



საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობათა კვლევის ფონდი  
GEORGIAN FOUNDATION FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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**GEORGIA HOMELAND DEFENSE:  
CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES**

*NODAR KHARSHILADZE*



**EXPERT OPINION**

**2013**



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## Georgia Homeland Defense: Challenges and Perspectives

In May 2013, the Strategic Defense Review document for Georgia, developed by the Ministry of Defense and approved by the President of Georgia as a result of co-operation with the National Security Council, was published. Today, when almost five years have elapsed since the Russia-Georgia armed conflict in August 2008, it is interesting to conduct a parallel analysis and establish a vision of the type of army required by Georgia, what aims should be fulfilled by its armed forces and what realistic expectations should exist in the case of renewed military aggression.

Unfortunately, following the August war, a volumetric, detailed military analysis of lessons learned during the conflict has not been conducted, either internally or at the expert level. The conclusion of the Temporary Parliamentary Committee for the Study of the August War of 2008 focuses on more general interagency aspects, pointing out only the shortcomings related to management and control, as well as the reserve system. Thus, since detailed analysis was not the objective of this Committee, the military component is also reviewed only on a general level.

In 2009, the Ministry of Defense developed an initial analysis of experiences gained during the August War although due to various reasons, it proved impossible to deepen and refine this analysis and an initial viewpoint does not provide sufficient material for a detailed study.

The purpose of the present paper is not to analyze the military causes and outcomes of the war. This can be accomplished by a special group comprising experienced officers of the armed forces. Although representatives of the Ministry of Defense have repeatedly emphasized the need for creating such a group, the issue remains pending. We believe that until an extensive analysis is conducted, it will be difficult to develop a realistic plan for the future based on experience.

Given Georgia's strategic circumstances and legislation, the principal and most significant objective of the Georgian armed forces is the protection of the country's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty. The fulfillment of international obligations within competence (including par-

ticipation in international peacekeeping operations) as well as assistance to civil authorities during natural and technogenic disasters also present important tasks. The latter is more of a non-traditional mission and it would be appropriate to discuss the key component in the implementation of this task – the reserve force – in the section about defense.

It would be fitting to discuss the tasks highlighted above both in general terms, as well as with regard to the Georgian armed forces, as to how the Georgian Army could fulfill these functions.

In the case of Georgia, it is feasible to discuss two aspects of defense: one being the prevention or debarment of war and the second in the form of delay the opponent in case of military aggression. Below we present both options.

## **Prevention**

Prevention is rather a complex phenomenon and may be explained in diverse ways such as, for instance: the combination of political, economic, social and military factors which inhibit one or several potential parties to a conflict from using open force. Given the specifics of this paper, we will pay special attention to the military component.

According to the rare historic cases where prevention has played a certain role, several common elements can be singled out as three key components: rationality, inevitable damage and balance of power. All three components will be discussed in detail below.

Rationality, perhaps, is one of the major elements of not only military but general prevention. Prevention stands a chance when the parties to a possible conflict take decisions based on rational analysis; in other words, any given state machinery or sole leader (in more autocratic cases) should make a decision regarding whether or not to commence a conflict based mainly on rational conclusions. As it is almost impossible to exclude the human factor, it will affect the decision on some level. If human emotions and/or, worse, religious or national fanaticism are above rationalism, talk of successful prevention is futile. For instance, if a decision-making leader of a country ‘converses’ with a deity by night and receives advice on humanity as a whole and, in particular, on the future of their nation directly

from the heavens, it is rather difficult to estimate what this individual (or group of individuals) will ultimately decide and when they will be 'instructed from above' to obliterate 'the unbelievers' in spite of the risk and harm that ensues from this attempt and more so if the country in question possesses nuclear weapons.

Accordingly, rationalism is necessary for the parties to correctly share the results and risks of aggression following which, based on pragmatic calculations, they will restrain themselves from engaging in conflict.

