

# CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN GEORGIA: AN ANALYSIS APPLYING THE INTRACTABLE CONFLICT THEORY AND THE GOVERNMENTAL POLITICS MODEL

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## Abstract

*Conflict between Georgia and Russia has resisted resolution for nearly a century. This paper examines this conflict using two theoretical models in order to understand its many dimensions and complexity. The roots of the conflict run deep into the economic, social and political structure of Georgia and Russia. When discussing the conflict in Georgia, we must go beyond the birth and evolution of the conflict and explore the economic, political and social environment in the Caucasus that permitted its existence and persistence. Moreover, we must analyze the response from the Georgian and Russian governments as well. This study will use the Intractable Conflict Theory in order to best understand the historical antecedents of the conflict. Next, it will offer an analysis of the Georgian and Russian governments' policy-making process by using the Governmental Politics Model. This model positions Turkey as a key nation and illustrates the ways in which the Governmental Politics Model provides a theoretical apparatus to analyze the strategic and diplomatic links that bind Turkey with Georgia and Russia. Finally, after applying these two theories into the Georgian conflict and reaching the findings, the paper will offer micro-policy recommendations to mitigate and manage the conflict.*

## Key Words

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Caucasus, conflict, Georgia, Intractable Conflict Theory, Russia, Soviet hierarchical system, South Ossetia, Governmental Politics Model, Turkey.

## **I. The Intractable Conflict and Governmental Politics Model**

### **Theoretical Background and Framework**

Conflict between Georgia and Russia remains unresolved after nearly a century. For many, the conflict is categorized as intractable; its roots run deep into the economic, social and political structure of both Georgia and Russia. When discussing the conflict in Georgia, one must go beyond the birth and evolution of the conflict and explore the economic, political and social environment in the Caucasus that permitted its existence and persistence as well as analyze the response from the Georgian and Russian governments.

This paper uses both Jacob Bercovitch's "Intractable Conflict" theory and Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow's "Governmental Politics Model (GPM)" as a framework to understand the Georgian Conflict. With events throughout the history of the conflict, intractable conflict theory is useful to capture the conflict's nuance and complexity. Intractable conflicts are accepted as the most precarious conflicts in the world. They not only threaten their environment, but also entire regions and the international system. The Georgian conflict is an intractable conflict because of its complexity, long existence, violence, and futile peace attempts as well as the deep fear, hatred and concern from the both parties. Berkovitch's entries in "Grasping the Nettle, Analyzing Cases of Intractability" will provide a deep analysis of some of the major factors keeping the conflict from progressing towards a more beneficial outcome. Without breaking out the complexities of the conflict and having a deeper understanding of the core elements, there can be no compromise, mitigation, reconciliation or management of the conflict.

Many citizens in societies wonder why their governments' policies do not reflect public opinion. Public opinion polls usually show the contradiction between the desires of ordinary citizens and the decisions of the government. Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, in their work, "Essence of Decision, Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis", draw out a valuable

analysis of governmental behaviour before, during and after the conflicts. The authors argue that politicking is the only way for us to understand why nation-states make the decisions they make.<sup>2</sup> GPM allows us to best understand the ways in which nations relate to one another. After analyzing the intractable Georgian conflict, to get an illustrative and complete analysis of the Georgian and Russian governments' policy-making process, GPM is ideal. The model shows us how nation-states relate to each other. This model sheds light on the Georgian and Russian government's policy-making processes before and during the conflict. The paper also explores the unique role that Turkey may play in the conflict as an arbiter. Indeed, Turkey's geopolitical position has rendered it a strategic partner to both Russia and Georgia. If Turkey positioned itself as a reliable and neutral mediator between the two nations, it would emerge as a leading proponent of peace and stability in Caucasus region.

The purpose of this paper is to develop a cogent analysis of the Georgian conflict in order to identify pathways that lead to conflict de-escalation and resolution by applying the Intractable Conflict Theory and the Governmental Politics Model. The recent hostilities may have subsided, but many of the underlying tensions across numerous aspects of life and in various segments of society are still in need of scrutiny and modification. The Georgian conflict is important to address, not only because of the human suffering as a direct effect, but also because of the critical roles of major players on the global geopolitical map: once-mighty Russia, the U.S., the EU, Turkey and the new states of the Caucasus.

## **2. Analysis and Findings**

### **Intractable Conflict**

#### **Characteristics of Intractability**

Understanding the intractable nature of the conflict requires that we lay out the issues that have 'frozen' progress towards a resolution over the decades. According to Bercovitch, intractability has five phases within these dimensions, which help frame the cycle of intractability:

“It tends to be long-lasting; it persists twenty or more years.

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<sup>2</sup> Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, New York, NY, Longman, 1999, p. 258.

It is characterized by ever-present tension and violence. The victims of violence in intractable conflict include combatants as well as civilians.

There is a long set of unresolved or apparently irreconcilable issues at stake. The parties may reach temporary cessations of violence and they cannot reach a fundamental and genuine resolution of their issues.

