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On the front lines in the near abroad: the CIS and the OSCE in Georgia's civil wars

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As is pointed out by Muthiah Alagappa's framework analysis in this issue, that regional organisations[1] might relieve some of the burden on the United Nations (UN) in the area of conflict management gained new currency after the Cold War. As Boutros Boutros-Ghali pointed out, the goal of such task-sharing was not only to distribute management burdens more effectively by taking advantage of hitherto under-utilised regional capacities, but also to democratise international relations through the devolution of power to regional entities.[2] In addition, some would argue that regional organisations are better prepared than global ones to address specifically regional problems.[3]

However, regional organisations face a number of structural deficiencies, and they may be less capable of impartiality in addressing problems among and within regional states.[4] Notably, power asymmetries at the regional level raise the prospect that regional multilateral organisations may be used by locally dominant states to achieve their own self-interested objectives. There is an element of irony here in that hegemony[5] by some accounts lays the basis for effective cooperation—in that the hegemon is both willing and able to provide the public good of order—but by its very nature is likely to turn the pursuit of order to the hegemon's own advantage.

The record of activity and effectiveness (or inactivity and ineffectiveness) of regional organisations in the post-cold war era in cases such as the Gulf, Somalia, the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda suggests that much of the initial enthusiasm about regionalism in the security realm was misplaced. This might well lead to a re-emphasis on the exclusive role of global organisations (and notably the UN); but given the latter's difficulties, this seems unpromising.

Alternatively, it raises the possibility of creative combinations of sub-regional, regional and global organisational activities that maximise the advantages and minimise the disadvantages at each institutional level through a synergistic approach to local problems. Notably, might it not be possible to rely on regional structures, including hegemonic ones, to provide order in the face of rising levels of local conflict and the reluctance of extra-regional actors to commit themselves, and yet to involve broader multilateral mechanisms in an effort to enhance transparency and to situate the hegemon's activities in a shared normative structure, and in so doing to temper the hegemonic agenda?

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The case at hand, the Republic of Georgia, is a good one with which to test this possibility. It involves efforts by a regional power with hegemonic aspirations (Russia) to manage—directly in the case of South Ossetia, and indirectly via a sub-regional organisation—two civil conflicts. A broader regional organisation, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), is active in efforts to temper Russian intervention in the South Osset case. The UN is attempting to play a similar role with respect to Abkhazia.

The UN faces a dilemma in task-sharing in Georgia, as elsewhere in the former Soviet space. On the one hand, it is loathe to become directly involved in regional conflicts because no consensus on such action is present among the permanent members of the Security Council. Moreover, doing so would only add further burdens to an already stretched peace-building apparatus in the UN system. On the other hand, the organisation and its members perceive an interest in enhancing peace and stability in the former Soviet space. The combination of these two factors leads to a search for task-sharing with regional organisations. However, the principal regional organisation thus far willing and able to undertake such tasks happens to be dominated by a regional hegemon, Russia, which displays little reluctance to manipulate conflict management in pursuit of a self-interested agenda of influence-building and control.[6] Unqualified reliance on the organisation consequently jeopardises another basic norm of the UN—respect for the sovereignty of its members. Life is full of sloppy compromises. In this instance, UN task-sharing must find middle ground between these inconsistent imperatives.

In this paper, I examine external efforts at conflict management in Georgia in an effort to assess the extent to which synergy has been achieved. First, to what extent has this blend of external activities been effective in keeping the peace and in producing durable settlements to the conflicts in question? Second, to what extent have the roles of the OSCE and the UN operated to mitigate the impact of the Russian presence? Third, to what extent did the broader international context in which UN task-sharing proceeded affect the nature and effectiveness of task-sharing? UN deliberations on the Abkhaz question occurred more or less simultaneously with decisions on task-sharing in Haiti and Rwanda. Arguably, this concatenation of crises may have affected UN efforts to deal with each one.

I argue that the combination of regional and global efforts evident in the case has been effective in keeping the peace in a strict sense. Moreover, the presence of international observers has enhanced transparency and to some extent has acculturated Russian forces to international norms regarding peacekeeping. This has resulted in gradual improvement in the performance of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Russian forces in the field. However, the Georgian mix has been unsuccessful in producing progress towards political settlements in the two conflicts. Moreover, international efforts have had little restraining effect at a strategic level on Russian efforts to manipulate these conflicts in order to induce Georgian acquiescence in the broader regional agenda of Russia in the Transcaucasus.

This article begins with a short discussion of task-sharing in the former Soviet region and is followed by a background section dealing with the conflicts. Then

I go on to look at the mandates of the OSCE, the CIS and the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) in the conflicts and their effectiveness in fulfilling them. This leads to a discussion of the efforts of the various organisations to promote a durable peace in Georgia. The next section deals with the extent to which the regional power has pursued a unilateral agenda by multilateral means and the tension between this agenda and the objectives of the international community in the region. The conclusion discusses what the Georgian case tells us about the effectiveness of 'supervised devolution' of responsibility for conflict management and resolution.

