents with ample stocks of weapons, Russian interests at different levels successfully manipulated the perceptions and motivations of all parties, and achieved a primary political goal: the retention of Georgia within its sphere of influence. Although not all cases of 'manipulated' small arms leakages are motivated by the dictates of divide-and-rule policy, Russian actions in this regard illustrate the complex—and central—ways in which small arms can form part of much larger political and strategic questions.

Small arms availability and use in post-conflict contexts

The widespread availability of small arms in Georgia highlights a phenomenon common to most countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia. The collapse of Soviet structures and the subsequent withdrawal of military forces and *matériel* from border posts occurred in a context of drastic economic decline and disintegrating capacity of administrative and security structures to maintain law and order. As a result, the new states of the FSU possess little control over illicit goods that pass over their borders and through their territories. Consequently, and as continued weapons proliferation within and from Georgia indicates, weapons are easily re-transferred to other conflict zones. The illicit trade this inevitably engenders fuels a vicious circle whereby the actors best-suited to profit from such conditions—political, economic, and criminal strongmen—do so to the detriment of the regulatory control of state institutions. This is clearly highlighted in the area of the Pankisi valley, where local authorities, although formally charged with keeping weapons and armed men from crossing into and out of Georgia, do the exact opposite. In this context, state authority and criminal activity in the illicit trade are indistinguishable.

In Georgia, as in other countries of the FSU, tackling the illicit trade in small arms—as well as other illegal commodities—should be a priority, together with the reinforcement of state regulatory capacities of both border forces and police. To date, Georgia possesses a robust arms control system on paper, and is party to a range of regional and international initiatives that, inter alia, focus on preventing weapons proliferation. The challenge is to transform these concepts, ideas, and legal precepts into practice. The impoverishment of Georgian state structures, and pervasive corruption at all levels of the administrative hierarchy, however, make this unlikely. Outside assistance also remains minimal.

Small arms proliferation also has had effects on human security, sustainable development, and the peace negotiations over both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As the case study of Abkhazia illustrated, widespread weapons availability, together with social, economic, and political insecurity, not only produce high casualty rates but also creates a climate detrimental to economic productivity, access to basic entitlements, and the provision of humanitarian and development assistance. Small arms and light weapons permit criminal elements—both organized and unorganized—to establish coercive and exploitative economic systems that sap the livelihood of local populations, and perpetuate a climate of fear and terror that is hardly conducive to long-term investment in the future and social co-operation. At the political level, widespread violence and the criminal structures encrusted upon these zones are formidable obstacles to the creation of a space for dialogue within the peace negotiations. Security, as a necessary precondition of trust, confidence building, and eventually compromise, cannot be guaranteed so long as small arms continue to remain an accessible and destabilizing factor in society.

The tragedy of Abkhazia also lies in international neglect, however. Poverty and lack of opportunities are the fundamental elements upon which all forms of insecurity are based. Outside investment—whether in the form of development activities, weapons collection, or even training—would have a drastic impact on the dynamics at work in Abkhazia. What is needed is a better understanding of the causes and nature of insecurity, the ability to manage risks on the part of the international community, and the will to ensure that the process of implosion which started with the collapse of the Communist system should not be allowed to run its course in post-Soviet societies.

Endnotes

[1] Zverev (1996), citing Valeri Simonov, former Chief of Intelligence of the 19th Independent Anti-Aircraft Army stationed in Georgia.

[2] Interview with Sergei Shamba, de facto foreign minister of Abkhazia, Sukhumi, 5 May 2001.

[3] Casualty estimates in the Abkhazian conflict stand at 3,000 Abkhaz and 5,000 Georgian combatants killed, and up to 20,000 civilians killed (Aves, 1996, p. 27; Slider, 1997, p. 172).

[4] According to Colonel General Yu. Shatalin, commander of the Soviet MVD troops in Abkhazia, during these riots, which involved 250–300 people on each side, a reported 56 Kalashnikov assault rifles, 40 pistols, and three sub-machine guns were either looted or distributed from local police stations. Moreover, according to him, 8 police stations and two hunting-equipment stores were robbed (accounting for 1,441 firearms) in western Georgia as a whole during this time (cited in Arsenyev, 1989b).

[5] Interview with GDF Deputy Director, Tbilisi, 17 February 2001.