Psychological manifestations of enmity and deep feelings of fear and hatred generally underlie the relationship between parties. Continuous conflict tends to induce stereotypes and suspicions, and these reinforce antagonistic perceptions and behaviours.

Intractable conflict attracts many actors and institutions that want to deal with, treat, manage or resolve the conflict. There are many futile attempts at management or resolution. Only few of these actors or institutions are successful.”<sup>3</sup>

Before detailing the utility of the intractable conflict, Bercovitch uses Edward Azar’s definition of protracted conflicts. According to Azar, “Protracted conflict takes place between communal groups but quickly transcend national boundaries, it is usually linked to some intangible needs (e.g., identity, recognition, ethnicity), and it tends to generate or reinforce a high level of violence”.<sup>4</sup> The Georgian conflict fits this definition quite well. First of all, the “current conflict” itself has been going on for many years and has its roots in the Cold War climate of the second half of the twentieth century. Secondly, it took place between communal groups, South Ossetians and Georgians, but transcended national boundaries when Russia started taking an active role in the Georgia’s territory. Moreover, identity, recognition and ethnicity have played a central role in the high level of violence.

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<sup>3</sup> Jacob Bercovitch, “Mediation in the Most Resistant Cases” in Pamela Aall, Chester A. Crocker, and Fen Osler Hampson, *Grasping the Nettle: Analyzing Cases of Intractable Conflict*, Washington, D.C., United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007, p. 100-101

<sup>4</sup> Edward Azar’s definition quoted in *Grasping the Nettle: Analyzing Cases of Intractable Conflict*, p. 100.

In order to successfully analyze the Georgian conflict and apply it to Bercovitch's concept of intractable conflict, one must look at the history of the Caucasus region and its people. During the era of Soviet domination, major nationalities were granted political status within the Soviet state and were ranked in a hierarchical federal system. Their place in this hierarchy depended on population size, geographical location and political power with the Communist Party elite. In the Soviet hierarchical system, the highest status was the union republic, followed by the autonomous republic and the autonomous region in the third rank.<sup>5</sup> Each national group which had received the right to constitute one of these units was recognized as its 'titular nation'. For instance, Abkhazia was the titular nation of the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia and the Georgia was the titular nation of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia.

The first armed conflict between South Ossetia and Georgia occurred 1920, when South Ossetians attempted to declare independence from the First Georgian Republic (1918-1921). This outbreak of hostilities ended with several thousand deaths at the hands of Georgian troops. Thousands of South Ossetians suffered from hunger and epidemics. Following the 1921 Red Army invasion of Georgia, the Soviet Government granted South Ossetia an autonomous status within the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia in April 1922. Thus, South Ossetians were granted the lowest status as a people in the Soviet Union: titular nation of the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Region of South Ossetia.<sup>6</sup> By this status, South Ossetians were able to enjoy a degree of autonomy with regard to language and education, yet their position was inferior to that of Abkhazia or the autonomy enjoyed by their northern kin under Russia.

At the end of the 1980s with the disintegration of the Communist Party, institutional guarantees for minorities disappeared. With the democratization of the Soviet system and the collapse of centralized power, the legitimacy of the federal order and hierarchical relations between union republics, autonomous republics and autonomous regions became one of the

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<sup>5</sup> According to Geoffrey Hosking, "The political status of all units could change over time according to circumstances and the political considerations of the Moscow party leadership", see Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: A History*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 340.

<sup>6</sup> Antje Herrberg, *Conflict Resolution in Georgia: A Synthesis Analysis with a Legal Perspective*, Crisis Management Initiative, June 4, 2006, p. 11.

main subjects of dispute. Some national movements in autonomous republics and regions refused to be considered part of a union republic. In most of the Russian Federation, these conflicts were settled by mutual agreement, but in the North and South Caucasus the crisis of legitimacy led to political tension and in some cases to violent clashes between the capitals of the union republics and their subordinate political entities.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia all challenged the Soviet federal hierarchy. The political leadership of the autonomous region of South Ossetia strove to upgrade the status of the region through reunification with the North Ossetian Autonomous Republic (which lay within the Russian Federation). The South Ossetian Popular Front was created in 1988 and came to power on 10 November 1989 demanding an autonomous "republic". The Georgian Government rejected this demand. Public discussions between Georgians and South Ossetians over the future of Georgia and its ethnic group, the South Ossetians, were held in South Ossetian villages, but peaceful attempts to resolve the tension failed on 23 November 1989, when 15,000 Georgians marched into Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia. The ensuing clashes between Georgians and South Ossetians resulted in over a thousand casualties, missing people, destruction of homes, refugees and internally displaced people.<sup>8</sup>

As we can now see, the Georgian conflict is a long-lasting one that has antecedents in the events of the Russian Revolution – in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Indeed, the conflict between Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia and South Ossetians started in the 1920s when South Ossetians attempted to declare independence from the First Republic of Georgia. In the disintegration of the Communist Party at the end of the 1980s, with its civilian victims, the conflict became even more volatile.

