

Putin's Playbook: a comparison between the Russo-Georgian War and the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War

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Keywords: Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, China, August 2008 War, Donbas, Donetsk, Lugansk, Kyiv, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Tbilisi, Gori, Poti, NATO, EU, PFP, JCC, OSCE, Putin, Saakashvili, Stalin, Ivan Ilyin

Abstract

Prior to the 2022 “special military operation” (according to Putin’s view) carried out by the Russian military in Ukraine, in 2008 Russia had another target in sight along its borders, residing in the infamously unstable region of Transcaucasia, Georgia. In an eerily similar fashion to what the current conflict unfolds in terms of Russian military prowess and display of warfare, in August 2008 the Russo – Georgian War marked the beginning of Russia’s reemergence as a military power for both the West as well as its former Soviet

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constituent states and further deepened the conflict between the NATO block and Russia. The latter plunged into initiating a long streak of instabilities inside the former Soviet states that broke away from the USSR.

Many see the **Russo-Georgian War of 2008** and the ongoing **Russo-Ukrainian War** as manifestations of a renewed geopolitical rivalry between major world powers. Both wars have been driven by a desire to assert Russian dominance and control over the regions in question and have led to various consequences that have had profound implications for the nations involved. In the case of Russia, the invasion of Ukraine has been seen as the biggest threat to peace and security in Europe since the end of The Cold War.

However, for the first part, the Russo-Georgian war solely lasted for 5 days, (stretching from the 8th to the 12th of August), albeit tensions were carried out from earlier that year and turmoil was about to spread at any moment. The primary purpose of sending Russian troops to the separatist regions of **Abkhazia** and **South Ossetia** was to support these pro-Russian regions' armies against the Georgian military hidden under different pretexts (i.e., "humanitarian aid" sent to repair a railway in the region of Abkhazia). For the second case, this perspective cannot be applied in the current Russo-Ukrainian war. Despite sporting a similar battle tactic in achieving its goal (keeping in mind that the conflict debuted as early as 2014 with the annexation of the **Crimean Peninsula**, as well as the **Donbas** region by sending Russian troops under the pretext of defending the local "repressed" minority from the regions of **Donetsk** and **Lugansk**, see Fig.No.1), the Russian military has marked only temporary victories at the cost of a staggering number of casualties. This comes to show that Moscow's war plan carried out in Ukraine might become a lesson for future aggressors in regard to undermining opponents and show how miscalculations can overturn primary predictions, despite the fact that it is a major power with a bristling arsenal.

Looking back at the Russo-Georgian War case, the Russians' success had permanently dented Georgia's image in the long term. It halted the country's progress of aligning itself with the West by adopting for the first time in 2004 under Mikhail Saakashvili's presidency a pro-European stance, as well as deterred it from aspiring to join the EU and NATO, by solely remaining a PFP member since 1994. In the case of Ukraine, also a PFP member, but from 1995, their military has undergone training in this NATO partnership and collaboration from that period up to nowadays. Moreover, its geopolitical location, size, and implicated political and economic agents active on its territory also make it a much more valuable pawn on this imaginary chessboard between Russia and the West. NATO and the EU continue their support of Ukraine through the means of its member states that send weapons, ammunition, and many types of light and heavy military equipment, including anti-tank and air defense systems, howitzers, and drones.²

The Georgian example comes to show that the Russian rhetoric cannot be trusted and that it further continues to spread disinformation, this time around, by accusing Ukraine of staging military provocations in the Eastern Donbas region. Ironically, the Ukrainian government hasn't had intentions of changing the status quo throughout its eight years of the ongoing war in Donbas by intervening in the occupied Lugansk and Donetsk regions, thus making it even less plausible that Kyiv would have taken such a risk amidst Russia's largest military mobilization in decades. Putin has gone further, issuing "genocide" claims regarding killings allegedly taking place in the said region. In 2014, the Kremlin justified its military offensive by claiming ethnic Russians were being threatened in eastern Ukraine. Similar accusations were also at the forefront of Russian information warfare in

² The North Atlantic Treaty Organization. "NATO's Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine." December 9, 2022. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_192648.htm.