Unfortunately, pragmatism alone will not suffice for this. Here, the issue of the second precondition of prevention is raised – inevitable damage, or when the first condition is fulfilled and rational and pragmatic analysis of the situation is performed, this should demonstrate to the potential parties to a conflict that in the case of aggression, resulting damage would be inevitable (military and, consequently, economic, political, social or all together) and this damage would exceed or, as a minimum, equal the benefits obtained in the case of a successful conclusion of the conflict (a part of the territory, natural resources, political domination, etc.). In addition, the risk of incurring such damage should be high, one might say – guaranteed; it should not be dependent on the military success or the good fortune of the opponent. Naturally, these last two factors increase or decrease damages incurred by any given party to the conflict; however, the principal amount of losses should be identified.

As an example, the Latin American country, Alpha, plans to attack country Beta, defeat it through the use of military force and capture the disputed province between the two countries. In this case, besides political factors (let us say that the political damage will not be catastrophic and irreparable) which should give country Alpha food for thought, it should also bear in mind that in order to reach its goal, it will lose 50 thousand troops – in the best case, and if country Beta uses its forces more effectively than expected by the Alphaeans through initial analysis, and if military fortune is also on its side, then Alpha's troop losses will increase to 80-100 thousand as a result of which it may not be able to achieve its military objective – the occupation of the disputed province, although this is unlikely.

In this case, Alpha's authorities must decide whether or not the occupa-

tion of the province is worth losing 50 to 100 thousand troops (as well as obvious political factors which are also significant but not decisive). If Alpha decides that the combination of military damage and additional political factors exceeds the value of the acquisition obtained as a result of achieving its objective (in this case, the disputed province), it may refrain from aggression. Such a result is expected in democratic or democratically oriented political systems where power is obtained through electoral means and the society is involved in state procedures. In such conditions, the risk of loss (and a subsequent loss of power as a result) may serve as a crucial deterrent factor in decisions by the ruling party.

It is noteworthy that in certain cases this does not suffice and a third preventive factor gains significance. If there is no balance of power, which makes it almost impossible or indeed impossible for the aggressor to reach the objective, and if the opportunity to achieve the goal exists, despite the expected losses (in autocratic regimes, especially in the case of Russia), the party or parties to the conflict will take the risk anyway.

The balance of power is significant precisely in those cases where despite the rationally calculated risks and damages, one or both sides are prepared to use force to reach the objective. The existence of the balance of power renders the escapade (and, in this case, it is only an escapade) useless. The balance of power between the potential parties to a conflict may be individual, where the countries possess equivalent power between them, and collective – where one party is a member of an alliance whose military potential balances out the stronger second party. It is possible that both parties are members of two different alliances which balance each other with their military potential. This depends on how the issue is understood.

In addressing historical examples, a classical and successful illustration of military prevention is the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, or the Cold War. The fact that the cold conflict between the USSR and the US did not escalate into a World War is primarily the result of bilateral military prevention. A popular theory of military prevention is the US 'mutually assured destruction' which signifies that if one party (the Soviet Union) used all of its nuclear arsenal to inflict a devastating massive blow to its opponent, then the second party (the United States) would nevertheless have the opportunity for a response attack, which may

have been quantitatively less powerful, but would still possess sufficient potential for destruction. To this end, nuclear submarines and especially fortified facilities were used which would automatically retaliate in accordance to a pre-defined scenario. Consequently, the balance of power and inevitable damage appeared to be the crucial obstacle for the Soviet Union since no other moral or political leverage could hinder its desire to destroy and/or subordinate capitalism by force in order to establish the communist regime (the violent struggle against capitalism was directly stated as the first priority in the USSR's military doctrine).

An example of post-conflict prevention is the present situation between Pakistan and India. It should be noted that, including the First Kashmir War of 1947, four armed conflicts of various scales have occurred between the two countries. Following the final armed confrontation in 1999, the conflict entered the frozen phase, the balance of military power and the potential for mutual use of nuclear weaponry makes the operation of bilateral military prevention realistic, which has been the case for the last 14 years.