On Sunday, 12 November 2006, South Ossetians went to the polls to vote in a referendum confirming the region's independence from Georgia. The result was an overwhelming "yes" to independence, with a turnout

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Service, *A History of Modern Russia: From Nicholas II to Vladimir Putin*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 487.

<sup>8</sup> Herrberg, p. 11.

above 95% from the territory's 70,000 people.<sup>9</sup> Georgia would react with force to such attempts to break away. On the 7 August 2008, Georgia launched an aerial bombardment and ground attack on South Ossetia. Georgian forces controlled the South Ossetian capital, Tskhinvali, for part of the following day. Russia, meanwhile, poured thousands of troops into South Ossetia, announcing that they were taking an active role to protect the innocent South Ossetian people from the Georgian troops. The war lasted five days. At the end of the five days, large numbers of civilians were driven out of their homes in South Ossetia. Many South Ossetians crossed over to the Russian republic of North Ossetia. Residents of Georgian villages in South Ossetia, and the town of Gori, also fled. The South Ossetian capital, Tskhinvali, was reported to be largely in ruins. Thousands of people were dead; hundreds of them were reported as missing. Thousands of innocent men, women and children suffered from the five-day war.<sup>10</sup>

According to Bercovitch, another dimension of an intractable conflict is that it “attracts many actors and institutions that want to deal with, treat, manage or resolve the conflict. There are many futile attempts at management or resolution. Only few of these actors or institutions are successful”.<sup>11</sup> We see this assertion play out in the conflict at many junctures. For example, as soon as the war broke out on 7 August 2008, the international community quickly responded to the event. On 25 September 25, Georgia's primary ally, the United States, criticized Russia's invasion as a violation of the UN Charter. United States President George W. Bush stated that “the world must stand united in our support of the people of Georgia.”<sup>12</sup> The United States, also, reportedly pulled out of the G-8 meeting in protest of the Georgia conflict. Also Poland and Ukraine stated their support for Georgia. In the UN General Assembly, Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko accused Russia of "hypocrisy" and "candid support of separatism" for recognizing the independence of both South Ossetia and another breakaway Georgian province, Abkhazia, soon after the invasion.<sup>13</sup> The EU also condemned Russia's actions, called for it to meet the terms of

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew Collin, “South Ossetia Votes for Independence”, *BBC News Report*, 13 November 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Tim Whewell, “Georgia Accused of Targeting Civilians”, *BBC News Report*, 28 October 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Bercovitch, p. 101.

<sup>12</sup> George W. Bush before the General Assembly, 25 September 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Viktor Yushchenko before the General Assembly, 25 September 25 2008.

an EU-brokered ceasefire and suspended talks on a new partnership agreement with the bloc.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to rhetorical support, the United States provided more than \$39 million of emergency humanitarian relief to the citizens of Georgia affected by the fighting, according to U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator Henrietta Fore.<sup>15</sup> The IMF too has agreed to provide Georgia with a \$750 million loan to help repair the conflict's damage.<sup>16</sup> An international push by foreign governments and nongovernmental organizations began to assist the estimated 100,000 people displaced by the conflict. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Norway, Turkey, Poland and Ukraine also provided humanitarian aid to the region.

On 12 August 2009, Russian President Medvedev and Georgian President Saakashvili approved French President Nicolas Sarkozy's (also the rotating European Union President) six-point peace plan. According to six-point plan:

1. There will be no recourse to the use of force
2. There will be definitive cessation of hostilities
3. There will be free access to humanitarian aid
4. Georgian military forces will be withdrawn to their normal bases of encampment
5. Russian military forces will be withdrawn to the lines prior to the start of hostilities Russian peacekeeping forces will implement additional security measures
6. There will be international discussions over security and stability modalities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.<sup>17</sup>

But this too is consistent with Bercovitch's notion of intractable conflicts. The conflict attracted many actors that seek involvement – most of

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<sup>14</sup> BBC Report, "*Russia Praises EU over Sanctions*", 2 September 2008.

<sup>15</sup> According to USAID's August report, "total USG humanitarian assistance to Georgia is valued at nearly \$39 million, including more than \$12.1 million from USAID/OFDA, nearly \$9.2 million from the U.S. Department of State (State), and nearly \$17.5 million from the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD)", 29 August 2008

<sup>16</sup> BBC, "How has the International Community Responded to the Conflict", *BBC News Report*, 11 November 2008.