2008, when the Kremlin blamed Tbilisi for committing ethnic cleansing—a charge later dismissed by a ruling of the European Court of International Rights.³

This paper aims to draw a comparison between the similarities of the Russian forces' applied strategies during the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, and the 2014 Annexation of Crimea and Donbas region with aftermaths in the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war respectively, as well as question what were the factors that determined the major differences in the way these two states were perceived by the West, eventually leading to such a different timeline. Furthermore, I will attempt to analyze if one country had more probability to appease to Western political and economic interests, as well as if the geopolitical location and size of Ukraine were of more importance than Georgia's. I will attempt to justify if Georgia was perceived as a scapegoat that prepared Ukrainian troops for similar future conflict escalations on behalf of Russia, and finally if Russia's victory in Ukraine is even possible and what the aftermath of that action would be.

Introduction

One of Vladimir Putin's most notable quotes is that the "collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 21st century".⁴ This has been widely interpreted as being part of the ex-KGB agent's yearning for a return to the Soviet past. However, Putin has made his thoughts known while talking about the vicious wars that have erupted in their aftermath and the ongoing conflicts that were bound to come in the future.

³ Natla Seskurla, "Russia Is Reenacting Its Georgia Playbook in Ukraine," Foreign Policy. February 22, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/22/russia-ukraine-invasion-georgia-2008-south-ossetia-tskhinvali/>.

⁴ Claire Biggs, "World: Was Soviet Collapse Last Century," RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty. April 29, 2005, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1058688.html>.

To begin with, it is worth noting that in both the Georgian and Ukrainian cases, these countries were invaded on Kremlin's decision due to **political objectives** rather than material security. Putin's rhetoric has held a similar fluctuation since the 2007 Munich Security Conference, in which he insisted that his actions were a counter-reaction to NATO's further eastward enlargement as a national security measure.

Secondly, another motivating force in Putin's actions conducted in 2008 and 2022 is regime survival. There is a connection between the Russian President's initiated wars; they are a continuation of domestic policies. Apart from the general paranoia that sprung from the "color revolutions" that occurred throughout the 2000s in these regions, he has also long feared **economic and democratic development** contagion coming from Georgia and Ukraine. "Georgia's economic growth averaged 10.5% per year between 2005 and 2007. In comparison, in late 2021 and right before the 2022 invasion, Ukrainian GDP expanded 5.9% year-on-year in the fourth quarter of 2021, up from 2.7% the previous quarter".⁵ What's curious is that both states' economies were on the rise right before their respective invasions. Thus, it seems as though Russia was attempting to prevent Georgia and Ukraine's chance of providing their prosperity and opportunity to their people outside of the Russian alliance system, which in turn could also potentially surpass what Russia can offer its own people as well.

On the one hand, Georgia and Ukraine were constituent states of the Soviet Union. Both have had a tense relationship with their **minority groups** which have most of the time been backed up by Russian forces. While it is true that Vladimir

⁵ Natia Gamkrelidze and Tinatin Japaridze, "The Limits of the Georgia Prism in Ukraine," Middle East Institute, March 2, 2022, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/limits-georgia-prism-ukraine>.

Putin and the Kremlin undoubtedly have greatly profited off the tensions in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, it is unwise to assume that it was their creation. The situation of the Ossetians and Abkhaz minorities would be more comparable as a regional conflict with that of Transnistria, a shallow body of land that is run by Moscow-loyal separatists whilst remaining officially a part of Moldova, whereas the same cannot be said about Ukraine's geopolitical confrontations, as well as its status in the USSR and Cold War period.

But on the other hand, given Ukraine's status of having reached a cornerstone in the USSR, it couldn't hold the same faith as Georgia. It held high importance in its population and agricultural production numbers, defense industries, military (here including the Black Sea Fleet) as well as being home to a portion of the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal. Georgia is primarily recognized as being among one of the first Soviet republics to vow for its independence from the Union since 1989, which has solely grown throughout the successive years up until the official dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Seeking the opportunity, Ukraine, the once vital **geopolitical flashpoint** of the union sought a similar opportunity by distancing itself as well in 1991, which proved to be a coup de grâce for the ailing superpower.⁶ However, a point of equilibrium would prove to be a tricky goal to achieve for the two emerging states, still holding deep historical and cultural ties to Russia, in its territory, and minorities respectively.