A historical example more appropriate for Georgia is the case of Germany and Switzerland during World War II, however, this historical theory is not confirmed by facts and is accompanied by some degree of skepticism. This implies the successful prevention carried out by Switzerland towards Germany where, according to the Swiss, the military component, in particular, their territorial defense system, played a significant role. This issue is quite controversial since, at the beginning of World War II, Germany clearly had the most modernized, effective and almost completely mechanized forces which was an innovation at the time. These forces were especially effective during static territorial defense, a clear example of which is the campaign of 1939-1940, when Germany, in a few days, defeated countries such as the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark. Germany was particularly effective against such fortified and static obstacles.

It is unlikely that Germany expected to suffer any serious damage from the Swiss defense systems; moreover, the lack of balance of power between Switzerland and Germany is evident. This is, perhaps, a rare case, when Hitler, presumably, approached the issue rationally and refrained from attack, although this rationalism was based on political and financial, rather



than military, elements. A neutral Switzerland was beneficial for Germany as a forum for clandestine political talks and a space to amass and transfer financial assets (the Swiss banks held millions of Reichsmarks and it was here that Germany attempted to conduct negotiations with the Allies for a separate truce). Accordingly, this historical example is interesting as a theory, however, the existence of military prevention in this case raises skepticism.

In mentioning prevention, it is essential to point out that history is full of conflicts where prevention should have worked but did not. This occurred on the basis of overly optimistic estimates in favor of one's own military forces, when rationalism dictated to the parties that neither would achieve their objectives and incur heavy damages, but faith in their own victory was so strong that these factors were considered secondary. A clear example of this is a war euphoria arising pre-World War I in the otherwise quite pragmatic and rational German and French societies – the belief in their own quick victory despite the fact that all factors and conclusions (the apparent balance of power and the consequent lengthy war with its severe consequences, results and great damage) pointed to the opposite.

Prevention on paper and prevention in reality clearly differ from each other; numerous scenarios can be calculated in advance, when prevention will not work, however, it is difficult to foresee the circumstances when prevention will work without question.

With regard to the Russia-Georgia armed conflict and the possibility of military prevention, it must be highlighted that it is close to zero. This is the case when the lack of military prevention is apparent. First and foremost, there is no balance of power between Georgia and Russia. If Russia was to spend enough resources and this was not to be interfered with by political factors, it would be guaranteed to achieve its objective – the full occupation of Georgia. Second, Russia does not expect any serious damage and loss resulting from this war. Moreover, it should be noted that Russia, in fact, is a country which traditionally attaches less importance to its own losses if successful achievement of its goal is guaranteed. Moreover, Russia has good experience in the sense that in August 2008, it managed to neutralize Georgian military forces over a short period of time with little or no loss in comparison with its scale. According to Russian officials, they

will be able to achieve this even more easily in the future. We will discuss below whether or not this is true, however, it is a fact that Russia does not consider Georgian military potential an important factor.

Thus, in making decisions on whether or not to trigger a war with Georgia, Russia will give little, if any, significance to the factor of Georgian defense forces. As a conclusion, it can be said that in terms of a Russia-Georgia armed conflict, military prevention will not actually work.

## **Delay**

As stated above in the example of Georgia, self-defense is divided in two: prevention and Delay. Despite the inexistence of military prevention, political prevention inures to the benefit of Georgia which is complemented as a positive factor by the initiative of the new Government of Georgia to begin pragmatic relations with Russia. Whether or not this new format will be effective is a topic of a separate discussion although it should be noted that war rhetoric in Russian media and official statements has subsided which can be seen as a positive factor. According to the military hypotheses of the Strategic Defense Review document, however, full-scale military aggression on the part of Russia remains on the agenda among threats faced by the country.

Accordingly, defense planning should take place under the least desirable scenario. In the case that, despite the factors at hand, the Russian Federation still decides to renew military aggression, in this context it is important to consider what task Russia may have and what are the likely targets it sets in case of using military force. It is unlikely that Russia wishes to fully occupy Georgia with the purpose of its complete subordination and the destruction of its statehood. This will take much more time and will be very difficult to achieve politically. A more realistic scenario is one in which Russia, through military aggression, will attempt to create an interim government comprised of forces loyal to it which will assume control of the country on behalf of the Georgian nation. With this, it will present the international community with a fait accompli and, as a minimum, create a good springboard for political bargaining. In order to attain this objective, Russia will conduct a rapid attack (Blitz Krieg) against Georgia and strive for maximum damage to the country.