Subcontracting and the former Soviet Union

The term 'subcontracting' is not really appropriate for peace-related operations of the OSCE and the CIS in the former Soviet space in general or Georgia in particular. The concept implies a decision on the part of one organisation to devolve a defined set of responsibilities upon another on the basis of mutual gain. In the case of the former Soviet Union, such activities generally occur on the basis of national (Russia) or regional (OSCE, or CIS) decision.

That said, the regional players do recognise to varying degrees the purview of the United Nations and its Charter over their actions. The OSCE had declared itself to be a Chapter VIII organisation and therefore presumably accepts the limitations on its behaviour contained in this section of the Charter.[7] The delineation of responsibility over conflicts in Georgia (with the UN taking the international lead on Abkhazia and the OSCE on South Ossetia) is based on an agreement between the two organisations.

Russia has sought UN approval for CIS actions in Georgia, not least out of a desire to secure external finance for force deployment, and the Commonwealth of Independent States Peacekeeping Force (CISPKF) in Abkhazia operates with the approval of the United Nations Security Council, as established by Resolution 937 of 21 July 1994. There are, however, numerous instances in which such approval has not been sought (for example, the Russian peacekeeping operation in South Ossetia) or has not been granted. And in any event, rather than initiating action, the UN finds itself in the delicate situation of facing requests for international legitimisation of decisions taken by others.

From a UN perspective, there are specific advantages in relying on regional organisations for the management of conflict in the former Soviet space. Notably, it is clear that Russian policy makers are uncomfortable with the idea of a prominent role being granted to external actors in dealing with conflict in the former Soviet space.[8] More recently, this has been extended specifically to the activities of international organisations in the management of conflict. As one group of influential Russian foreign policy commentators and policy makers put it in May 1996, 'it is definitely not in Russia's interest to see outside mediation and peacekeeping operations on the territory of the former Soviet Union'.[9]

In these circumstances, it is difficult to conceive of substantial UN conflict management activities in the former Soviet space, since they are likely to be opposed by Russia, one of the five permanent members of the Security Council.

Other key players, and notably the US, are reluctant to contemplate such operations, not only given the cost, but also in view of the importance of maintaining good relations with Russia. In consequence, it makes sense for the organisation to let others take the lead.

Background

Georgia is a country of some 5.4 million people in the Transcaucasian region of the former Soviet Union. Although the Georgian majority constitutes over 70% of the total population, there are numerous ethnically defined and territorially compact minorities in the country. Two of these minorities, the Ossets and the Abkhaz, have been involved in civil conflicts with the central government and the Georgian majority since the early 1990s; key events are summarised in Table 1.[10]

The conflict in South Ossetia

The conflict with South Ossetia began during Georgia's transition to independence in 1989–90. The leadership of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast' of the Republic of Georgia, threatened by the overt chauvinism of rising political forces among the Georgian majority declared, its secession from Georgia and desire to unite with the North Ossetian Autonomous Republic of the then Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. The Georgian Supreme Soviet annulled this declaration and abrogated the *oblast*'s autonomous status in a climate of growing intimidation and violence in Tskhinvali, South Ossetia's capital. In the face of rising violence, Soviet Interior Ministry forces intervened, but did not succeed in curbing the conflict. They were withdrawn as the Soviet Union collapsed. And the war continued until June 1992, when a durable ceasefire agreement was obtained through the mediation of Russian President Boris Yeltsin. Estimates of casualties from the war vary, although most agree on around 1000 dead. The war also produced some 110 000 refugees, from both South Ossetia and the rest of Georgia, whence many Ossets were evicted.

The ceasefire agreement on South Ossetia envisaged the deployment of a mixed Russian–Georgian–Osset force to police the line of contact. Initially, the force comprised one regiment of Russian forces, and one battalion from each of the parties. By 1995 the Russian complement had shrunk to one battalion, matching the other two. The initiative was Russian; no approval from international organisations (including the CIS) was sought.

In December 1992 an OSCE Mission to Georgia was established in Tbilisi at the invitation of President Eduard Shevardnadze in order to 'promote negotiations on a peaceful political settlement of the conflict'.[11] The ceasefire has been stable since June 1992. A degree of freedom of movement has been established inside South Ossetia and between it and the rest of Georgia. Visits with Osset units of the peacekeeping force suggest low levels of readiness and little sense of threat. Their principal preoccupation seemed to be the prevention of thefts of firewood.[12] A low level of economic exchange between Georgian and Osset

