

## **GEORGIA: ASSESSMENT OF A DISASTROUS MILITARY ADVENTURE**

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On the evening of August 7, when the whole world was preparing to direct its attention to Beijing for the opening ceremony of the Summer Olympic Games, the Georgian Armed Forces launched an assault on the secessionist province of South Ossetia. This military adventure aimed at reconquering the province was presented by Tbilisi as a response to the continual provocations from the side of the Ossetian forces which had punctuated the preceding months and weeks.<sup>1</sup> It ended six days later with the announcement of a cease-fire that had the bitter taste of defeat for Georgia. It also drew into the conflict the security forces of another separatist province, Abkhazia. In the face of Russian troops who arrived, in the words of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, *'to protect lives and guarantee the dignity of Russian citizens wherever they are in the world,'*<sup>2</sup> Georgian determination lasted only five days.

It is still too early to draw all the conclusions which this blitzkrieg gives rise to, both on the domestic and on the international levels. Not all the effects of the tidal wave created by this failed operation have yet made themselves felt.

The conflict dealt a serious blow to the military capabilities of Georgia and raises many questions in the medium and long term. These concern the viability of this country's joining NATO, as well as its ability to recover politically, diplomatically and economically from the consequences of this type of adventure. On the military level, this defeat reveals strategic errors on the part of the Georgian authorities and shows up certain Russian weaknesses, in particular in the area of organisation and equipment. We are now going to analyse these errors and weaknesses.

### **The Georgian assault ...**

Preceded by an intense artillery barrage and use of multiple BM-21 Grad<sup>3</sup> rocket launchers, the modern equivalent – though still rather imprecise – of *'Stalin's Organs,'* the operation was followed by an assault on the ground. The Georgian authorities were very quick to publish victory communiqué after victory communiqué,<sup>4</sup> giving the impression that the cause

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<sup>1</sup>The arrival on Ossetian territory of new Russian peace-keeping forces, mortar fire directed against Georgian villages and the loss of many Israeli-made Georgian drones.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/08/1553\\_type82912type82913\\_205032.shtml](http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/08/1553_type82912type82913_205032.shtml)

<sup>3</sup> Put into service at the start of the 1960s, the BM-21 Grad is a 122-mm multiple rocket launcher (salvos of 40 rockets)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18946>

was won<sup>5</sup> and that it was with '*a flower in the rifle barrel*' that the Georgian troops succeeded in their mission<sup>6</sup>. They evidently did not count on the Russian reaction. Moscow could not let such an opportunity go by unanswered. Taking advantage of their air superiority, a superiority that was not so easily acquired as one might have thought, the Russian armoured and mechanised forces on the ground launched a counter-attack. At the moment of the cease-fire, they had come to within several kilometres of Tbilisi.

The Georgian offensive was perfectly in line with the political rhetoric of President Saakashvili, who, in the course of the Presidential electoral campaign in January, had promised '*in the very near future, in just several months, with the assistance of the international community to create the conditions for the displaced persons to return in safety and dignity.*'<sup>7</sup> It constitutes an unfortunate and disastrous first test for a Georgian Army that was formed, supported and trained by the United States.

What in the view of the Georgian leaders was hoped would be a grand first debut on the tactical level was transformed into a serious strategic setback. Set to flight on the field of battle, Georgia is now cut off from South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Moscow wasted no time in recognising their independence, establishing diplomatic relations and signing agreements of military cooperation. There is every reason to believe that in the framework of these agreements Russian troops are not prepared to leave Tskhinvali or Sukhumi.

### **... and the Russian riposte**

Both rapid and powerful, this very first Russian military operation abroad since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was surprising in its breadth. The counter-attack was led by the 58<sup>th</sup> Army, which, as the lead unit in the North Caucasus Military Region, is considered to be one of the best performing and most battle hardened units in the Russian Armed Forces. Specifically formed in 1995 for the operations in Chechnya, this Army has its headquarters (HQ) near Vladikavkaz, the capital of North Ossetia. Seventy thousand men strong, it is equipped with nearly 690 tanks, 2,000 armoured vehicles for transporting front line troops and materiel, 125 pieces of artillery, 190 multiple rocket launchers of the type BM-21 Grad or BM-27 Uragan<sup>8</sup> and 450 anti-aircraft cannon. In addition, it has its own air support, namely 120 combat planes and 70 helicopters.