Therefore, Georgia should possess adequate power in order to delay Russia's progress in the shortest possible time, prevent a full occupation of the country and preserve its sovereignty until the international political system comes into play and forces Russia to halt its military aggression through the use of key political leverage.

How long international political institutions and our partners will require to become engaged and to be able to exert influence on Russia and stop its aggression is a subject of a separate detailed study, although judging from past experience and various examples, this is approximately a one-week time period, in the best case. In addition, the factor of Russia attempting to extend such negotiations through the use of various diplomatic means so as to give more time to its armed forces to complete the military operation and put the international community before the accomplished fact should also be taken into consideration.

It is for these circumstances and objectives that the Georgian forces need to plan the so-called 'delaying' element, obviously, taking into account the country's resources. Georgia has the clear case of the budget oriented planning.

According to Georgia's Strategic Defense Review document published in May 2013, the upcoming budget for the years 2013-2016 will gradually increase from GEL 660 million to GEL 880 million, over the period of three years, which is an average annual growth rate of approximately 8-9%. For a comparison (in comparison budget in 2007-2010 was a range from 900 to 1500 million lari). Today Defense is considered to be still important, but unlikely of years 2007-2008 it is not a number one priority. Which is understandable considering the background of the existing reality, when due to the financial crisis, defense expenditures of NATO-member states are also reduced, and our country's priorities are mainly directed towards the development of social fields, it is prudent, under conditions of limited resources, to make a choice in favor of quality over quantity, taking into account the given capacity.

The updated Strategic Defense Review distinctly focuses on quantity in the section for budget calculations for 2013-2016. According to the document, up to 70% of the entire budget (up to 68.8-69.1%) will be spent on

the maintenance of army personnel, purchases – up to 2.1-7%, construction – up to 1.4% and scientific research and development – 6-6.3%, while 21.3-23.9% will be used on operations and support. Accordingly, it can be said that required amounts of financial resources cannot be mobilized for modernization, and capital investment. financial allocations for such parameters in the short or long term will not be able to have a positive impact on combat effectiveness of the Georgian army.

In case of upholding existing weaponry, its maintenance costs will increase while their efficiency decreases. While we retain military equipment from the 1970s, military technology in the world continues to advance. Despite the fact that since 2010 we managed to launch domestic military production (drones, etc.), without increasing annual investment, this initiative will only bring a microscopic effect.

Under these conditions, it can be said that in the case of repeated military aggression by Russia in 2014-2015, the balance of power will be similar to that of 2008 as radically significant changes have not occurred in either party's defense agencies.

Indeed, the Georgian armed forces are headed by more educated and skilled officers, defensive barriers have been erected around Tbilisi although, in order for the country to have an additional advantage, it is necessary to conduct a series of fundamental reforms in the armed forces which, among other things, requires significant resources and time.

For its part, Russia has already implemented a series of reforms to modernize and restructure its army (albeit on paper but it was a limited success). Russia has established better-organized footholds on occupied territories of Georgia which ensures better logistics and management. Accordingly, it can be said that both have taken particular strides, however, both have armies approximately similar to those in 2008 with the same military balance.

According to the above considerations, in the case if Russia decides to renew its military aggression against Georgia, the latter's armed forces will find it difficult to deter the former's aggression for a required period of time as no drastic reforms have taken place in the Georgian army since 2008.

Among the key shortcomings faced by the Georgian armed forces, in addition to limited financial resources, is the lack of educated officers and NCOs. Simply put, Georgia does not possess sufficient commander circles to manage a 37,000-strong army and this is in no way a secret. Although certain steps have been taken in this direction (a renewed defense academy, various new command courses and other military schools), tackling this problem also requires some time.

If the education system of the Georgian army was already fine-tuned, supplied with necessary resources and could begin training the required number of personnel tomorrow (and, unfortunately, this is not the case, and this will require years), initial results would not be obtained for another four-to-five years and meanwhile approximately half of the commander and NCO ranks will either not be staffed or will have to be staffed with low-level personnel.