TABLE 1
Key events in the Osset and Abkhaz conflicts

South Ossetia	
January 1989	Founding of Osset Popular front (*Ademon Nykhas*)
November 1989	Armed confrontation in Tskhinvali begins
March 1990	Georgia declares sovereignty
October 1990	Zviad Gamsakhurdia elected chairman of Georgian Parliament
November 1990	South Osset region Soviet attempts to upgrade region's status to autonomous republic. Decision annulled by Georgian government
December 1990	Georgia annuls autonomy of South Ossetia. State of emergency declared
January 1991	Gorbachev calls for Georgian withdrawal from South Ossetia
December 1991	USSR dissolved
December 1991–January 1992	Gamsakhurdia driven out of Tbilisi. Military Council takes power
March 1992	Shevardnadze returns to Georgia as Chair of Military Council
June 1992	Renewed Georgian offensive in South Ossetia. Russian–Georgian agreement on regulation of conflict in South Ossetia
July 1992	Deployment of mixed Georgian–Osset–Russian peacekeeping force in South Ossetia
December 1992	Deployment of OSCE long-term mission to Georgia
Abkhazia	
July 1989	Anti-government riots in Sukhumi
May 1990	Mountain Peoples Congress in Sukhumi demands exit of Abkhazia from Georgia
August 1990	Abkhaz government declares sovereignty
July 1992	Abkhaz government annuls current constitution, restores 1925 constitution, and states intention to secede from Georgia. Decision annulled by Georgian Supreme Soviet
August 1992	Georgian forces enter Abkhazia. Hostilities begin
September 1992	Russia mediates ceasefire
October 1992	Abkhaz offensive against Gagra. Georgian request for UN peacekeeping force. (Repeats request in January 1993)
May 1993	Special Representative of the Secretary General for Georgia appointed. Second ceasefire agreement, which fails immediately
July 1993	Third Russian-mediated ceasefire agreement
August 1993	Security Council authorises deployment of advance 50-person observer force for Abkhazia to observe ceasefire compliance
September 1993	Ceasefire collapses. Georgian forces and population driven from Abkhazia. Deployment of UNOMIG suspended
December 1993	Memorandum of Understanding between Abkhazia and Georgia on cessation of hostilities. Security Council authorises deployment of full observer force
February 1994	Shevardnadze and Yeltsin request UN peacekeeping force
April 1994	Moscow Agreement on formalisation of ceasefire and initiation of political talks. Request for peacekeeping force with Russian contingent. Quadripartite (Abkhaz–Georgian–Russian–UNHCR) agreement on refugee return (never implemented)
May 1994	Abkhaz–Georgian agreement on peacekeeping operation
June 1994	CIS agrees to provide peacekeeping force
July 1994	Formal deployment of CISPKF. UN Security Council Resolution 937 recognises CISPKF decision, expands UNOMIG, and extends its mandate

settlements in South Ossetia and between South Ossetia and the rest of Georgia has also re-emerged. OSCE monitors in the spring of 1996 judged the situation to be calm and did not anticipate any change.[13] In contrast, there has been little movement towards a settlement of the dispute, despite agreement between the parties on a security memorandum in May 1996.

The conflict in Abkhazia

The conclusion of the phase of active hostilities in South Ossetia was closely followed by the beginning of war in Abkhazia in August 1992. After the overthrow of Zviad Gamsakhurdia in a prolonged firefight in central Tbilisi in November 1991–January 1992, Gamsakhurdia returned to his home region of Mingrelia in western Georgia and mounted a rebellion there. In consequence, the Georgian National Guard and associated paramilitary forces entered Mingrelia to pursue a counter-insurgency. Supporters of Gamsakhurdia were using Abkhazia as a sanctuary from which to resist Georgian forces and also to hide kidnapped Georgian officials, including Deputy Prime Minister Sandro Kavsadze. As a result, the newly arrived Eduard Shevardnadze sought and obtained the approval of the government of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic for a limited hot pursuit operation into eastern Abkhazia in the Gali Raion.[14]

When Georgian forces entered Abkhazia, they found the road open to the capital, Sukhumi, and moved on in violation of the informal agreement with Abkhaz authorities. As they arrived in Sukhumi, the Abkhaz Parliament was in the process of deciding to bring Abkhazia's 1925 constitution back into force. This constituted a declaration of sovereignty. Georgian forces responded by attacking the parliament and driving the Abkhaz government out of the city in September. The Abkhaz re-consolidated their position in the northern part of the region and began a counter-offensive, taking Gagra in October 1992, and then advancing to Sukhumi by mid-1993.

At this stage, Russia brokered a ceasefire, agreeing to act as its guarantor and deploying monitors to ensure that its disarmament and encampment provisions were respected by the parties. The United Nations responded to Georgian appeals by deploying a small observer group, UNOMIG, to Abkhazia in the late summer of 1993. The ceasefire failed before the UN mission was fully deployed, and the Abkhaz, benefiting from Russian and North Caucasian assistance, retook the capital in September 1993, and ejected Georgian forces from Abkhazia. Abkhaz forces also drove out the region's Georgian population of some 250 000 people (46% of Abkhazia's population).

The last days of the campaign in Abkhazia also witnessed a revival of the Zviadist rebellion behind Georgian lines in Mingrelia, threatening the complete collapse of the Georgian state. At this stage (in October 1993), Shevardnadze flew to Moscow and agreed that Georgia would join the Commonwealth of Independent States. Russian forces intervened in the conflict in Mingrelia and suppressed it. They also deployed along the Abkhaz–Georgian line of contact in late 1993 to separate the warring parties. In June 1994, the Commonwealth of Independent States, acting on the basis of an agreement between the parties in May, legitimised this deployment as a regional peacekeeping operation based on the consent of the parties. The Security Council in turn accepted this decision in July 1994. Resolution 937 also provided for an expansion of UNOMIG from 40 to 136 observers.