<sup>17</sup> European Union Commission Report, "EU Revives Talks on Russia deal", 14 November 2008.



whose efforts have proven fruitless. When we look at the EU's mediation attempt, we see Bercovitch's framework on fuller display. The six-point plan was not able to bring the parties to a fundamental and genuine resolution. On 13 August, the Guardian reported that Russian troops were advancing in South Ossetia.<sup>18</sup> On 15 August, cooperation between Georgian and Russian police in Gori broke down due to apparent discord among personnel.<sup>19</sup> The New York Times reported on 15 August that Russian forces had pushed to within 34 miles (55 km) of Tbilisi, the closest during the war; they stopped in Igoeti.<sup>20</sup> On 25 August 2008, Russia recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states. Russia now argues that the Russian troops should stay in the region as a protector of these newly-born nations.<sup>21</sup>

Another dimension to Bercovitch's theory is that "intractable conflicts present deep feelings of fear and hatred that generally underline the relationship between parties".<sup>22</sup> When we analyze the Georgian conflict, we see that there are a lot of different narratives from each side that include fear, hatred and concern. Every narrative has a different story and even they are all different from each other – each carrying their own truth.

The Georgians have constructed a narrative of victimhood whereby their history is marked by the invasions of large regional actors: first the Ottoman Empire and then by the Russian Empire. They see themselves surrounded by their former occupiers in the region. They were always vulnerable as a nation and their identity have been threatened by the regional powers all through their history. They have always had to resist the outside threat and survive as a nation.<sup>23</sup> Thus, this notion of victimization has created a perception of the 'other', in this case the 'other' is Russia, as always an aggressor against Georgia and its territory. Therefore, starting from the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 2008, Russia's actions were only seen as those of an aggressor by Georgian society. Georgians think Russians took the advantage of their unresolved conflicts to divide Georgia's territory. Many Georgians

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<sup>18</sup> Luke Harding and James Meikle, , "Georgian Villages Burned and Looted as Russian Troops Advance", *The Guardian Report*, 14 August 2008.

<sup>19</sup> BBC, "Talking Through Gritted Teeth", *BBC Monitoring*, 16 August 2008.

<sup>20</sup> C. J. Chivers,, "For Russian Armor, Even With Rice in Georgia, Cease-Fire Is Not a "Red Light", *The New York Times Report*, 15 August 2008

<sup>21</sup> BBC Report, "Miliband Warns Over Russian Crisis", *BBC Report*, 28 August 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Bercovitch, pg. 100.

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth Colleman, *A History of Georgia*, University of Georgia Press, 1991, p. 15.

believe that Russia used the South Ossetians to destroy Georgia. Today a lot of Georgians think Russia actually has never wanted Georgia to be an independent state.

Those reasons that were mentioned above explain the Georgian people's deep nationalistic belief and their attachment to their homeland. Georgians see South Ossetia as part of their historical land. For years, the Georgian government firmly resisted Ossetian separatism, shunning the use of the name South Ossetia, which it sees as implying political bonds with North Ossetia, and therefore as a threat to Georgia's territorial integrity. It prefers to call South Ossetia, which is part of the Georgian province of Shida Kartli, by the ancient name of Samachablo or, more recently, the Tskhinvali region.<sup>24</sup> When Georgia's President Mikhail Saakashvili won the elections in 2004, he promised to recover the breakaway territories, and to join NATO.<sup>25</sup> Saakashvili's promises were widely accepted by Georgians who saw him as a protector of their homeland.

South Ossetians on the other hand, stress that they have always lived in an enclave inhabited mostly by ethnic Ossetians who speak a common language remotely related to Farsi. Russian is their second language. Ethnic Georgians account for less than one-third of the population there.<sup>26</sup> By tradition, the Ossetians have had good relations with Russians and were regarded as loyal citizens, first of the Russian empire and later of the Soviet Union. They sided with the Kremlin when Bolshevik forces occupied Georgia in the early 1920s and the South Ossetian Autonomous Region was created in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia and North Ossetia was formed in Russia in 1922.<sup>27</sup> The collapse of the USSR and Georgian independence in 1991 did nothing to reduce South Ossetia's determination to complete the break with Tbilisi.

One more important aspect of the South Ossetian narrative is the issue of dual citizenship. Even though there are a lot of intermarriages between Georgians and South Ossetians, the 70,000 South Ossetians inhabiting South Ossetia feel themselves much closer to the Russian

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<sup>24</sup> Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus*, Odyssey Publications, Hong Kong, 1992, p. 41.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>27</sup> Herrberg, p. 11.

government than to the Georgian government. Most of the population holds a Russian passport. A Russian passport is known to be a lifeline for South Ossetians. It is a way to get an education or a job in North Ossetia or Moscow. South Ossetians think they have been discriminated against by the Georgian government for years. Most of the population believes that economic advancement in Tbilisi is almost impossible for a South Ossetian. There are very few jobs in the region of South Ossetia. However, Russia provides them with their best opportunities for social advancement. Not surprisingly, most families have at least one person working in Russia and sending money home.<sup>28</sup> It becomes obvious when talking to people that reintegration into the Georgian state would not be realistic.