[6] Interview with GDF Deputy Director, Tbilisi, 1 February 2001.

[7] Interview with GDF Deputy Director, Tbilisi, 1 April 2001.

[8] Interview with GDF Deputy Director, Tbilisi, 10 March 2001. According to him, most of the armed formations from western Georgia were armed with Mosin rifles.

[9] This is further corroborated by the newspaper *Izvestia,* which estimated that approximately 10–30 per cent of the members of armed groups were armed (Kochetkov, 1990).

[10] According to a statement issued by the Chief of the Press-Center of the GRVZ in October 1993, Georgia had not received its allotted portion of Soviet military property, or any armaments from Russian army forces, since 1992. Cited in the *Georgian Chronicle* (October 1993).

[11] Interview with GDF Deputy Director, Tbilisi, 1 February 2001. See also Darchiashvili (1997b), who backs up these assertions from numerous interviews with individuals involved in the December 1991 fighting.

[12] According to Tengiz Gogotishvili (interview, 20.4.2001), Kalashnikov assault rifles sold for USD 200–300, Makarov PM pistols for USD 800, and armoured vehicles (BTRs) for USD 5,000–8,000.

[13] Information from GDF Deputy Director, 10 March 2001.

[14] During 1992–93, the GRVZ was reduced from 100,000 to 30,000 men (Berryman, 2000, p. 90).

[15] See Mukhin (1992).

[16] According to official government data printed by Georgian media, 10,265 assault rifles and machine guns (out of a total of 152,290) were ceded to Georgia by Russian military forces following the signing of the Tashkent Treaty. See *Army and Society* (April 1998).

[17] Information from Tengiz Gogotishvili (interview, 20 April 2001) and National Guard Archives (GDF, 2001). GDF Deputy Director estimates that approximately 80 per cent of the weapons obtained by the National Guard during this time originated in the Akhalkalaki military base.

[18] Interview with Irakli Aladashvili, military journalist and formerly head of the press centre of the Georgian internal troops, Tbilisi, 7 February 2001.

[19] Interview with GDF Deputy Director, Tbilisi, 17 February 2001. According to him, the Lagodekhi base was a major transit point for weapons en route from the Soviet Union to Afghanistan, and contained both Soviet and foreign weapons types.

[20] Interview with GDF Deputy Director, Tbilisi, 17 February 2001.

[21] Interview with GDF Deputy Director, Tbilisi, 1 April 2001.

[22] Testimony of Vitali Chari, an Abkhaz journalist, cited in ‘Information on the Participation of Official Structures of the Russian Federation in the Abkhaz Conflict’, Classified Memorandum of the Georgian Government, dated 14 November 1996. Document in the possession of the Small Arms Survey.

[23] Interview with Irakli Aladashvili, 7 February 2001.

[24] Kozhokin (1996), citing the testimony of Valeri Simonov, former Chief of Intelligence of the 19th Independent Anti-Aircraft Army stationed in Georgia. See also Berryman (2000, p. 90).

[25] These documents, signed by GDF, National Guard, and Russian officers, include receipts for purchases of weapons and ammunition dated 23, 29, and 30 March 1993. Document in the possession of the Small Arms Survey.

[26] Procurement request from the Georgian Ministry of Defence for a range of weapon and ammunition types, signed 15 March 1993. This document contains hand-written instructions that some of the weapons listed, including 82 and 120mm mortars, and PTUR 'fagot' anti-tank missiles, were to be obtained from ZakVO sources due to their availability. Document in the possession of the Small Arms Survey.

[27] One of these documents, for instance, is signed by two Russian majors based at the General Staff HQ of the GRVZ in Tbilisi (signed 29 March 1993). Similarly, the Russian price list of weapons detailed in Table 4 allegedly was drawn up by Deputy Commander of the GRVZ himself and intended to supply Georgian troops in Abkhazia in 1994 (which, due to the fall of Sukhumi in September 1993, never materialized).

[28] 'Information on the Participation of Official Structures of the Russian Federation in the Abkhaz Conflict', Classified Memorandum of the Georgian Government, dated 14 November 1996. Document in the possession of the Small Arms Survey.

[29] See also Lev Rokhlin (undated).