Taking into account these estimations, it can be said that at this stage we have neither financial resources nor a desired number of educated officers to provide for the development of a 37,000-strong army. Accordingly, talk of optimizing (reducing) the army should begin and the estimation of the specific number of troops required by the country for these purposes, we believe, should become the prerogative of military specialists.

In this regard, as a recommendation, it is advisable to shift the focus to the development prospects of the armed forces. The funds freed, as a result of the optimization, from personnel maintenance costs should be invested in education and the development of essential military capabilities. Subsequently, if requirement exists and the budget allows, together with the enrollment of new sergeants and officers into the army, the number of the troops should gradually increase, although keeping in mind that at least 25% of the defense budget will be utilized on weapons development (standard NATO budget).

Lastly, a few words to touch upon the issue of military reserve. Beginning in 2006, there have been several attempts to establish various types of reserve force in Georgia. Unfortunately, all of them failed to yield the desired result for the same reasons that any other military reserve concept would yield no results. The reason is simple. It is the lack of commander circles –

officers and sergeants – for an annual reserve contingent of 100,000. The Guard Vision document developed in 2009 by the National Guard Department analyzed the errors made by the military reserve prior to the August war which stated that the deficit of brigade and battalion management was one of the reasons why the reserve was not effective during the August hostilities. According to the document, only five servicepersons were allocated from military personnel to command 500 reservists. Unfortunately, despite such an analysis, the Ministry of Defense began training 100,000 reserve troops in the post-war period notwithstanding the fact that the problem in the National Guard was not yet settled and would not be settled, albeit due to the lack of time.

Accordingly, in establishing a new type of reserve system, it is advisable to focus on smaller-scale army reserves which would consist of former servicepersons and its effectiveness would be higher than that of a regular reserve.

We should not forget that training a reserve costs money and that the more demands towards a reserve system, the more expensive it is to maintain it.

In case of availability of required funds, the country may maintain a small-scale reserve force which would organize a group of critically needed concrete specialists (reserve staffed according to specialty types) during war or crisis situations (natural and technogenic disasters). The country would benefit from this both in times of war and in peace. Although, based on the National Defense concept of Georgia, the entry on total and unconditional defense and the shortage of budgetary funds renders it almost impossible to establish the reserve system in a way that would yield desired results.

In conclusion, we cannot not address the issue of participation in peacekeeping missions. This task is successfully and honorably handled by the Georgian armed forces and, especially, private soldiers. Participation in a peacekeeping mission promotes the attainment of political dividends for the country and increases the quality of interaction with leading countries' servicepersons.

When discussing military knowledge and experience gained during such

missions, it is essential to consider how we will be able to utilize the knowledge attained there in case of wide-scale aggression. The adequacy of the experience gained by our servicepersons in the missions is a different topic, although one thing should be noted: if our army is well equipped and fully secured logistically, acts under proper management and control, it exhibits examples of individual heroism and possesses the ability to be one of the most successful armies, as demonstrated by international operations.

## **Conclusion**

As a conclusion, it can be said that the possibility of military prevention with Russia is clearly absent. Accordingly, emphasis should be made on the possibility for calculated delay over a certain period of time (one week or more). In order to reach this goal, however, the country must take relevant measures.

Based on the military threats facing the country, it is crucial for the Ministry of Defense to begin an internal analysis of lessons learned which includes an extensive examination of the lessons learned during military reforms conducted after the August war as well as in the course of general reforms.

On the basis of the relevant conclusions, it is advisable to initiate group discussions consisting of skilled servicepersons and relevant experts regarding the optimization (reduction) of the army, to the extent possible.

It would be beneficial to pay particular attention to the further development of military education while funds freed as a result of optimization could be used for future investment.

Strategic documents, defining a long-term plan and vision of how the country plans to ensure an adequate and efficient response to military threats, are also to be refined and updated.

All of the above will contribute to the establishment of a modern, mobile, small and efficient army which would be the pride of the nation and which would be capable of resolving set objectives and neutralize the threats facing the country.