#### **a) Ground operations**

After sending in a battalion of elite paratroopers and a unit of special forces - *spetznaz* -, nearly 15,000 infantrymen, 150 tanks and self-propelled artillery moved into South Ossetia.

In the second phase, the Russians opened a second front by positioning three assault companies in Abkhazia, the second separatist region of Georgia. Sent by sea from the Russian port of Novorossiisk, these units deployed rapidly and created a bridgehead that served as the jumping off base for an assault towards the Kodori Valley<sup>9</sup>, in order to cut off possibilities of Georgian reinforcements arriving.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18955>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18975>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=16450>

<sup>8</sup> Brought into service at the end of the 1970s, the BM-27 Uragan is a 220-mm multiple rocket launcher (salvos of 16 rockets).

<sup>9</sup> This valley, under Georgian administration, constitutes a strategic junction for communications. On September 27, 2006, the Georgian authorities proceeded to install the provisional administration of Abkhazia there under the authority of the president of the Abkhaz government council in exile, Malchaz Akishbaia.

The Russian ground operations quickly attained their established objectives, namely to secure the two rebel provinces. One of the principal elements of this plan assigned to the Russian Armed Forces the task of neutralising Georgia's main military capabilities by pursuing the units in retreat, destroying a maximum of heavy equipment and targeting military installations and bases.

This is how, according to accounts of the Georgian Ministry of Defence<sup>10</sup>, the base at Kojori Senaki (HQ of the 3<sup>rd</sup> motorised brigade), the bases at Gori and Khelvachauri (HQ of the armoured brigades and artillery units), the air bases at Marneuli, Vaziani, and Bolnisi, the HQ of the air defence command in Tbilisi, the infrastructures of the port of Poti on the Black Sea, the civilian airport of Tbilisi, the airports of Kopitnari and Shiraki, the civilian radar stations of Shavshvebi and Leninisi and the aircraft assembly factory producing the fighter planes Sukhoi Su-25<sup>11</sup> at Tbilaviamsheni in the suburbs of Tbilissi were subjected to air strikes.

### **b) Air operations**

In terms of air defence, Georgia's initial successes - 7 Russian planes were shot down – essentially due to the missile systems S-125<sup>12</sup>, S-200<sup>13</sup> and Buk-M1<sup>14</sup>, only ended after the Russian attacks on the radar installations and the national system of air surveillance.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, after having used electronic warfare operations and cyber-attacks to target the command and control networks of the air operations, the Russian forces had no difficulty neutralising Georgia's nine Sukhoi Su-25 and nine L-29 Delfin<sup>16</sup> planes.

Apart from the evident obsolescence of the aircraft and equipment of the Georgian Air Force, the lack of interoperability between the air surveillance command posts<sup>17</sup> greatly contributed to the collapse of Georgian defences.

### **c) The Russian Navy, as if on parade**

In order to impose a blockade of Georgian ports, Moscow mobilised vessels from its Black Sea fleet, including the cruiser *Moskva*, the patrol boat *Smetlivy*, as well as several escorts. Patrols along the Abkhaz coast began on August 10. On the same day, Russian vessels intercepted 4 Georgian missile-launcher boats. After the patrol boat *Smetlivy* fired a warning shot in the direction of one of these ships which was said to have initiated a series of dangerous manoeuvres, the Russians sank it while the other ships scattered at once.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.mod.gov.ge/2008/bombing/bombing-E.html>

<sup>11</sup> Produced since its introduction in 1978, the Sukhoi Su-25 is a single place jet plane intended for close air support. Its conventional name in NATO parlance is 'Frogfoot.'

<sup>12</sup> The S-125 *Neva/Pechora* (NATO name: SA-3 'Goa') entered into service in 1963 and is a system of ground-air short-range and low-altitude missiles.

<sup>13</sup> The S-200 *Angara/Vega/Dubna* (NATO name: SA-5 'Gammon') is a very long-range and medium-range ground-air missile system operating at high altitude. Like its smaller brother, the S-125, it was put into service in 1963.

<sup>14</sup> The Medium-range ground to air missile Buk-M1, known in NATO as the SA-11 'Gadfly,' was put into service in 1983. The Ukraine sold several of these to Georgia.

<sup>15</sup> This system consists of Russian-designed P-18 radars. Developed at the start of the 1970s, the P-18 radar was for a long time the principal surveillance and targeting radar used both by Russian systems of air traffic control and by the air defence.