[30] Interview with GDF Deputy Director, based on his direct involvement in several such transactions as procurement agent for the National Guard paramilitary group, Tbilisi, 22 February 2001. Evidence of this trade is represented in two price-lists obtained by the Georgian Defence Foundation from Azeri and Armenian dealers (in the possession of the Small Arms Survey) which provide a detailed breakdown of weapons types available.

[31] The small size of weapons transactions is attributable to the Azeri and Armenian intermediaries who feared possible disruptions, robbery, and non-payment by their clients.

[32] In another example, the GDF Deputy Director was assured that within two to three days (and with appropriate security guarantees) Azeri dealers could easily procure 20 Kalashnikov assault rifles, 10 RPG-7s, 200 rounds of RPG-7 ammunition, 100,000 rounds of Kalashnikov ammunition, 200 hand grenades, 1,000 kilos of plastic explosive, 2,000 kilos of 'Trotel' explosive, 100 detonators (with trip-wires), 200 flares, and 100 mines (GDF, 1993).

[33] Personal recollections of the GDF Deputy Director, Tbilisi, 22 February 2001.

[34] Personal recollections of the GDF Deputy Director, Tbilisi, 22 February 2001.

[35] Interview with GDF Deputy Director, Tbilisi, 1 April 2001.

[36] Interview with Tengiz Gogotishvili, military journalist, Tbilisi, 20 April 2001.

[37] Interview with GDF Deputy Director, Tbilisi, 17 February 2001.

[38] Weapons prices based on research conducted by GDF Deputy Director for this study, and which consisted of personal recollections, GDF archival documents, interviews with other former weapons dealers, and current street prices. The full list of prices obtained in this manner can be found in Table 11.

[39] Interview with a resident of Tbilisi, 15 April 2001.

[40] Interview with the Deputy Director of the GDF, Tbilisi, 15 April 2001.

[41] Information from GDF Deputy Director, 2001

[42] Information from GDF Deputy Director, 2001

[43] Despite the requirements of military operations, many weapons obtained outside formal procurement channels usually remain concentrated near the original source. For a description of this phenomenon in the Republic of Congo, see Demetriou, Muggah, and Biddle (2001).

[44] An example of this is the 'feeding frenzy' that occurred upon the closure of the Lagodekhi base in late 1992. Although a significant portion of the stockpile was given to the National Guard, many weapons were distributed freely to local traders and weapons dealers linked to local authorities, who then sold the weapons on the black market (GDF 1993).

[45] In the Republic of Congo, for instance, militia leaders purchased far more weapons than men, both to stem continual leakage of weapons and to create additional armed units. For an in-depth treatment of high weapons-to-men ratios in irregular armed formations in the Republic of Congo, see Demetriou, Muggah, and Biddle (2001).

[46] Interview with group of Mkhedrioni ex-combatants, 20 January 2001.

[47] Interview with Tengiz Gogotishvili, Tbilisi, 20 April 2001.

[48] The Mkhedrioni were later reconstituted following the December 1991 coup against Gamsakhurdia (see below).

[49] Interview with General Djemal Tchumburidze, National Guard commander, by Koba Liklikadze, reprinted in Center for Civil-Military Relations and Security Studies/Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (September 1999).

[50] Information from GDF.

[51] Liklikadze (1999). The true number was probably considerably lower, given the lack of a formal command and control hierarchy, and the fact that, as an irregular force, most members joined and left at will.

[52] National Guard battalions, despite their designation, rarely numbered more than 120 combatants, with 80 men being the norm (the average size of a battalion in regular armies is between 500 and 1,000 men). Information from Aladashvili (2001).

[53] Interview with GDF deputy director, Tbilisi, 1 April 2001.

[54] This is clearly evident in the following comparison of food distribution infrastructures between the National Guard and the Mkhedrioni (although the author presents the former as 'regular troops' and the latter as a paramilitary, it is clear, as stated earlier, that there was little difference between the two as far as their relations to formal state structures were concerned): 'The regular troops looked like poor orphans, if compared with, say, Mkhedrioni. It seems that paramilitary units managed to perfect their "black" supply system. While official battalions used their "confiscation" methods spontaneously and occasionally, paramilitary units created a system that was more centralised and quite stable. They had permanent partner enterprises, farms, private companies and even banks, which financed them. In fact, the system created by certain paramilitary units managed to succeed where the MOD failed—it maintained stable and sufficient food supplies to the armed forces throughout the war' (Zaza, 1998).