The autonomous regions of Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia (**see Fig.No.2**) have held a special status ever since Georgia had been annexed to the Soviet Union

⁶ Jonathan Masters, "Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia | Council ...," Council on Foreign Relations. October 11, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/background/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia>.

in 1921. There is much controversy about the arrival of the Ossetian minority in the Transcaucasia region, where these ethnic conflicts seem to be part of Stalin's legacy. Arbitrary boundaries and forced repatriation are two of the causes behind the constant conflicts in the former Soviet Union.⁷

While at first the newly arrived community integrated quickly and lived peacefully with the locals, the rise of nationalism, because of a new international policy established after the First World War, led to numerous conflicts between the two communities. The situation was repeated in much the same way in Abkhazia. The Soviet invasion in 1921 meant the end of the conflict for Georgia for a time, with Ossetia and Abkhazia acquiring the status of an **autonomous region** (oblast) within the USSR. The status is seen as a reward for the collaboration with the Soviet authorities, supported by the two communities. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1992, additional conflicts arose in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia. With the help of certain Russian military divisions and the Confederation of the Peoples of Northern Caucasus, they defeated Georgian forces and became *de facto* independent. Yet since then, neither Abkhazia nor South Ossetia has gained international recognition for their independence.⁸ Georgia has maintained a truce with the two breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which *de facto* maintained their independence with Russian military support. Tensions rose once more in 2008 when Georgia expressed interest in joining NATO.

⁷ Shaun Walkers, "Ethnic Tensions: War in the Caucasus Is Stalin's Legacy," independent. August 17, 2008, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ethnic-tensions-war-in-the-caucasus-is-stalin-s-legacy-899615.html>.

⁸ "Government of Georgia: About Georgia". gov.ge. Archived from the original on 21 August 2016. https://web.archive.org/web/20160821030240/http://gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=193

When Russia sent additional forces to Abkhazia, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili denounced an attempt to annex the enclave. After months of escalations and skirmishes, the situation exploded into a full-scale war. Tbilisi said Russian troops seized South Ossetia before the army began an assault aimed at regaining control of the region, but Moscow has accused Georgia of opening fire first.

Nowadays, Russia and Ukraine are also taking different positions in two separatist regions, Donetsk and Luhansk. The two have remained in a state of frozen conflict since 2014, when, after overthrowing the pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich from Kyiv, these regions have been backed up by separatist pro-Russian forces. Moscow, however, has repeatedly denied supporting these rebels.

Donbas has been the witness of several migration waves. In the beginning, it was Catherine the Great who sent to the newly conquered lands Christians from the Ottoman Empire, Greece, and Serbia, as well as from her native country, Germany, settlers who were invited with the promise of obtaining a patch of land. With the turn of the 20th century, the poorest and most reckless from all over the empire arrived in Donbas in staggering numbers, during the Russian Empire's fairly short industrial revolution. The natural resources of coal fields, seaports, and railway systems had suddenly become a valuable source of exploitation. Albeit rich in said sources, the population suffered due to terrible working conditions and livelihood, the Donbas population also being affected by its constant migration and high mortality rate. During the Second World War, the next wave of migration consisting of the communist youth and political prisoners had settled in, with the intention to rebuild the region's industry which was in shambles. "And then there were the blooming 1960s and 1970s when youth from the entire Soviet Union

rushed to Donbas for jobs in coal mining, one of the most prestigious industries during Soviet rule.”⁹

Back in 2008, when Putin was Vice-President and held a meeting with former US President George W. Bush, he declared that Ukraine didn’t even have the status of a state. He would later go on to show signs of fretfulness. “What about Ukraine? Part of its territory is Eastern Europe and the other noteworthy part was given to it by us! You have to tell me what Ukraine is because I don't know. Ukraine is nothing.”¹⁰

After this public scene, Putin would later go on to apologize for raising his voice. Afterwards, he made the hypothetical claim that if Ukraine were to be accepted into NATO, it would immediately cease to exist simply as a state, further adding that in such a case Russia would immediately start annexing Crimea and eastern Ukraine, which would eventually materialize later in 2014 and 2022.

Inside Putin’s head.