The ceasefire has held since the end of 1993, with the exception of limited exchanges of fire in the Kodori Valley—the only part of Abkhazia that had not been fully evacuated by Georgian forces—in late 1993 and 1994. Violence,

however, did not disappear altogether. Limited spontaneous return of refugees to the Gali District in 1995 and in greater number in 1996 was accompanied by repeated instances of terrorism targeting local Abkhaz officials, and by substantial violations of human rights in the security zone established by peacekeepers. In the meantime, little progress has been made towards a political settlement allowing refugee return and the restoration of Georgian jurisdiction in Abkhazia Although the Abkhaz side appears to have abandoned the objective of full independence, their insistence on a confederal relationship with the Republic of Georgia remains a substantial distance from the Georgian advocacy of a federal structure for the country.

Mandates and performance

In these two conflicts, primary responsibility for management was devolved to one sub-regional organisation (the CIS in Abkhazia) and to one state (Russia in South Ossetia). In each instance, the activities of the primary actor were supplemented by an international multilateral presence—the UN in Abkhazia through UNOMIG, the activities of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG, Edward Brunner), and the role of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the negotiation of return for internally displaced persons (IDPs); and the OSCE in South Ossetia in the form of the OSCE mission. Their activities in relation to conflict management and political settlement were embedded in broader roles in Georgia.

In order to assess the effectiveness of these actors, greater precision with regard to their mandates is desirable. The mandate of the peacekeeping force in South Ossetia is the most conservative of the various actors in conflict management in Georgia, involving the suppression of hostilities and then interposition to prevent their resumption.[15] There are no explicit humanitarian or other functions in the mandate, although the activities of the peacekeeping force were accompanied by the establishment of a Joint Control Commission (Russia, South Ossetia, Georgia) to deal with modalities of the ceasefire and by Russian diplomatic efforts to mediate a settlement.

The mandate of the OSCE Mission in Georgia involves the conduct of negotiations with both sides in the conflict in the hope of removing sources of tension in their relationship; maintaining contacts with both officials and the population in the conflict zone, cooperation with local military forces in support of the ceasefire; the gathering of information on the military situation and the investigation of incidents; and cooperation in the creation of the political bases for the achievement of lasting peace.[16]

To these ends, the mission has mounted regular trips by military and civilian personnel to the line of contact to visit peacekeeping units, to monitor their weapons and personnel levels, and to consult with government personnel in South Ossetia and neighbouring regions of Georgia. In addition, members of the mission act as mediators in instances of local disputes that carry some risk of disturbing the ceasefire. The mission also facilitates humanitarian assistance and delivers small amounts of such assistance itself.

The objectives of the mission are to enhance transparency, transfer international norms to the peacekeepers, maintain an early-warning capability through fact-finding, and build confidence among local inhabitants and military and paramilitary forces. With the passage of time, the OSCE mission's role and, indeed, the role of the organisation as a whole, expanded. The outbreak of hostilities in Abkhazia led to dual OSCE and UN efforts to mediate a settlement, with the UN Secretary-General designating a special representative for Georgia, Ambassador Edward Brunner, and the OSCE doing likewise (Ambassador Gyarmati).[17] The two organisations coordinated their efforts through much of 1993, and eventually agreed that the United Nations should be the lead organisation on the matter of Abkhazia, the OSCE retaining status as a participant in the negotiations on political settlement. The OSCE has also taken up a human rights role in cooperation with the United Nations in that region. The OSCE—at the invitation of the Georgian government—has also assumed human rights monitoring responsibilities with respect to minority populations in the rest of Georgia, observed both the 1992 and 1995 elections, and provided technical assistance to the Georgian government in the areas of constitutional and judicial reform.

The OSCE mission in Georgia has by and large fulfilled expectations, at least as regards the monitoring of the peacekeeping force in South Ossetia, confidence-building between the parties at the local level, and the promotion of dialogue between the parties at both official and unofficial levels. By Georgian account, the mission's broader activities have also contributed significantly to the promotion of a stable and democratic transition in the country as a whole. OSCE human rights activities have greatly enhanced transparency in this area and, as such, have probably contributed to an improvement in the position of minorities, as well as in the treatment of people imprisoned for acts of opposition (some would say terrorism) to the current government. They have produced significant progress towards a political settlement of the Osset–Georgian question. Little progress is evident in the negotiations. This cannot, however, be taken as evidence that task-sharing does not work. There is no reason to believe that, had it assumed a direct role, the UN would have done any better, for reasons that are further discussed below.

The relationship between the United Nations and the OSCE in Georgia has been relatively untroubled, although in specific instances there have been the problems that one might expect in inter-organisational cooperation. The lack of progress on the Abkhaz front led to an increase in OSCE activity with respect to that conflict in 1995–96, particularly in the area of human rights monitoring. The organisation originally intended to open a human rights office in Abkhazia on its own, but after a certain amount of exchange with the UN, it was agreed that such an office be opened by both organisations, with the UN in the lead and the OSCE playing a supporting role. Jealousy over turf has been supplemented by organisational incompatibility in this joint effort. The OSCE is a rather unstructured and *ad hoc* organisation. The UN is not. The result is that it has taken more than a year to negotiate the parameters of a joint representation that will probably number fewer than five people.[18] Relations between the missions in the field have also been somewhat strained because the OSCE has received more favour-

able treatment in the press and is generally perceived in Georgia to be doing a reasonably good job.