The Russian narrative presents yet another dimension to the conflict. Historically, South Ossetians have always had a good relationship with the Russians and have typically been regarded as loyal citizens. They hold dual citizenship. Most of the population study and have a job in Moscow or North Ossetia. The Georgian government's aggressive policy against South Ossetians was regarded as a threat by the Russians. The Georgian government's ongoing use of force against the South Ossetians was not acceptable. Russia blamed Georgia for perpetrating genocide over its minority group, the South Ossetians. On 8 August 2008, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev stated that he would "protect the life and dignity of Russian citizens wherever they are".<sup>29</sup> Moreover, Russians still have strong connections to the Caucasus region. During the period of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, Russians were the main regional power in the Caucasus region. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, they lost control and power over the Caucasus. The conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia gave the Russian government an opportunity to regain its power over the Caucasus region. In addition, Georgia's ongoing good relationship with the USA and its attempts to become a member of NATO presented a perceived military threat to the Russian government who thus deemed it unacceptable.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Charles King, "Russia's Liberal Passport Policy." American University, Georgia-Russia Roundtable Discussion on the Current Conflict in South Ossetia, Washington, DC, 10 November 2008.

<sup>29</sup> BBC, "Russian Tanks Enter South Ossetia", *BBC Report*, 8 August 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Luke Harding, "Medvedev Moves to Tighten Russian Leadership's Grip on Power", *The Guardian Report*, 6 November 2008.

All of the above factors firmly place the Georgian situation within the realm of an intractable conflict. It is pervasive, long-standing and involves repeated acts of military activity and violence. The victims of the conflict are combatants as well as civilians. Moreover, the parties could not reach a fundamental resolution and eventually war broke out on 7 August 2008. There is a deep hatred, fear and concern from both the Georgian side and South Ossetian sides. Lastly, despite mediation attempts led by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, the situation in the region is still fragile. The six-point plan is widely viewed by scholars as an unsuccessful mediation attempt.

### **The Governmental Politics Model**

It is not unusual in any society for public opinion and government policy to diverge at times. The policies taken by the top level government officials contradict what an ordinary citizen would decide if they were in power. Many citizens in societies wonder why their governments' policies do not reflect public opinion. The Governmental Politics Model is a very helpful model to explain the relationships between nation-states. With the Governmental Politics Model we can have a much better and deeper understanding of a state's policy-making process. This paper will use Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow's Governmental Politics Model from their work "Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis" to analyze the Georgian conflict. It will first provide their propositions for the Governmental Politics Model. Then it will show how those dimensions help us to understand the parties' policy-making process in the Georgian conflict.

Allison and Zelikow state "[t]he decisions between nation-states are due to politics".<sup>31</sup> They offer five general propositions for the Governmental Politics Model (GPM). First, they claim that authoritative power is most often shared. Even if a leader holds absolute power, he or she must gain a consensus within his or her entourages. By having a group decide the nation's policies, they create a better policy-making process.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, they claim that a nation's actions are best understood as the result of politicking and negotiation by its top leaders. The third proposition is that even if nations share the same goal, leaders differ in how to achieve it because of such factors as personal interests and background. Fourth, leaders

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<sup>31</sup> Allison and Zelikow, p 258.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 265.

have different levels of power based on charisma, personality and persuasion skills. The fifth and the last proposition is that leaders must create a consensus. Otherwise, opponents may take advantage of these disagreements.<sup>33</sup>

When we look at the Georgian conflict, we see these propositions fit perfectly into the parties' decisions. Allison and Zelikow's first proposition is that authoritative power is most often shared. Russia possesses approximately half of world's reserves of nuclear weapons, is the world's largest producer of natural gas, is an influential exporter of modern arms and the holder of oil reserves worth 300 billion dollars. Russia, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, is in a position to support or frustrate the policies of the UN. Russian foreign policy makers want their country to be viewed as a sovereign superpower, enjoying a balance of its dependencies on its partners, and total respect from all other significant international actors, mainly other major powers. The Russian response to the Georgian attack on South Ossetia was designed to send a message not only to the Georgian government, but also to the United States. On 8 August 2008, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev stated that he would "protect the life and dignity of Russian citizens wherever they are".<sup>34</sup> This Medvedev speech was supported by the policies of the Russian foreign policy makers. Thus, we see how in this instance, authoritative power is most often shared.

The second proposition of the Governmental Politics Model is that a nation's actions are best understood as the result of politicking and negotiation by its top leaders. For certain, political economy played a role since "trade turnover with the EU in 2005 was 52% of all Russian international trade, making Russia much more economically dependent on good relations with the EU, than on the US (3%) or China (6%)".<sup>35</sup> That's one of the main reasons why Russian President Dmitry Medvedev accepted French President Nicolas Sarkozy's six-point plan to withdraw Russian troops from Georgia. Russia and the EU have a dependency relationship over the trade turnover. Russia, by not accepting the EU's mediation offer, would risk their relationship.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 259-261.

<sup>34</sup> BBC, "Russian Tanks Enter South Ossetia", *BBC Report*, 8 August 2008

<sup>35</sup> Maria Ordzhonikidze, "What Makes a Real Super Power?", Brussels, Belgium, EU-Russia Center (YEAR).

