



Russia Flexes Its Muscles in Abkhazia While Citizens Recall Anniversary of War with Georgia

OE Watch Commentary: Twenty-six years ago, Georgian National Guard and paramilitary forces launched a military campaign against the small breakaway region of Abkhazia. A year and a half later Georgian forces were driven from the region. Abkhazia has remained a breakaway region, independent of Georgian rule, ever since. During the anniversary month of August, local Abkhazian newspapers like the accompanying excerpt from *Nuzhnaya Gazeta*, have been full of stories detailing the heroism of citizen defenders from Abkhazia, and the entire Caucasus region, against the far numerically superior Georgian force. At a special ceremony commemorating the conflict, Hero of Abkhazia, Mzia Beya recently stated, “On the second day of the war... the first group of our brothers from Kabardino-Balkaria... arrived to help a small republic in the fight against armed aggression of the State Council of Georgia.”

The commemoration also coincided with a series of Russian military exercises in Abkhazia under the direction of the Russian 7th Military Base headquartered in the Abkhazian capitol of Sukhumi, with bases also located in Guadata and Ochamchira. According to the accompanying excerpts from *Sputnik*, “more than 2,500 personnel and more than 600 units of military equipment took part in joint exercises of servicemen of the 7th Russian military base of the South Caucasian Military District, the Black Sea Fleet, the Fourth Air Force and Air Defense Forces of Russia.”

The exercises included a number of tactical operations, including helicopter air assault and amphibious landing. Although neither Georgia nor Abkhazia have much of a navy, the 1992-1993 conflict featured a Georgian amphibious landing to reinforce the coastal city of Gagra, and an Abkhazian amphibious landing (led by Chechen Shamil Basaev) cutting the Georgian supply line outside of Ochamchira.

The annual exercises also punctuate an uncomfortable strategic truth of Abkhazia’s breakaway status from Georgia with continued repercussions for the Black Sea region. Russian military support is a significant factor in Abkhazia’s ability to remain separated from Georgian rule. The 7th Military Base, like the 4th Military Base located a few hundred miles to the east in South Ossetia, was established in strength following the Russian-Georgian war of 2008.

Today there are roughly 9,000 Russian soldiers permanently stationed in the Georgian separatist regions, 4,500 at the 7th Military Base and another 4,500 at the 4th Military Base. Immediately following the initial wars for South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the early 1990s, Russian military power was limited to a few small units and “peacekeepers” along the de-facto separatist borders. During that time Georgian paramilitaries continued to harass Russian and Abkhazian positions along the de-facto border, while Georgian officials never gave up the political rhetoric to regain its breakaway territories.

The 2008 war between Georgia and Russia, largely fought in South Ossetia, provided a reset on the status of Abkhazia. While there are multiple factors, the 4,500 or more Russian military personnel in Abkhazia have helped put an end to Georgian paramilitary probing of Abkhazian territory on the southern Gali sector or from the Svan valley in the northwest into the Kodori Corridor (the two most probable Georgian invasion routes, excluding an amphibious landing on the coast). The locally-based Russian forces are also close to and provide a springboard to Russian military operations in Ukraine and Syria.

While Russian forces continue to utilize the temperate climate offered in the coastal regions of Abkhazia to more or less train year round, the number of Russian military personnel permanently stationed in Abkhazia act as a deterrent to Georgian. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

Source: “В ряды защитников Абхазии вступили лучшие сыны (The Best Sons Joined the Ranks of the Defenders of Abkhazia),” *Nuzhnaya Gazeta*, 15 August 2018. <https://abh-n.ru/v-ryady-zashhitnikov-abxazii-vstupili-luchshie-syny>

The best sons of Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Poland, Transdnistria, Estonia, Ukraine also came to the ranks of the defenders of Abkhazia, who regarded the misfortune that befell our people as their own. Our brothers who volunteers made a huge contribution to the victory of Abkhazia in the domestic war of 1992-1993.

Source: “Дать ‘левиафану’ по зубам: как российские военные отбили ‘атаку’ на Абхазию (To give ‘leviathan’ teeth: How did the Russian military repel an ‘attack’ on Abkhazia),” *Sputnik-Abkhazia*, 13 August 2018. <https://m.sputnik-abkhazia.ru/Abkhazia/20180813/1024707107/kak-rossijskie-voennye-otbili-ataku-na-abxaziyu.html>

More than two and a half thousand personnel and more than 600 units of military equipment took part in joint exercises of servicemen of the 7th Russian military base of the South Caucasian Military District, the Black Sea Fleet, the Fourth Air Force and Air Defense Forces of Russia, told reporters... “The exercises will be held for another three days, where we will work out two stages that will be held at the training grounds, including the mountain range, where together with the units of the Republic of Abkhazia we will hold events,” said Major-General Vladislav Ershov Commander of the 49th Army... The military-tactical exercise was acknowledged by the Major-General as effective, largely due to the commanders, who, he said, used the experience gained in Syria and demonstrated non-standard solutions at all stages.

Source: “В учениях принимают участие около 2,5 тысячи военнослужащих и более 600 единиц вооружения и военной техники (About 2,500 servicemen and more than 600 units of weapons and military equipment take part in the exercise),” *Sputnik-Abkhazia*, 2 August 2018. <https://m.sputnik-abkhazia.ru/Abkhazia/20180802/1024611425/rossijskie-motostrelki-ucheniya-abxazii.html>

...During the first stage, units completed a march with equipment from the “Tsabal” base... The second stage will involve a defense of the Black Sea coast, during which an episode of defending the coast from a sea-assault by the enemy will be played out...

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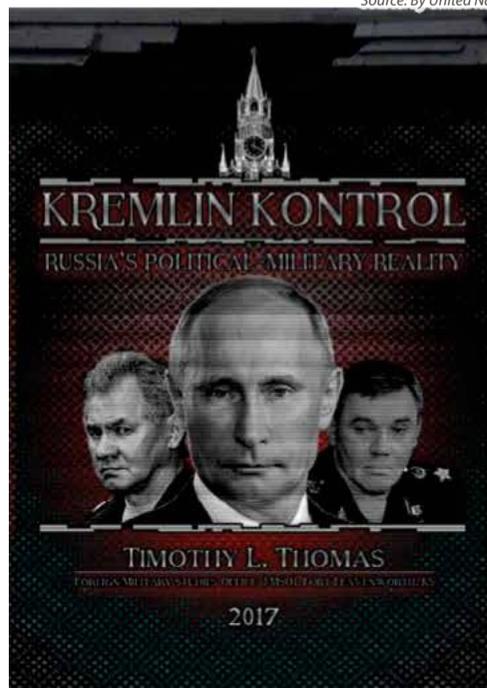


Continued: Russia Flexes Its Muscles in Abkhazia While Citizens Recall Anniversary of War with Georgia

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Map of Georgia showing the autonomous republics of Abkhazia (de facto independent) and Adjara, and the de facto independent region of South Ossetia. Source: By United Nations Cartographic Section, with amendments by User:ChrisO (United Nations Cartographic Section) [Public domain or Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.



KREMLIN KONTROL by TIMOTHY L. THOMAS

In 2016 Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov instituted sweeping changes that have reorganized the country's security forces and reestablished the nation's military prowess. This study, Kremlin Kontrol, aims to describe how control over the security services and the military have hastened those changes.

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