Turning to Abkhazia, the original mandate of CISPKF, which has survived more or less intact since, is attached as a protocol to the Moscow Agreement of 14 May 1994 between Georgia and Abkhazia on the ceasefire and separation of forces. The two sides agreed to establish a security zone along the line of contact, in which there would be no armed forces from the two sides. Adjacent to this zone on both sides was a restricted weapons zone, in which artillery, most mortars, tanks and armoured personnel carriers were prohibited. Heavy military equipment originating in the zone was to be stored in designated areas. Georgian forces were to withdraw from the Kodori Valley. Volunteer formations from outside Abkhazia assisting Abkhaz forces were to be disbanded and removed.

CISPKF units were to be deployed to the security zone. The parties agreed that the PKF's principal function was to 'exert its best efforts to maintain the ceasefire and to see that it is scrupulously observed'.[19] It was to supervise the implementation of the agreement with regard to the security zone and the restricted weapons zone. Moreover, in contrast to the South Ossetian case, the CISPKF presence was to 'promote the safe return of refugees and displaced persons, especially to the Gali District'. Rules of engagement were unspecified in the documents establishing the force.[20]

The Security Council's recognition of the CISPKF in July 1994 brought an expansion in the mandate of UNOMIG. The force was expanded in order to 'monitor and verify the implementation by the parties' of the May agreement, 'to observe the operation of the CISPKF', to verify the removal of troops and heavy equipment of the parties from the security zone, to monitor storage areas for heavy equipment withdrawn from the security and restricted weapons zones, to monitor the withdrawal of Georgian troops from the Kodori Valley, to patrol the Kodori Valley, to investigate alleged violations of the May agreement and to assist in the resolution of such incidents, to report to the UN Secretary-General on the implementation of its mandate and related developments, and to 'contribute to conditions conducive to the safe and orderly return of refugees and displaced persons'.[21]

Again, there are at least two dimensions to effectiveness. The first focuses directly on how well the players fulfilled the mandates that guided their action. The second focuses on the extent to which the separate or joint actions of the respective organisations fostered movement towards a political settlement, and addressed other recognised needs deriving from the conflict. With regard to the first, one might well argue that the principal objective of the international actors is to prevent renewal of conflict. Conflict has not been renewed. Therefore, they have essentially fulfilled their mandates. In the Abkhaz case, like that of South Ossetia, the interposition of peacekeepers has stabilised ceasefires and has prevented any renewal of conflict.

Moreover, as in South Ossetia, relations between international observers and Russian peacekeepers have on the whole been good. With the exception of UNOMIG difficulties in obtaining access to the coastal areas of the security zone in late 1994, there has been no obvious CISPKF effort to hinder UNOMIG activities. The two bodies often patrol jointly. They consult on mine and other hazards.

CISPKF has agreed to provide evacuation assistance to UNOMIG in the event that it is needed.

The problem in assessing the role of CISPKF and UNOMIG in stabilising the ceasefire is that one cannot know the counterfactual. In the case of Abkhazia, the ejection of the Georgians resulted in the establishment of a geographically defined and defensible front line. Georgia was in no position in 1993 and 1994 (and arguably even now) to contest the outcome. In this respect, one might well argue that the ceasefire would have held in any case. Such an inference is supported by the experience of Nagorno Karabakh, next door in Azerbaijan, where a ceasefire has held since May 1994 in the absence of any peacekeeping force.

There was at least one organised effort to break the ceasefire and to 'liberate' Abkhazia from the Abkhaz. In 1995, former Defence Minister Tengiz Kitovani and several hundred armed followers moved by bus from Central Georgia towards the ceasefire line, having announced their intention to take Abkhazia back. This was perhaps the most dangerous organised effort to breach the May 1994 agreement. However, he was stopped, not by peacekeeping forces, but by interior ministry personnel of the Republic of Georgia. Kitovani now sits in jail.

It is easy to conceive of how spontaneous incidents along the line of contact could have produced inadvertent escalation in Abkhazia, as in South Ossetia. International personnel interposed between the parties do reduce the incidence of such problems and, particularly in the case of the OSCE in South Ossetia, follow up on them to seek a resolution of the question causing the problem. Moreover, the UN rightly points to evidence that UNOMIG and CISPKF remonstrations with local military authorities have minimised the reintroduction of heavy weapons into the weapons restricted zone.[22]

The matter gets much stickier when one moves to issues of protection. This is a more significant problem in Abkhazia, where large-scale spontaneous return of IDPs to the Gali District began in 1995 and met with substantial opposition from Abkhaz authorities.[23] Under the terms of the May 1994 agreement, local law still applies in the security and restricted weapons zones, the local authorities retain responsibility for civil administration including law enforcement, and peacekeepers are not empowered to override local officials in the discharge of their responsibilities in these areas. The problem is that the Abkhaz administration is structurally hostile to Georgian returnees. In addition to the lingering acrimony of the civil war, there is the further problem that, if a substantial return of refugees occurs before a settlement on the political status of Abkhazia, decisions on status will be determined in large measure by returning Georgians. The Abkhaz constituted less than 20% of the population of the region while the Georgians made up more than 45%. In such circumstances, returnees are likely to be targets of intimidation.

