



Georgia Seeks to Build a Reserve—Again

OE Watch Commentary: While the breakaway region of Abkhazia last month celebrated the anniversary of its separatist war with Georgia, which began in August 1992, Georgian media recalled the more recent war with Russia in August 2008. That war is understood by many Georgians to have formalized the loss of the two separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and put Georgia under constant threat of “Russian military aggression.” In the wake of such a sober assessment, it was recently announced that Georgia would again try to create a viable reserve force as the accompanying excerpted articles from *Kviris Palitra* report.

This will be Georgia’s third attempt. The first took place prior to the 2008 war with Russia. The 2008 war was a reality slap in the face for many Georgians, as Russian forces penetrated south all the way to Gori and then turned east on the main highway towards Tbilisi. The panic was justified as Russian troops were less than an hour’s drive from the capital and there was very little Georgians could do to stop them. A second attempt to establish a reserve force was undertaken during the tenure of Irakli Alasania, Georgian Defense Minister from 2012-2014. The initiative failed, though some wonder if perhaps this third attempt will succeed. The pilot program is already underway and will run through November.

Training bases in the cities of Batumi and Telavi will house training brigades for the reserve force. Under current law, reservists will be protected from employers who might want to eliminate their civilian jobs in case a deployment longer than the 45 days a year spreads over 12 months. Currently Georgia relies on compulsory service of all males 18-27 to augment its smaller professional soldier force, many of which are on-going international peacekeeping missions abroad. When Russia entered Georgia in 2008, the Georgian contingent deployed to Iraq was flown home. A working reserve would help alleviate those numerical pressures.

The reserve would be available to assist in natural disasters and other emergencies, but its primary mission would be in defense of the nation. The article suggests that the two areas of primary concern for Georgia are in the cyber realm and general IT. Although unsaid, it is implied that while a reserve service would expedite mobilization in case of war and natural disaster and provide relief on a national level, it will not be a panacea for Georgia’s security problems. In reality, Georgia today is defended by a professional class and compulsory service. Georgian media often notes that conscripts are generally disinterested in military service.

The new government vision is a force that is 30 percent contract or professional soldier and 70 percent reserve, with an additional draw of only 1-3 percent of draftees or those under compulsory service. As the articles imply, a tiny nation like Georgia needs a reserve force and the author looks to the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) as an example of what could be. It is not inconsequential that he chooses the Baltic countries, three other small countries living in Russia’s shadow. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**



Georgian soldiers on the attack during Combined Resolve II (2014).

Source: By 7th Army Joint Multinational Training Command from Grafenwoehr, Germany [CC BY 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georgian_soldiers_on_the_attack_during_Combined_Resolve_II_\(14304988195\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georgian_soldiers_on_the_attack_during_Combined_Resolve_II_(14304988195).jpg).

“The Georgian Defense Budget can not provide for a large regular army staffed on the basis of contract... These functions should be taken on by the Reserve Service, this third attempt has to be successful—there is no other way.”

Source: “რეზერვის შექმნის მესამე ცდა (The Third Attempt to Create A Reserve),” *Kviris Palitra*, August 27, 2018. <https://www.kvirispalitra.ge/samkhedro-thema/45945-rezervis-sheqmnis-mesame-cda.html>

...We lost two occupied territories and live under permanent threat of renewed Russian military aggression. Unfortunately, neither Georgia or the international community can take real steps to end the Russian occupation and restore the country’s territorial integrity...

Source: “ათი წელი აგვისტოს ომიდან (Ten Years After the August War),” *Kviris Palitra*, August 8, 2018. <https://www.kvirispalitra.ge/samkhedro-thema/45377-athi-tseli-agvistos-omidan.html>

...The primary point is that the reserve service should become universal and be the largest part of society. This will provide a nationwide total defense model that is really a relief for a small country like us...