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s decision to launch an all-out invasion of Ukraine took the world by storm, but this was an event that was long in the making. His longer-term motivations for invading Ukraine are much more

⁹ Alina Smutko, “The ‘Russian Minority in Donbas’ and the History of the Majority,” IWM WEBSITE, n.d., <https://www.iwm.at/publication/iwmpost-article/the-russian-minority-in-donbas-and-the-history-of-the-majority>.

¹⁰ Daniel Contescu, “În 2008, Putin Ar Fi Strigat La Bush: „Ucraina Nu Este Un Stat, Este nimic!,” Mediafax. March 24, 2022, <https://www.mediafax.ro/politic/in-2008-putin-ar-fi-strigat-la-bush-ucraina-nu-este-un-stat-este-nimic-20665614>.

important for our purposes than the acts and events that eventually led him to give the order for this “special military operation.” The main ideologists behind his point of view are Vladislav Surkov, **Ivan Ilyin**, and Alexandr Dugin.

However, throughout his career and even in his latest speech, Putin has shown his interest once more in following the ideology of the fascist philosopher Ivan Ilyin. This has been backed up by other scholars as well, primarily Timothy Snyder, a well-respected historian who has conducted considerable research and writings on the theme of fascism and has undisputedly been fascinated by the leadership of Putin to understand his ideology by thoroughly analyzing his speeches and political tactics, and who his mentors are respectively.

Thus, Ivan Ilyin is crucial in understanding the core concept after which President Putin guides his autocracy. For starters, according to Ilyin’s writings, any mention of Ukrainians or Georgians, or other nationalities of the Russian Empire was put into quotes, since he believed that these were only **sub-nationalities** or parts without any true difference to the larger Russian body National. Any mention of Ukraine as a separate national or cultural construct of identity that could act independently of Russia was to be seen as treason against Russia and severely punished.

Secondly, in his essay entitled “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians” Putin vowed for a mythological approach that matches with Ilyin’s perspective of the “**cell and body**” when highlighting the equality of the Ukrainians and Russians on a “spiritual, human and civilizational” level that makes them all together “one people”. In his perspective, Ukraine is inseparable

from Russia and exemplifies Ilyin's lust for unity and totality.¹¹ The "sin" that Ukraine must be severely punished for at this moment is its aspiration for "Westernization", by establishing democracy and joining NATO, comprising in a nutshell "God's sin" as perceived by both Putin and Ilyin.

Western stance on Georgia vs Ukraine

The 2008 Russo-Georgian War had erupted at the start of the **Beijing Summer Olympics**, much to the dismay of Chinese officials, a state with which Russia holds powerful financial ties in a common effort to build an alliance against the United States. This was also used as a tactic to divert attention from the ongoing turmoil and advancement of the Russian troops within the separatist regions of Georgia. To avoid upsetting China once more, Putin has this time waited until after the Winter Games' closing ceremony, also held in Beijing, before striking again in Ukraine. Putin's move signaled an eerie déjà vu for Georgians still reeling from their country's bruising defeat at the hands of Russia.¹²

Before Washington D.C. said on the 14th of August 2008 that Russian troops were showing signs of withdrawal, the Georgian territory continued to be the scene of brutal destruction carried out by Moscow-led forces. In at least three Georgian cities, including Gori and the port of Poti, Russian occupiers, equipped with tanks and armored vehicles, blew up various targets. Uniforms and military

¹¹ Hampton Terrell, "How Understanding Philosopher Ivan Ilyin..." Du Clarion. April 19, 2022, <https://duclarion.com/2022/04/how-understanding-philosopher-ivan-ilyin-can-give-insight-into-vladimir-putin/>.

¹² Benjamin Dodman, "Moldova, Then Georgia, Now Ukraine: How Russia Built, " France24. February 22, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220222-moldova-then-georgia-now-ukraine-how-russia-built-bridgeheads-into-post-soviet-space>.

insignia were also looted from Georgian barracks, probably for future sabotage or diversionary operations. Moscow said the six-point peace plan negotiated under the EU presidency would allow it to adopt additional security measures pending the deployment of international observers to the region.