This has been a chronic problem in the area.[24] In March 1995, for example, over one hundred Abkhaz with police identity cards entered the security zone, and arrested some 200 returnees. Twenty, mostly male and of military age, were murdered. Some executions took place in the open and were reportedly observed by CISPKF and UNOMIG personnel. Civilians seeking protection from CIS peacekeepers were unevenly treated. Some received protection; some were turned

away; some were turned over to Abkhaz police. This reflected a very narrow interpretation of the humanitarian clause in the mandate cited above. CISPKF personnel responded to questioning on these events by arguing that there was no humanitarian or protection component in their mandate, and that the agreement obliged them to allow properly documented local officials to carry out their responsibilities in the security zone.[25] UNOMIG personnel made no effort to interfere either, although they did provide medical assistance to those injured in the action. Those UNOMIG personnel who assisted civilians during this incident reportedly did so in violation of instructions from UNOMIG command in Sukhumi.

Although the basic functions of peacekeeping in a traditional sense were fulfilled, broader aspects of the mandate, including protection, were not. UNOMIG, composed of unarmed observers, was not in a position to take on the issue of protection seriously.[26] CISPKF was, but did not. The problem from the perspective of the UN—leaving aside the ethical problems of standing aside to watch people be slaughtered—is that the failure to address protection damaged the world organisation's credibility. UN credibility was in this instance the hostage of the regional organisation with whom it was task-sharing. When the CISPKF did not deliver, much of the egg stuck to UNOMIG's and UNHCR's faces, the two agencies being the only high profile international presences in the area. The result of the UN's association with a peacekeeping venture that leaves the population at risk has been a serious loss of face in the area concerned.[27] Moreover, to the extent that abuse of the population carries some risk of renewal of conflict as well as further embittering the parties, the failure of CISPKF and UNOMIG to deliver on protection may have further complicated efforts to achieve a settlement.

On a more positive note, however, there is some evidence to suggest that encouragement from UNOMIG, coupled with the Russians' own embarrassment, did slowly improve CISPKF performance in 1995–96. Subsequent to the events just described, CISPKF units began shadowing Abkhaz patrols in the region more closely, perhaps reducing intimidation and violation of local human rights. In this sense, one might argue that the interweaving of UN and regional activity did result in a degree of transfer of international norms.

More generally, Russian performance in the early days of both the Osset and Abkhaz operations was handicapped by a lack of units trained for peacekeeping. In the Abkhaz case, early units were drawn in considerable measure from formations already stationed in Georgia. Their connections to the local population compromised their impartiality. The Russian military has since made considerable efforts to train units for such missions, can draw upon a more substantial complement of experienced personnel[28] and is deploying units from outside the region. The level of professionalism among Russian forces deployed to the region has thus increased. Greater UN and other international support of Russian training efforts might well accelerate this process.

There were several other perils associated with the devolution of peacekeeping functions to CIS and Russian peacekeepers in Georgia. Notably, when it went into South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the Russian military did not share international standards concerning rules of engagement, and comportment with regard to the civilian population and civilian property. Matters were made worse by the state of logistics in the Russian army. Shipments of supplies to units in the field were

erratic and insufficient. The financial crisis in the Russian military resulted in long periods when peacekeepers were not paid. These factors led to problems of corruption. Instances ranged from the small scale (for example, the extortion of money from Georgians seeking to cross into Abkhazia from Georgia via the main bridge across the Inguri controlled by CISPKF[29]) to the grandiose.[30] Evidence of corruption was also evident in the Osset case, where, for example, peacekeepers were extorting protection money from vendors in the Tskhinvali markets.[31] Such activities highlight the practical difficulties of relying on poorly paid and equipped regional forces to implement peacekeeping tasks. However, corruption was in part the result of the disastrous financial and logistical condition of the Russian armed forces. It is, consequently, an open question whether UN willingness to finance Russian peacekeeping might have mitigated the problem.

With regard to the second dimension of effectiveness, the extent to which the players contributed to creating the conditions for a political settlement, the OSCE and the Russians have been somewhat effective in establishing and sustaining a dialogue between the parties in South Ossetia. The OSCE has also had some success in re-establishing unofficial contacts between the two sides through track two dialogue. The stabilisation of the situation on the ground has allowed some revival of economic links across the line of contact. However, other than a memorandum agreed between the two on confidence-building measures in 1996, there has been little obvious movement towards a comprehensive solution. In the meantime, there has been little success in efforts to return displaced Georgians and Ossets to their homes.