[55] In October 1992 the KGNK was renamed Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus (KNK). All subsequent references to this organization use the latter appellation.

[56] Interview with residents of Tskhinvali, South Ossetia, April 2001; Interview with GDF Deputy Director, Tbilisi, 1 February 2001.

[57] Interview with an ethnic Georgian former combatant in the South Ossetian conflict, Tbilisi, 18 April 2001.

[58] Notably the Russian bases in Akhalkalaki, Vaziani (near Tbilisi), Batumi (in Ajaria), and Guduata (in Abkhazia).

[59] In particular, see the series of reports published by the International Committee of the Red Cross (1999).

[60] Incidents of reported criminal offences, for instance, dropped from 3,638 (reportedly an all-time high for Georgia) in December 1993 to approximately 1,000 cases in December 1994 (Georgian Chronicle, December 1993–December 1994).

[61] See Pirtskhalaishvili (2001) for a description of the various amendments to the Law on Firearms.

[62] Text of the *Law of the Republic of Georgia on Firearms of 15 March 1994.*

[63] Text of the *Law on Control Over the Export of Arms, Military Equipment and Dual-Use Products of 28 April 1998.*

[64] In all likelihood actual supply of weapons (i.e. weapons available for sale on the black market) did contract, but the degree to which this occurred was negligible relative to the decline in demand. In this scenario, rapidly decreasing demand would obscure a drop in absolute supply of such weapon types.

[65] For evidence of the presence of Chechen combatants in the Pankisi Gorge, see *RFE/RL Newsline* (1 December 2000) and *Reuters* (22 October 2000).

[66] According to knowlegeable sources, the General Prosecutor of Georgia is allegedly deeply involved in the illicit trade in weapons flowing across the security zone and into Chechnya.

[67] Information from GDF Deputy Director, based on his knowledge of the illegal trade in Tskhinvali.

[68] The Istanbul decision of November 1999 included among its provisions the closure of the Gudauta and Vaziani bases by no later than 1 July 2001, and the finalization of the decision to close the remaining two bases (Batumi and Akhalkalaki) during 2000. For the text of the Joint Russian-Georgian Communiqué announcing this decision, see *Army and Society* (November 1999).

[69] Several salesmen interviewed at the Sadachlo market acknowledged the existence of a strong market in weapons which, like all other goods being sold illegally, are under the close scrutiny of local police officials. Interviews with market salesmen, Sadachlo, 25 March 2001.

[70] The informal sector in Georgia, by one estimate, accounts for 35 per cent of all economic activity, and in many places dwarfs the size of the formal sector (UNDP, 2000, pp. 67–8).

[71] Interview with the Head of the Disarmament and Arms Control Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tbilisi, 6 February 2001.

[72] According to Giorgi Gachechiladze, the head of the Georgian Green Party, only 30 per cent of fuel and 20 per cent of wheat and flour supplies are legally imported into the country, while the total value of goods crossing illegally into South Ossetia from Russia amounts to approximately 1 USD million a day. Cited in *Caucasus Press* (20 March 2001).

[73] The Georgian-Armenian border near the town of Sadachlo is notable for the fact that a massive market spreads over both sides of the border. Transit from one side to the other is almost completely unimpeded.

[74] Interview with the Head of the Disarmament and Arms Control Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tbilisi, 6 February 2001.

[75] Interviews with the Head of the Press Division, Ministry of Defence, Tbilisi, 15 February 2001, and Head of the NATO Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tbilisi, 23 February 2001.

[76] These are the *Declaration on measures for a political settlement of the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict, 4 April 1994, Quadripartite agreement on voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons, 4 April 1994,* and *Agreement on a cease-fire and separation of forces, Moscow 14 May 1994.*

[77] Specifically, 'the function of the peacekeeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States shall be to exert its best efforts to maintain the ceasefire and to see that it is scrupulously observed. Further, its presence should promote the safe return of refugees and displaced persons, especially to the Gali region. It shall supervise the implementation of the Agreement and the Protocol thereto with regard to the security zone and the restricted-weapons zone' (*Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces,* 14 May 1994).