<sup>16</sup> A training plane, the L-29 Delfin, originally Czech, was, at the start of the 1960s, the standard plane for training purposes within the Warsaw Pact forces. Though designed for training, the L-29 Delfin is capable of carrying nearly 200 kg of various armaments (cannons, rockets, bombs and missiles).

<sup>17</sup> Theoretically interoperable with its air defence units, the command of air surveillance still resorts to using means of communications such as telephone and radio that are not integrated for purposes of transmitting its control orders.

This engagement was the sole naval combat of the conflict. This was essentially due to the fact that the Georgian Navy is in a state of manifest inferiority. Maintenance of the level of its fleet, composed of nine combat ships, and the operational preparation of its crew have been sacrificed these past few years in favour of starting-up, training and equipping a fleet of coast guard ships having no use in the context of armed conflict.

The serious deficiencies of Georgian naval and air force capabilities show clearly that despite powerful support from the United States, Georgia was not able to provide itself with all-around and high performance defence to ensure the protection of its air and sea space.

## **Cyber warfare**

The use of computer warfare is one of the constant elements of the Caucasus conflicts. It was already used in the context of the Chechnya conflict. Armenia and Azerbaijan also used it in their dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh. But until now it was never used at the same time as a military operation.

Comparable to the attacks of April and May 2007 which paralysed the official sites of the Estonian administration, the Russian attack initially targeted sites of the Georgian government. Then they went after media sites, even breaking into the site of the Azerbaijan press agency *Day.Az*, which was deemed to be too *'pro-Georgian'* in its comments. Thus, from the first hours of the conflict the official sites of the Presidency of the Republic, of Parliament, of the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of the National Bank of Georgia and the sites of English-language on-line information agencies, *The Messenger* and *Civil.ge*, as well as the site of the television channel *Rustavi*, were overwhelmed and paralysed by an exponential number of requests for connections.<sup>18</sup>

A bit later, the computer pirates went so far as to post on the site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs an image of President Saakashvili superimposed on a montage of photos of Adolf Hitler and a tampered video in which he appeared to beg the Polish President Lech Kaczynski to place the official site of the Polish Presidency at the disposal of the Georgian authorities.

By moving their sites onto American servers, the Georgian authorities succeeded in quickly diluting the effects of this attack. By doing so, they obliged the Russian *hackers* to either stop or take on the risk of a much bigger cyber warfare confrontation. This attack is very instructive. In effect, it is the very first time that an attack of this type has been coordinated with a military operation and that by complementing it and reinforcing it, it operated in perfect synergy with it. For Dominique Fedronic, technical director of the IT security company *ActivIdentity*, *'the Russian objective was to prove the weakness of the Georgian authorities and the response was far from what Moscow hoped for. The Russian authorities found themselves confronting a delicate situation. Either to stop or to directly go after the American IT servers.'*<sup>19</sup>

Though during this operation the Russians abstained from crossing the red line, it is no less certain that in future conflicts we risk seeing a generalised use of cyber warfare attacks.

## **The Georgian errors**

In light of the tactical errors and very serious strategic gaffes, it appears evident that two major failures in evaluation were at the basis of the fiasco of Georgian strategists. In the first place, Tbilisi's strategy sinned essentially due to overconfidence. There was an irrational excess of confidence in the operational capabilities of its Armed Forces. In second place, the

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<sup>18</sup> [http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article\\_id=2373362](http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2373362)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.technewsworld.com/rsstory/64494.html?wlc=1221635074>

Georgian strategists badly analysed and evaluated the threat and, above all, they underestimated the Russian response.

### **a) Incomplete programmes**

Despite an impressive American financial effort and after seven years of instruction and bringing equipment up to standards, we have to emphasize the heterogeneous and ‘*semi-feudal*’ nature of the Georgian Army and of its chain of command. As a result of the American military aid programmes, whose extent grew considerably when Georgia agreed to join the United States in the in operation *Iraqi Freedom*, the Georgian Army was split in two. On the one side, the professionals, who were few in number but were supported and surrounded by American instructors, all receiving pay that is considerable when compared to the average level of life. On the other side, the conscripts, who are paid little, are badly equipped and barely trained. The profound differences in treatment, consideration shown and status certainly did not contribute to cohesion, morale and combat readiness.