Likewise, in Abkhazia, there is little evidence of progress on the political front. The SRSG for the Abkhaz conflict is widely criticised in the region for what is perceived to be a dilatory approach to the settlement process. Likewise, the CIS and Russia have had little success in pushing the parties towards an agreement, and, indeed, many in the region believe that Russia has made little real effort in this regard, since Georgian dependence on Russia rests in large part on the failure to normalise the Abkhaz situation. Finally, the UNHCR has failed to deliver in its role as leader of the quadripartite commission on return of IDPs to Abkhazia. Its one substantial effort in this regard (the April 1994 agreement on return) was widely criticised for its failure to address the issue of protection of returnees, and ultimately failed in the face of Abkhaz obstructionism.[32]

Hegemony and conflict management

Underlying these specific dimensions of cooperative peace-building in the region is the broader political question raised at the outset of this paper: to what extent does reliance on regional actors jeopardise impartiality and serve particular state interests at the expense of those of the target state or the international system as a whole? It is worth recalling the nature of the trade-off that the UN faces in task-sharing in such circumstances. On the one hand, reliance on a regional actor reduces pressure on the universal organisation and, moreover, increases the likelihood that a substantial effort will be made in the area of conflict management. It is fair to say that, in the Georgian case, had it not been Russia that intervened to stabilise the situation, no one else would have. On the other hand,

reliance on a regional organisation may further the hegemonic aspirations of dominant powers within that organisation. Moreover, regional players may have ties to particular actors in a conflict that make it difficult to dissociate regional institutional responses from the politics of the conflict itself.

Russia has clear hegemonic aspirations in the former Soviet space. Although a wide array of opinions is expressed on Russian policy in the newly independent states in the media and in parliament, a dominant consensus appears to have emerged among foreign policy influentials on the need for active presence and influence in the area.[33] Such views have been widely expressed in official statements,[34] influential statements by independent policy groups,[35] and by advisers to the president,[36] influential political figures,[37] and the president himself. The hegemonic component of Russian policy in the 'near abroad' is evident in its efforts to restore Russian control over the external borders of the former Soviet Union, to reassume control over the Soviet air defence network, to obtain agreements on basing Russian forces in the non-Russian republics, and by its obvious sensitivity to external military presences (including multilateral ones) on the soil of the former Soviet Union. To judge from Russian policy on Caspian Sea and Central Asian energy development, it extends beyond the political/security realm and into the economic one. Its sources are diverse, and include the Russian imperial hangover, but more practically the fate of the Russian diaspora, the lack of developed defences along the borders of the Russian Federation proper, concern over Islam, and discomfort with the spill-over effects of instability in the other republics.

The capacity of a dominant power to manipulate a regional organisation depends partially on the latter's institutional strength. The more substantial and embedded the organisation, the less likely it is to be a creature of particular dominant states within the region. This case is unpromising. We have seen already how one instance of peacekeeping in Georgia (South Ossetia) ignored the regional organisation altogether. It was a Russian response on the basis of an agreement mediated between the parties by Russia. There was no pretence of multilateralism. In the case of Abkhazia, on paper the CIS responded on a regional multilateral basis. However, for reasons amply analysed elsewhere,[38] the CIS was (and is) neither multilateral nor an organisation. To the extent that it serves any purpose, it is as an instrument of Russian foreign policy in the former Soviet space. The Georgian example is illustrative. In the Abkhaz case, Russian peacekeepers were deployed late in 1993 by decision of the Russian government and without the imprimatur of the CIS, which caught up in June 1994 by authorising the deployment of a regional peacekeeping force. However, not a single soldier from a CIS state other than Russia has ever appeared. Nor have the other states in the CIS contributed financially to the force. In short, the CIS mandate is a transparent fig leaf for Russian action in a neighbouring state.

Russia's first activities in these conflicts in Georgia were not peacekeeping operations. Russia and Russians have been involved in various capacities in these conflicts since their eruption. It is hard to say whether this involvement has always reflected a conscious and coordinated policy, given the chaotic nature of policy making in Moscow from 1990 to 1994. However, the involvement of

Russia (including peacekeeping) has served to render Georgia dependent on the Russian Federation, and this dependence has led to Georgian concessions that are entirely consistent with the evolving hegemonic consensus in Russia on relations with the other former Soviet states.

To take the case of South Ossetia, the insurgency in the region was funded out of Russia, and many of those fighting were Russian citizens from North Ossetia. Although it is more than likely that these people participated for their own reasons, most of them related to ethnic loyalty, Russia made no attempt to interfere with the passage of volunteers and of matériel across the frontier into Georgia. It also did not pressure the North Ossetian Autonomous Republic of the Russian Federation to limit its involvement. Support of or tolerance for Osset initiatives is consistent with pattern of North Caucasian politics, in which the Ossets have been one of the most reliable allies of Russia in a very difficult region. Another example of this point is the role of Russian federal forces in defending the Osset claim to the Prigorodnyi Raion in 1991–92 against Ingush efforts to reclaim the area for Ingushetia.[39]

In the Abkhaz case, insurgents used Russian military equipment, presumably obtained from Russian bases in Abkhazia, in order to push the Georgians back. When Russia brokered a ceasefire in mid-1993, it took on responsibilities to monitor compliance and guarantee the agreement. The Georgians (albeit slowly) did remove heavy equipment restricted under the agreement from Abkhazia. The implementation of the disarmament was, by contrast, ineffective with respect to the Abkhaz. This created the regional military imbalance that permitted Abkhazia's rapid push to victory in September 1993. The asymmetrical quality of Russian monitoring of the Sochi Accord appears to be a clear example of Russian government partiality in the period leading up to the deployment of the Russian peacekeeping force in late 1993. Large numbers of Russian citizens participated on the Abkhaz side in the final offensive. There was no effort to stop them from entering Abkhazia even though their purpose was known.