The Georgian Government has been trying to gain membership in NATO to secure its presence in the region. Also Georgia has been expanding its military power for the last 5 years. Moreover, until the breakout of war in August, Georgia had 2,000 troops in Iraq, the third-largest contingent after the U.S. and Britain.<sup>36</sup> This policy shows Georgia's willingness to be an ally with the US along with its desire for NATO membership.

Meanwhile, one must not ignore the crucial role that Turkey has played in this conflict. Indeed, occupying a critical diplomatic, economic, and cultural link to the region, the government and politics model offers a powerful explanatory tool to analyze the nation's policies in relation to Georgia and Russia. Turkey's close strategic relationship and military cooperation with Georgia, along with its longstanding membership in NATO, has sometimes put Turkey in a tenuous diplomatic power play with Russia. Turkey has consistently provided military and economic support to Georgia while concurrently maintaining an open-door trade policy with Russia.

On the one hand, commentators have correctly noted that economic relations between Turkey and Georgia have grown over the decades. The Turkish Daily News reported that "approximately 100 Turkish companies are active in Georgia, mainly in the building sector, and have invested approximately US\$600 million. The trade volume between the two countries is US\$1 billion a year."<sup>37</sup> Significantly, Turkey and Georgia have undertaken joint regional projects, most notably the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Baku-Tblisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline and the Baku-Tblisi-Kars railway.<sup>38</sup> Military spending and trade in the weapons have also proceeded apace as Turkey has become a key arms and ammunition dealer to the Georgian military as well as a crucial partner in providing training for its officers. Russia, meanwhile, has become an invaluable trading partner to Turkey. Igor Torbakov, writing for the *Jamestown Foundation*, has found that "the trade volume with Russia was \$27 billion last year and is expected

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<sup>36</sup> Tony Halpin, "We Helped in Iraq-Now Help Us, Beg, Georgians", *The Times Report*, 11 August 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Turkish Daily News, "Turkey and Georgia to Increase Cooperative Economic Efforts", 07 February 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Igor Torbakov, *The Georgia Crisis and Russia-Turkey Relations*, The Jamestown Foundation, p. 22.

to rise to \$38 billion this year. Russia is expected to replace Germany as Turkey's most important trading partner. Turkey desperately depends on Russian gas to meet 64 percent of its demand and 40 percent for Russia's oil."<sup>39</sup> This while Turkish building contractors and supermarket chains have successfully proliferated in the Russian market, but trade and economic relations go well beyond goods and services as Russia also provides the largest numbers of foreign tourists in Turkey — currently 2.5 million a year.

On the other hand, Turkey has witnessed its relations with Russia undergo strain at times. The Turkish government's complicity in the safe passage of American ships through the Bosphorus on their way to the Georgian port of Batumi was among the more recent diplomatic flare-ups. The Turkish government is responsible for policing the 32-kilometer Bosphorus, the only route for ships travelling to the Black Sea, under the Montreux agreement of 1936. The Bosphorus, a key strategic access point, provides the sole access for ships to Georgia's Black Sea ports.<sup>40</sup> The issue of the Montreux Convention came up when the US attempted to send two hospital ships, weighing a total of 140,000 tons, through the Straits carrying "aid" to Georgia. The Turkish government refused permission on the basis that this contradicted the Montreux Convention. Washington finally sent three smaller ships instead. On 22 August 2008, these tensions emerged as open conflict when the U.S. warships used the Turkish straits to deliver aid to Georgia.<sup>41</sup> A Russian official condemned the move and warned Turkey it was obliged to enforce the rules of an agreement that gives a 21 day limit on any warship from a country that does not border the Black Sea.

Immediately following this incident, Russia introduced new custom regulations which, according to the Turkish trade minister Kürşad Tüzmen, could cost Turkey as much as \$3 billion. Tüzmen attacked the regulations as political, saying Moscow may be punishing it for allowing the U.S. ships to pass through the Bosphorus. Tüzmen said that "on September 1, Turkey will impose curbs on Russian exports and withdraw support for its membership of the World Trade Organization".<sup>42</sup> Moreover Russia has already

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Amberin Zaman, "Crisis in the South Caucasus: Turkey's Big Moment", *On Turkey Series*, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 25 August 2008.

<sup>41</sup> BBC Report, "US Warship Reaches Georgian Port", *BBC Report*, 24 August 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Dorian Jones, "Russia-Georgia Conflict Puts Turkey in Vulnerable Position", *Voice of America News*, 30 August 2008.

demonstrated Ankara's vulnerability by subjecting Turkish trucks entering Russia to strict controls, extending the waiting time at the border to up to one month.<sup>43</sup> This is widely interpreted as retribution for Ankara's decision to allow US warships to pass the Turkish Straits and enter the Black Sea to bring humanitarian aid to Georgia.