The Georgian Armed Forces benefit from two programmes financed by the United States (total cost: 45 million Euros): the ‘*Georgia train and Equip Programme (GTEP)*’ and the ‘*Sustainment and Stability Operations Programme (SSOP)*’. Neither of these two programmes is really on a scale to improve the preparation for combat and to reinforce the offensive capabilities of the Georgian forces. Presented as a custom-made and gradual training programme, the GTEP is restricted to training and equipping some 2,600 men from the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior to fight against terrorism. As for the SSOP, its only objective is to set up the units called upon to be deployed in Iraq within Coalition Forces that are participating in the operation *Iraqi Freedom*.

### **b) Errors of evaluation and military conduct**

The under-appreciation of the threat finds its explanation in the various national Georgian plans - the Concept of Security,<sup>20</sup> the Évaluation of the Threat<sup>21</sup> and the Military Strategy<sup>22</sup> - which minimized, indeed ignored, the Russian threat. Their conclusions - ‘*there is practically no possibility of overt military aggression against Georgia*’ and ‘*the probability of such aggression is relatively low*’ – are edifying. Most of the statements gathered by *Eurasianet*<sup>23</sup> from among high officials in the national defence and security establishments show very well that the possibility of a large-scale confrontation with Russia was never envisaged. For the Deputy Minister of Defence, Batu Kutelia, ‘*no one could imagine that Russia would put its international reputation at risk by invading a sovereign country.*’<sup>24</sup> The *Eurasianet* investigation also reveals a feeling of improvisation and amateurism in the way the ground operations were conducted. According to a lieutenant of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, the operation was launched without any special preparation. He knew that at the moment when it was decided people’s minds were turned to summer vacations or to preparation for forthcoming deployment in Iraq. This no doubt explains why instead of concentrating their efforts on the ‘*key point*’ of the operation, the Georgian troops preferred to put their emphasis on the very media-intensive conquest of Tskhinvali. The rebel province of South Ossetia is linked to its Russian twin sister, North Ossetia, by a four kilometre long tunnel. The Roki tunnel is the only real point of transit across the Caucasus chain. Taking control of it should have constituted the direction of the main and essential effort of the Georgian forces. Though its strategic importance did not escape the attention of the Georgian planners, the tacticians did not, however, have the necessary means for its

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.mod.gov.ge/i.php?l=E&m=3&sm=1>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.mod.gov.ge/i.php?l=E&m=3&sm=3>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eavo91508.shtml>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

conquest.<sup>25</sup> This error offered the Russian troops unexpected access to South Ossetia and is one of the causes of the Georgian military disaster.<sup>26</sup>

More important still, the state of preparation of the Georgian Armed Forces at the moment when the conflict was unleashed show that although the offensive by Tbilisi had some chances of ending favourably when confronting solely the forces of the separatist province, it was doomed to fail against a Russian force which was much more operational and better equipped. The inability of the Georgians to support large-scale and high intensity combat, an obvious lack of cross-service training in arms and units and insufficient logistical support all condemned the operation from the very first cannon fire.

### **c) A financial mess**

During the times of President Shevardnadze at the beginning of the new millennium, the Georgian military budget bordered on 36 million Euros. Seven years later, it multiplied almost by a factor of twelve – to 405 million Euros – and even reached 714 million Euros this year. This formidable increase is the result of the military and political reinforcement through the alliance with the United States, the most visible aspect of which took concrete form in the deployment of a contingent of 2,000 men in Iraq.

As Gérard Chaliand, French geo-politician and expert in conflicts has stated, there is a vast difference between ‘*military personnel*’ and ‘*warriors*’<sup>27</sup> Military men are people who ‘*work within the Army, who wear a uniform, classify documents and carry out the orders they receive. Warriors are, above all, combattants.*’. The 2.15 billion Euros that Georgia has invested over the past several years have certainly allowed it to have a modern army, but they have not provided it with ‘*warriors*’ who would enable it to fight more effectively. In response to President Saakashvili’s erroneous calculation in ordering the assault on Tskhinvali, Russia did not hesitate to enroll alongside its regular troops, already battle hardened, the formidable *Vostok* battalion, consisting of former Chechen rebels who came over to the side of Moscow and were placed under the orders of the *GRU*, the intelligence service of the Russian Ministry of Defence.<sup>28</sup>

## **The Russian weaknesses**

This war revealed certain weaknesses in the organisation and the equipment of the Russian Armed Forces. In the case of a confrontation with a more powerful adversary, these weaknesses could have seriously complicated the way their military operations played out. Initial lessons lead us to believe that the Russian Army is going to have to make changes in its organisational order, in particular to work out new procedures of command and control of the operations, as well as changes in military equipment.