The Kremlin seemed determined to defy the West in general, and the US in particular, to suggest to the westward-looking former Soviet republics that they cannot rely on support from the West. This was partly achieved by the staging in Moscow of the two separatist leaders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia's apparent ignoring of Ukraine's decision to force the Russian fleet in Crimea to seek authorization for their operations before launching them has also served the same purpose. Finally, increasingly insistent calls for peace and pro-Georgian statements by US officials have been met with some of the most acid retorts from Moscow.

The Russo-Georgian War of 2008 raised serious questions regarding the reliability of political blocks such as **European security**, only further exacerbated by the lack of sanctions which were mere and inefficient accusations said at the conference room exchanged between US spokeswoman Condoleezza Rice and Russian diplomatic chief Lavrov. The inability of the US and the EU to offer any resilience in face of the aggressor later left Putin with a mindset of the feebleness of the blocks. Thus, this war and its aftermath showed the effects of incoherent policymaking, enfeebled political will, and disunity in the Western alliance. For Washington, it also represented a harvest of a misconceived policy towards

Georgia that lost control over Georgian policy and may have contributed to Tbilisi's recklessness.¹³

The primary stakeholders in the Russo-Georgian War were the United States of America, NATO, the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and Russia. A Joint Control Commission (JCC) and the Joint Peacekeeping Forces group were established by the OSCE in search of a peaceful settlement to the conflict. Abkhazia and South Ossetia were supported by Russia. The international reaction to Russia's military campaign in Georgia was to prove remarkably muted, with Moscow suffering few negative consequences. On the contrary, EU leaders led calls for a ceasefire that appeared to favor Russian interests, while the US under the new Obama administration was soon calling for a reset in relations with the Kremlin. Understandably, many in Moscow interpreted this accommodating approach as an informal invitation for further acts of aggression in Russia's traditional sphere of influence. As a result, there were no sanctions against Russia at the time.

Georgia is thought to be greatly disadvantaged by its geopolitical location; a post-Soviet legacy in the South Caucasus region tailored by the various interests that other countries pursue in the region, some being more powerful external players with different agendas than the others such as Russia, the EU, Turkey, US, China, Central Asia - particularly Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and finally Iran,¹⁴ all these international actors follow a tendency of imposing their power on

¹³ Stephen Blank, "America and the Russo-Georgian War," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 20, no. 2 (July 24, 2009): 425-451, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592310902975547>.

¹⁴ Christine Karelska, "Georgia's Balancing Act Between Russia and the West," *Visegrad Hindsight*, November 24, 2022, <https://visegradinsight.eu/georgias-balancing-act-between-russia-and-the-west/>.

the entire region and assert their own rules, thus further blocking Georgia's foreign policy room for maneuver.

Despite its regional differences and resilience with the other states, as well as its economic dependence on Russia, Georgia tries to maintain a point of balance with the EU and NATO. In fact, Georgia was considered to be on top of the list of the Eastern Partnership initiative alongside Ukraine and Moldova, together comprising the **Association Trio**. Furthermore, the state is constantly working on strengthening its strategic cooperation with the two political blocks to the next possible extent, striving for a "reliable partner" status, as well as a contributor to the order of international security, whilst treading carefully not to land in scalding waters with Moscow. However, despite its best efforts, Georgia has suffered a serious blow to its status, and the morale of its nation respectively when its candidacy status to the EU was rejected alongside the promise of embracing the European Perspective and continues to walk an unpaved and yet unknown road.

In the case of Ukraine, it is viewed as a key partner in the Euro-Atlantic region because it is a cornerstone for security, democracy, and human rights in the region. This is further supported by the fact that the War in Ukraine has plunged the EU into economic shock; the third after the "2008 financial and economic crisis, the following Eurozone crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic."¹⁵ As a countermeasure to this, the EU has stepped up its capacity by showing solidarity with the affected state. On their behalf, states such as Germany have begun to take significant measures to invest "€100 billion additional defense spending in 2022

¹⁵ Josep Borrell, "The War in Ukraine and Its Implications for the EU | EEAS Website," European Union External Action. March 14, 2022, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/war-ukraine-and-its-implications-eu_en.

and an increase of the defense budget to above 2 % of GDP from 2024.” According to Josep Borell, Vice-President of the EU Commission, the return of war to European soil implies that all European members are required to contribute more actively to taking responsibility for their security, whilst following frameworks that are in full complementarity with NATO.