Emerging from these diplomatic strains and seemingly weakening ties, Turkish politicians, columnists and academics decided that it is essential for Turkey to be neutral and play the role of mediator, being careful not to be seen as currying favour with one over the other. Much of the Turkish media is also calling for a neutral stance. Turkish policy makers think if mediation by Turkey succeeds in bringing the two sides together and defusing the crisis, Turkey will have demonstrated a unique ability to bring stability to the Caucasus.

The third proposition that Allison and Zelikow make is that "even if they share the same goal, leaders differ in how to achieve it because of such factors as personal interests and background". When we look at the Georgian side, Georgian President Mikeil Saakashvili's aggressive policies created concerns in the public. There have been some concerns about Georgian President Mikeil Saakashvili monopolizing power since his coming to office in 2004. For instance, at a news briefing on 12 January, Mikeil Saakashvili advised the then Justice Minister "to use force when dealing with any attempt to stage prison riots, and to open fire, shoot to kill and destroy any criminal who attempts to cause turmoil. We will not spare bullets against these people."<sup>44</sup> US-educated President Mikeil Saakashvili also showed the same aggressive attitude to Aslan Abashidze, Ajarian leader, prior to his inauguration indicating that if he did not change his approach towards the central government, Tblisi would adopt a more coercive approach towards Batumi.<sup>45</sup> Following Saakashvili's speech, in May 2004 Abashidze claimed Georgian forces had blown up bridges connecting the region with the rest of

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<sup>43</sup> The Guardian, "Turkey Restricts US Access to the Black Sea", *The Guardian Reports*, 18 October 2008

<sup>44</sup> Eurasia Daily Monitor Report, "Protests, Accusations and Riots Shake Georgia", 31 May 2006.

<sup>45</sup> Jaba Devadariani, "Saakashvili Relies on Combination of Old and New to Asserts Authority", Eurasia Insight, 26 January 2004



Georgia.<sup>46</sup> The Georgian President maintained the same attitude towards Georgia's foreign policies.

The fourth proposition of the Governmental Politics Models is that its leaders have different levels of power based on charisma, personality and persuasion skills. And the fifth and the last proposition is that leaders must create a consensus. Otherwise, opponents may take advantage of these disagreements. These two propositions function in the same way. When we look at the Georgian conflict, this situation perfectly fits into these propositions. Georgian President Mikeil Saakashvili's aggressive speeches and attitude have been criticized since he came to office. Since Georgian President Mikeil Saakashvili's failure in the South Ossetian's conflict, the Georgian opposition has called for an independent investigation into the origins of the war with Russia. Georgia's normally divided opposition – the former head of parliament Nino Burjanadze – wanted Saakashvili to resign and called for early elections to Parliament in the spring of 2009. Burjanadze claims Moscow provoked the situation, but that Saakashvili made the "disastrous" mistake of attacking South Ossetia on 7 August, prompting Russia to invade.<sup>47</sup>

This section analyzed the Allison and Zelikow Governmental Politics Model by applying the Georgian and Russian governments' policy making process. The Governmental Politics Models is a very useful instrument to understand these two nation states' policy-making process. Through this model we can have a much better understanding about the decisions made before and after the conflict.

## **Conclusion**

The August 2008 five-day war between Georgia and Russia revealed not the unpredictable aggression of one nation upon another so much as the cumulative impact of decades-old grievances that both nations piled upon each other. This paper analyzed the regional conflict that surfaced as an outbreak of war between Russia and Georgia for five days in August 2008 but had its antecedents in the series of conflicts over the preceding decades. To be able to reach a much better understanding of the conflict, this paper

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<sup>46</sup> "Timeline Georgia: A Chronology of Key Events", BBC Report, 10 August 2009

<sup>47</sup> Tara Bahrapour, "Georgians Question Wisdom of War with Russia", *The Washington Post report*, 9 September 2008

examined the conflict from two theoretical models: the Intractable Conflict Theory by Jacob Bercovitch and the Governmental Politics Model by Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow. To understand the Georgian conflict, it is important to look at the history of the Caucasus region and its people. Only with an understanding of the various nationalities and ethnic divisions extant throughout the former Soviet Union can one begin to make sense of the conflict. Understanding the history and breaking out the complexities of the conflict may initiate the first steps towards compromise, mitigation, reconciliation and management of the conflict.

The Intractable Conflict Theory sheds light on the different layers of the conflict. Intractable conflicts are accepted as the most dangerous conflicts in the world. They not only threaten their local environment, but also entire regions and the international system. This theory breaks out the complexities of the intractable conflicts and offers conflict management methods for them. The Georgian conflict is an intractable conflict because of its complexity, long duration, violence, futile peace attempts and the deep fear, hatred and concern from both the parties. Recognizing the intractability of this conflict lends itself to policies that fit and address the severity of it.