### **a) Ageing equipment**

Though the ground forces demonstrated during this operation a rather high level of interoperability between the various inter-service groups, the Air Force experienced relatively

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> On August 13, during a press conference, President Saakashvili tried to play down this error of evaluation (cf. : <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19109&search>). According to him, the plan anticipated well ‘*stopping the Russian troops near the tunnel*’ but ‘*we arrived too late and the Russians were already too numerous.*’

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/georgia-the-rose-revolution-s-forgotten-legacy>

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.jamestown.org/chechnya\\_weekly/article.php?articleid=2374375](http://www.jamestown.org/chechnya_weekly/article.php?articleid=2374375)

heavy losses -- 7 aircraft – including a long-range Tu-22M3<sup>29</sup> bomber. By not having neutralised Georgian air defences on time, the Russian Air Force faced two problems: not very effective close air support of the troops and a cruel lack of reliable intelligence.

The programmes to modernise aeronautics that are presently under way concern mainly air units of the special command (KSpN) from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Armies of the Air Force (Central Russia and the Far East). The 4<sup>th</sup> Army of the Air Force, which participated in this war, has only old aircraft whose most recent technology dates from the 1980s. The decisions which were taken by the Programme GPV 2011 - 2020 (arms orders by the Russian State and development programmes), scheduled to be adopted in 2010, will certainly provide an indication of the directions chosen in the matter of aeronautics.

Despite the brilliant results of the operation, the equipment of the ground forces also needs to be reexamined and modernised. Like the Air Force, the main ground troops supplied with new equipment are located far from the North Caucasus Military Region. This is why, apart from some rare modern arms used in the course of this war,<sup>30</sup> most of the materiel used - T-62 and T-72 tanks, armoured infantry combat vehicles BMP-1 and BMP-2, armoured troop transport vehicles BTR-70 and BTR-80, the self-propelled cannon Gvozdika and Akatsia and the Grad multiple rocket launchers date from the 1970s-80s. This equipment has been only slightly modernised. Meanwhile, General Vladimir Boldyrev, Commander in Chief of the inter-service forces that participated in this war speaks of problems of orders and of coordinating the arms systems within the armoured units.<sup>31</sup>

Besides the combat materiel, the reexamination of equipment of the ground troops should also concern the means of reconnaissance, of targeting and of command and control of operations. The flaws which were exposed in these domains are evident. In three days of combat in the region of Tskhinvali, Russian artillery was not able to neutralise or destroy Georgian artillery, which remained operational up to the moment of the retreat order given by Tbilisi. The lack of precise coordinates of these targets (the Russian forces do not have any drones), an insufficient number of guided munitions and their imprecision due to lack of intelligence, the failures in the systems for targeting objects and firing are the main factors responsible for the difficulties encountered.

The only force to have really played its game well, the Russian Navy, perfectly carried out its mission of blockading the coast in the area of conflict. But it seems useless to have too many illusions on this subject. The opposition was quasi-nonexistent. The Russian Black Sea Fleet is ageing. Its main vessels are more than 20 years old and should be withdrawn from service in the course of the decades to come. From a strategic point of view, the fleet should also be strengthened due to the obvious deterioration in relations between Russia and NATO. At the least, in order to ensure the defence of its coast and in case of serious conflict; at best, in order to effectively dissuade a potential adversary.

## **A Russian military budget that is strongly rising in 2009**

On September 11, drawing lessons from this blitzkrieg, President Medvedev expressed the view that *'the modernisation of forces and of equipment and the improvement of operational levels and of military capabilities constitute a major priority.'*<sup>32</sup> He justifies this

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<sup>29</sup> Brought into service in 1983, the Tu-22M3 strategic bomber, also known under the name 'Backfire,' was used in combat for the first time in Afghanistan from 1987 to 1989, then during the two Chechen conflicts.