Furthermore, NATO has developed a network of structured partnerships with countries from the Euro-Atlantic area, the Mediterranean, and others to incorporate Ukraine fully into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. Canada is also committed to using its international assistance to support Ukraine's goals for greater Euro-Atlantic integration. Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine have also seriously undermined Euro-Atlantic security, making Ukraine a key partner in the region. The US, NATO, and EU have all expressed strong support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and have implemented several measures to help Ukraine defend itself from Russia's aggression. The US and EU have imposed sanctions on Russia, while NATO has increased its presence in the Black Sea and has provided Ukraine with a **Comprehensive Assistance Package**. This package includes support for capability development and capacity-building, as well as financial and political assistance. Additionally, NATO has condemned Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and its destabilizing activities in eastern Ukraine and has called on Russia to immediately stop the war and withdraw its forces from Ukraine. The US, NATO, and EU have all made it clear that they are firmly committed to supporting Ukraine's independence and securing its future.

Was Georgia used as inspiration for Putin's playbook in Ukraine?

We can conclude that Georgia did serve as a major influence in Putin's "special military operation" carried out in Ukraine. In 2008, the Kremlin used Georgia as a testing ground for its strategy of hybrid warfare, utilizing both conventional military and non-conventional tactics such as disinformation campaigns and economic sanctions to achieve its objectives. The Georgian war has also allowed Moscow to gain control over two separatist enclaves, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, which it has since recognized as independent states.

In the case of Ukraine, the Kremlin has already applied the same tactics as in Georgia, such as the use of disinformation campaigns to discredit the Ukrainian government and the deployment of military forces along its borders. Moscow has also issued passports to citizens of occupied eastern Ukraine and has recognized the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, two separatist entities established in 2014. Furthermore, the Russian military has conducted exercises in Belarus and falsely announced partial troop withdrawals to give the illusion of de-escalation. All these tactics are eerily similar to those used in Georgia in 2008.

What remains in store for the future?

We cannot state for certain if Russia's victory in Ukraine is a plausible scenario, however, it is difficult to project at this moment in time the outcome of the confrontation. It is common knowledge that the war has been a tragedy for Ukraine and Ukrainians, however, it has also been a losing campaign for Russia which has debuted with a major backlash and one which I strongly believe will be

a major key point for the uphold of its progress; the outdated and failing Soviet conscription.

Military service is compulsory for men ages 18 to 27 in Russia, however, the majority is comprised of groups of youths with little to no experience in combat. Conscription has always been mandatory in Russia, since 1918, however, it is largely viewed by the public with disdain, being “closely linked to numerous exposés about the endemic abuses in the armed forces”,¹⁶ as well as finding judicial loopholes in the system to avoid the military service altogether. Thus, the more fitting, healthy, and educated young men successfully get away, whilst recruitment officials are oftentimes left to choose conscripts from youths with low education levels, as well as severe health issues. To add salt to injury, as of the 5th of November, President Putin signed a decree in which convicts of crimes such as drug trafficking and homicide were immobilized in the Russian army.

For a quick comparison, in 2008 the Russian military topped off as successful in the confrontation, due to a combination of kinetic and non-kinetic strikes that quickly overwhelmed the Georgian army and government. Moreover, it seems that Russia was well-prepared for the war and had practiced for it for several years prior to the hostilities. Thus, it was able to effectively move troops to the battlefield and effectively utilize its air power, whereas, for the Georgian part, the war revealed major deficiencies in its army, including a lack of coordination between the different services and poor intelligence.

This time around in the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war, the same cannot be said about Russia’s swift tactics. According to an article from the New York Times

¹⁶ “Conscription Through Detention IN RUSSIA,” Human Rights Watch. 2002, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/russia/russia1102-01.htm>.

gathered from interviews, intercepts, documents, and secret battle plans, the issues start from the poor equipment that the soldiers use to initiate their campaign: instructions read from Wikipedia for weapons that they hold minimum knowledge of using (**see Fig.No.3**). outdated maps of Ukraine from around the 1960s, sometimes recovered from the battlefield, other times scouting with no maps at all (**see Fig.No.4**). Poor battle tactics such as open use of cellphone lines give away their positions, whilst military training takes place in dilapidated Russian bases “hollowed out by corruption.”¹⁷ (**see Fig.No.5**).