Upon understanding the complexities of the conflict, it is essential to analyze the ways in which Georgia, Russia and Turkey have calibrated their responses with regard to their respective military, economic, and diplomatic exigencies. The Governmental Politics Model has offered one way to better approach the multi-faceted nature of the conflict. This model sheds light on the Georgian and Russian government's policy-making process before and during the conflict. The model also illustrates Turkey's role through its strategic geopolitical position as a trade partner with Russia and a military backer of Georgia. At the same time, Turkey's ties to both nations provide it with a unique role to negotiate a peace and serve as a go-between for Georgia and Russia. But for this to occur, Turkey would be best served to be cautious in their military support to Georgia while at the same time, avoid becoming beholden to economic alliances with Russia. Only this would create a space in which Turkey could presume neutrality between the two nations. If Turkey can assume a greater role in peace mediation between Georgia and Russia, it would only serve to bolster its image as a regional power in the Caucasus. Presumably, Turkey would emerge from such negotiations as key force of peace and stability in the region.

It is essential to identify pathways that lead to conflict de-escalation and mitigation. There are several approaches to manage the Georgian conflict, which is regarded as an intractable conflict. Bercovitch divides the conflict management methods into three categories; “unilateral methods (e.g., threats, avoidance withdrawal), bilateral methods (e.g., bargaining and negotiation) and multilateral methods (e.g., UN peacemaking, mediation)”<sup>48</sup>. According to Bercovitch, negotiation and mediation are the most suitable approaches for the intractable conflicts.<sup>49</sup> Applying this approach to the Georgian conflict, the best potential mediator of the Georgian conflict is the European Union. The EU is considered a more impartial actor for the conflict than the USA, already an outspoken ally of Georgia. Georgia has been trying to be a member of NATO, which by definition means a military block of Russia. Moreover, US-Russian relations are unstable. That would shadow the impartiality of the mediation process. Therefore, alongside with Turkey, the EU is the best potential mediator for the conflict. Such mediation approach can succeed in replacing Russian and Georgian troops with international peacekeepers coordinated by the UN and EU. The EU can also establish itself as a monitoring actor for the other minority groups in the Caucasus region such as the Chechen or Ingush people to avoid future tensions in the region.

But at the same time, for the EU to acquire the necessary credibility, it must cut down on its energy dependence from Russia. Otherwise, the EU’s inability to be impartial (or at least, its appearance to be) could endanger the mediation process. The trade turnover with the EU in 2005 was 52% of all Russian international trade, making those two actors much more economically dependent on good relations with each other. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline decreased the EU’s energy dependence on Russia. The Nabucco gas pipeline project promises to decrease the EU’s dependency on Russian energy. However knowing that the BTC pipeline offers only 1% of the global oil demand, it is thus unrealistic to assume that the EU’s dependency on Russian energy is going to diminish much in the near future.

Another important approach that has to be considered as a policy recommendation is that NATO has to consider its expansion more prudently. First of all, Russia considers NATO a military bloc and thus a threat to its

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<sup>48</sup> Bercovitch, p. 104.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

national security. The first NATO Secretary General, Lord Ismay, famously stated that the organization's goal was "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down".<sup>50</sup> Russia sees NATO as a vehicle of the US to extend its power through the Caucasus. Second, there are concerns in the member states that NATO's expansion could lead to a breakdown and additional instability in the region. On the 23 April 2008, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel claimed that NATO's expansion could destabilize an already volatile region on Russia's southern border.

Moreover, since Russia has already violated international law by invading sovereign Georgia, they must leave Georgia and South Ossetia; the international peacekeeping troops led by the EU and UN must play an active role. Also, Russia has to restrict its liberal issuing of passports to South Ossetians. To have a Russian passport requires a five year of residency in Russia. However it just takes a couple of hours for a South Ossetian to obtain a Russian passport.<sup>51</sup>

Last, there must be a stronger integration between economic and energy programs and social assistance activities between the Georgians and South Ossetians. During the history of the conflict, thousands of South Ossetians suffered from the conflict. At the end of the Five Days War in August, 2008, large numbers of civilians were driven out of their homes in South Ossetia. Many South Ossetians have crossed over to the Russian republic of North Ossetia. Residents of Georgian villages in South Ossetia, and the town of Gori, have also fled. The South Ossetian capital, Tskhinvali, was reported to be largely in ruins. These harrowing experiences traumatized the entire South Ossetian community. South Ossetians have to find collective ways to move through the stages of recovery. At that point, a resolute integration through dialogue between the Georgians and South Ossetians is essential. In this way, the two societies can break the cycle of hatred, fear and concern towards each other and move to the process of reconnection. In fact, Georgians and South Ossetians have tight relationships through a shared history. There have been a lot of intermarriages between these two communities. If the individuals are able to create a new meaning to their relationship, they can build a new future. Even if Georgia does not accept

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<sup>50</sup> Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Third Secretary General of NATO, "NATO in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", NATO Speeches, London, 20 July 2000

<sup>51</sup> King, "*Russia's Liberal Passport Policy*"

South Ossetia as an independent state, they eventually will have to accept their existence as a society.