[78] Specifically, UNOMIG was mandated to '(a) To monitor and verify the implementation by the parties of the Agreement on a Cease-fire and Separation of Forces signed in Moscow on 14 May 1994; (b) To observe the operation of the CIS peace-keeping force within the framework of the implementation of the Agreement; (c) To verify, through observation and patrolling, that troops of the parties do not remain in or re-enter the security zone and that heavy military equipment does not remain or is not reintroduced in the security zone or the restricted weapons zone; (d) To monitor the storage areas for heavy military equipment withdrawn from the security zone and the restricted weapons zone in cooperation with the CIS peacekeeping force as appropriate; (e) To monitor the withdrawal of troops of the Republic of Georgia from the Kodori valley to places beyond the boundaries of Abkhazia, Republic of Georgia; (f) To patrol regularly the Kodori valley; (g) To investigate, at the request of either party or the CIS peacekeeping force or on its own initiative, reported or alleged violations of the Agreement and to attempt to resolve or contribute to the resolution of such incidents; (h) To report regularly to the Secretary-General within its mandate, in particular on the implementation of the Agreement, any violations and their investigation by UNOMIG, as well as other relevant developments; (i) To maintain close contacts with both parties to the conflict and to co-operate with the CIS peacekeeping force and, by its presence in the area, to contribute to conditions conducive to the safe and orderly return of refugees and displaced persons' (UNSC Resolution 937, 21 July 1994).

[79] As illustrated in Figure 7, the demilitarized zone is comprised of a 'security zone' extending 12km north and south of the Inguri river (the CFL), and in which no troops (save police) or heavy equipment are permitted; and a 'restricted weapons zone' extending another 12km outside the security zone, in which no heavy weapons are permitted.

[80] Despite having a more 'robust' mandate (maintaining the cease-fire as opposed to simply monitoring it), the CISPKF has in practice been just as limited as UNOMIG in affecting developments on the ground.

[81] Interview with Joint Fact Finding Group Officer, UNOMIG, Sukhumi HQ, 3 May 2001.

[82] Interview with Military Information Officer, UNOMIG, Gali Sector HQ, 5 May 2001.

[83] Interview with Chief Security Officer, UNOMIG, Gali Sector HQ, 5 May 2001.

[84] Interview with Military Information Officer

[85] This is reflected in several UNOMIG observation reports that reveal that several Georgian partisans captured or killed by Abkhaz forces possessed MIA or police credentials.

[86] Information from GDF Deputy Director.

[87] Interview with Joint Fact Finding Group Officer

[88] To be precise, these include AK-47s, AK-74s, AKMs, RPGs (7, 18, 25), SVD sniper rifles, PK machine guns, and PG under-barrel grenade launchers. Interview with Military Information Officer.

[89] Not including hunting weapons. Interview with the Deputy Commanding Officer, UNOMIG Zugdidi Sector HQ, 6 May 2001.

[90] Interview with the de facto Abkhaz Deputy Foreign Minister, Sukhumi, 30 April 2001.

[91] Interview with an Abkhaz ex-combatant, Sukhumi, 30 April 2001.

[92] Interview with the de facto Abkhaz Deputy Minister of Interior, Sukhumi, 3 May 2001.

[93] Interview with UNOMIG Military Information Officer.

[94] The rest of the recorded violent security incidents occurred in Sukhumi, Kodori gorge (Abkhazia), and on the CFL.

[95] Although not included in this data-set, CISPKF has lost approximately 90 men since the deployment of the mission in 1994, constituting by far the highest fatality rate among the expatriate population.

[96] UNCHR IDP statistics by regions of origin, received April 2001.

[97] Interview with Deputy Chief Military Observer, UNOMIG Sukhumi HQ, 2 May 2001.

[98] Interview with the Chief Military Observer, UNOMIG Sukhumi HQ, 3 May 2001.

[99] The JPKF is composed of a Russian battalion consisting of 451 men, a Georgian battalion consisting of 197 men, and an Ossetian battalion consisting of 451 men. Its primary functions are to control the situation and prevent further outbreaks of violence, which are accomplished via a system of checkpoints and mobile patrols in the areas of fighting.

[100] Documents on JPKF weapons collection results, received 12 April 2001.

[101] Interviews with local Georgian and Ossetian residents, Tskhinvali, 10-12 April 2001 ; interview with General Tchuraev, Commander of the JPKF, Tskhinvali, 11 April 2001 ; interview with OSCE Military Liaison Officer, Tskhinvali, 11 April 2001.

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