If Russia were to prevail in Ukraine, it would lead to broader Russian claims and demands to rewrite the European security order following its interests. There would also be consequences for U.S.-Russian relations, with any near-term restoration of normalcy between the two countries becoming difficult, if not impossible.

¹⁷ Michael Schwirtz et al., “Putin’s War: The inside Story of a Catastrophe,” The New York Times (The New York Times, December 17, 2022), https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/12/16/world/europe/russia-putin-war-failures-ukraine.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&state=default&module=styleIn-russia-ukraine&variant=show®ion=BELOW_MAIN_CONTENT&block=storyline_flex_guide_recirc.

Fig. No.1

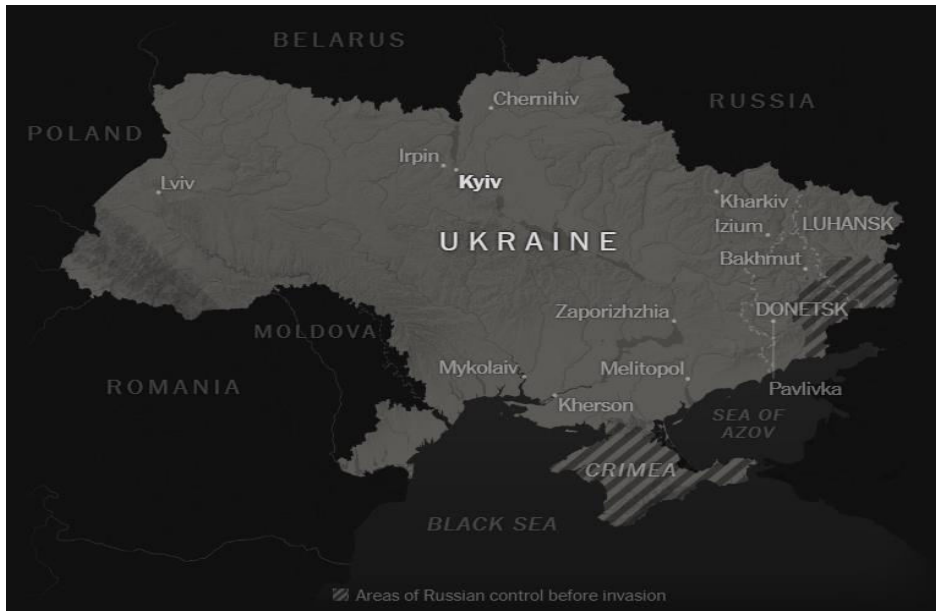


Figure II. Georgia



Sources: Map created by CRS. Map information generated using data from the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (2018), DeLorme (2018), Department of State (2017), and Esri (2017).

Fig. No.3



Fig. No.4

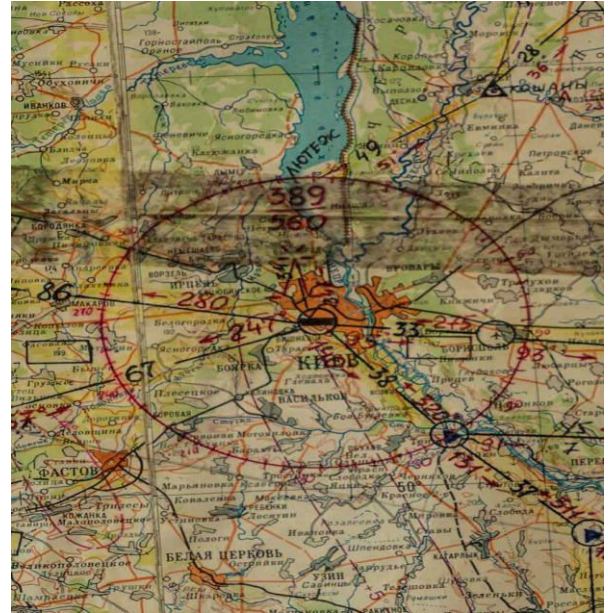


Fig. No.5



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