<sup>30</sup> The self-propelled cannon Msta, the missiles Tochka (the Russian authorities denied using this type of missile cf. <http://fr.rian.ru/world/20080818/116108781.html>) and the multiple rocket-launchers Smerch

<sup>31</sup> [http://en.rian.ru/military\\_news/](http://en.rian.ru/military_news/)

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/sdocs/news.shtml>

decision by the need in future to stand up to the rearmament now going on in Georgia. The Chief of Staff of the inter-services HQ, General Nikolai Makarov, for his part, believes that it is necessary to develop a new strategic concept and that priority in modern armaments should be given to smart arms (precision weapons), satellites, air defence and the Air Force.<sup>33</sup>

Four days later, his Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, announced a 27% increase in the defence budget for 2009.<sup>34</sup> It will thus reach the sum of 36 billion Euros. At the same time, the budget for national security, which includes the budget of the military forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and that of the intelligence services, would rise to 31 billion Euros, i.e., an increase of 32% compared to 2008.<sup>35</sup> Despite these increases, analysts and military experts believe that the 'Research and Development' positions in the military budget are still too largely ignored.

### **Assessment of human cost**

As in numerous cases, the result of such conflicts in terms of human lives is difficult to establish. On September 15, the Georgian Ministries of Defence, the Interior and Health released the official assessments.<sup>36</sup> According to Batu Kutelia, Deputy Minister of Defence, the military losses came to 168 soldiers, of whom only 110 have been identified. The others remain forever 'unknown soldiers.'<sup>37</sup> According to Minister of Labour, Health and Social Protection Aleksander Kvitashvili, civilian losses amounted to 188, mostly during the bombardments. As for the Deputy Minister of the Interior, Ekaterine Zguladze, she announced 6 persons disappeared and the loss of 16 officers.

For their part, the Russian authorities speak of 66 killed and 340 wounded. They believe that the real Georgian military losses came to 3,000 dead.

### **Conclusion**

Although it is still too early to draw conclusions in the medium and long term over the geopolitical and diplomatic consequences of this conflict and the necessary redistribution of the cards which we will have to witness in the course of the coming months, the Georgian rout is rich in lessons that will help us to shed light on the profound changes that are taking shape.

Those who like anecdotes and 'historical minutia' will discover with astonishment that the strangely premonitory scenario of this conflict goes back to 2001 and that it was imagined by the designers of an electronic game, *Ghost Recon*<sup>38</sup>. The scene takes place in 2008. Some radical ultranationalists have seized power in Moscow with the aim of restoring the Soviet empire. Russian tanks lay siege to the Caucasus and the Baltic forests, ready to move out to the West and to the South. Expecting the worst, the whole world holds its breath and waits. However, for a small group of elite soldiers, the war has already begun.

A handful of American Green Berets deployed to maintain the peace in Georgia constitute the first line of defence and the veritable spearhead of the reconquest. Quick, silent and invisible, supplied with the latest equipment and trained in the most recent techniques for a shadow war, they are baptised 'the Ghosts.' According to the skill and level of the players, this handful

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<sup>33</sup> [http://en.rian.ru/military\\_news/](http://en.rian.ru/military_news/)

<sup>34</sup> <http://story.malaysiasun.com/index.php/ct/9/cid/b8de8e630faf3631/id/407335/cs/1/>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.interfax.com/3/point/810/news.aspx>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.mod.gov.ge/i.php?l=E&id=1057>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.mod.gov.ge/i.php?l=E&m=11&sm=3&st=30&id=1030>

<sup>38</sup> [http://ghostrecon.fr.ubi.com/product\\_gr.php](http://ghostrecon.fr.ubi.com/product_gr.php)



of elite soldiers succeeds, more or less easily, in inflicting a crushing defeat on the Russian troops.

Although the frontier between fiction and reality is sometimes strangely marked, one thing is certain. The Georgian soldiers are still far from having the capabilities of the American Green Berets and the role which they played on the ground was, to say the least, the opposite of the beguiling scenario of 2001. The future of the Georgian Army now depends largely on the result of the American presidential election. Quite recently, two independent Democratic Senators, Joe Lieberman and Lindsay Graham, who are close to the Republican candidate John McCain, have opined in the Wall Street Journal that it was time to put an end to the reticence and procrastination of the Bush administration and that one had *'to give Georgia adequate military means to dissuade Russia from any new aggression.'*<sup>39</sup>

Up to the present, and despite the vehement protests of American authorities, - on September 4 Vice President Dick Cheney criticised *'the illegitimacy of changing the Georgian borders by force'* - the administration has turned a deaf ear to the various appeals for increased military aid and restoring Georgian operational potential by delivering modern and high-performance arms. This is a position showing wisdom and restraint that are welcome in these times of uncertainty.

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<sup>39</sup> [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central\\_Asia/JI09Ag01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/JI09Ag01.html)