The consequence for Georgia was dramatic. Georgian forces were ejected from Abkhazia and faced a serious rebellion in Mingrelia that was being assisted by the Abkhaz. The state was in danger of total collapse. It was at this stage that Shevardnadze went to Moscow to plead for Russian help and caved in on several major components of Russia's agenda in is relations with Georgia. Notably, Georgia signed the CIS Accord and agreed in principle to a military cooperation agreement that would render more or less permanent the Russian military presence in Georgia, as well as guaranteeing substantial Russian influence in Georgia's military. It was only when these objectives were attained that Russia interposed its peacekeepers and provided the military assistance necessary to quell the rebellion in Mingrelia.

The final point to make concerns the role of Russia in negotiations for a political settlement of the two conflicts. Although the reviews of Russian mediation in both the Osset and Abkhaz cases are mixed, Russia has not mounted the kind of pressure on the insurgent parties necessary to push them towards a compromise. Abkhazia is supposed to be under blockade, for example, but Russia has made little effort to enforce it. In both instances, enough gets through to sustain the insurgencies. One is left with the impression that Russia

is not looking for a settlement, since a durable solution to the wars would reduce Georgian dependence on Russia.

Conclusion

In the case considered here, task-sharing has produced a greater degree of stability than would otherwise have been the case. Russia has taken on peace-related operations that no-one else (including the UN) was willing to tackle. Its presence makes a considerable contribution to ensuring that there is no accidental resumption of hostilities. This has allowed a degree of normalisation in Georgia. In this sense, the experience of UN task-sharing is positive.

However, judgement is complicated in considerable measure because Russia was to some degree instrumental in causing these conflicts and has used them to enhance its control of the affairs of Georgia and the Transcaucasus. Although the activities of both the UN and the OSCE to mitigate the impact of the Russian presence in Georgia and to promote international norms have had some effect, they have done little to alter this basic fact. From the Russian perspective, task-sharing is a means of reasserting control while benefiting from the legitimising effects of involvement of international organisations.

From a policy perspective, this begs the question of whether a different approach to task-sharing might not have had more effective results in furthering the objectives of the UN. It is certainly not difficult to identify areas in which improvements could have been made. The deployment of larger numbers of Russian-speaking observers in UNOMIG, and the construction of a tighter structure of relations between UNOMIG and CISPKF might well have enhanced the performance of both organisations while assisting the spread of international practice to Russian forces in the field. Greater attention by UN observers to the issue of protection might have produced a better performance of CIS peacekeepers in this area of their mandate. A willingness to finance CISPKF operations in whole or in part could have been used as leverage to secure greater CISPKF compliance with international norms. The Russians were clearly interested in such support. None was forthcoming. Finally, greater international assistance in the training of Russian peacekeepers might well have accelerated their adaptation to international standards.

In short, although this particular case illustrates eloquently the pitfalls of reliance on regional organisations and actors to provide the public good of security, there are methods available to mitigate the negative consequences of such task-sharing and to enhance prospects for realising its positive effects. Although they were not adequately explored in the Georgian case, the latter experience provides a number of useful lessons to take into account when contemplating future devolutions of tasks related to regional security.

Notes

[1] Following the approach by Muthiah Alagappa, I define regionalism and regional organisation to be 'cooperation among governments or non-governmental organisations in three or more geographically

proximate and interdependent countries for the pursuit of mutual gain in one or more issue-areas'. Given the focus of this paper, the discussion is limited to inter-governmental organisations and the issue-area of security.

[2] Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace*, reprinted in *An Agenda for Peace 1995*, New York: United Nations, 1995, paras 63–64.

[3] For a summary of such arguments, see S N MacFarlane & T G Weiss, 'Regional organizations and regional security', *Security Studies*, Vol 2, No 1, 1992, pp 10–11.

[4] *Ibid*, p 11.

[5] A situation in which 'a single powerful state controls or dominates the lesser states in the system'. See R Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p 29.

[6] In fact, one might argue that the post-Soviet experience has added a novel dimension to the general concept of conflict management, since in a number of cases, the activity is not limited to conflict prevention, containment and resolution, but also to conflict generation.

[7] Notably those contained in Article 53 to the effect that 'no enforcement action shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without the authorisation of the Security Council', in Article 54 to the effect that 'the Security Council shall at all times be kept fully informed of the activities undertaken or in contemplation under regional arrangements or by regional agencies for the maintenance of international peace and security'. Article 53 is not relevant to OSCE or CIS activities in the former Soviet space, since they do not include enforcement, but lie more in the realm of Chapter VI.

[8] See the 'Foreign policy concept' and the 'Draft concept of military doctrine'. See also S N MacFarlane, 'Russian conceptions of Europe', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol 10, No 3, 1994, pp 234–269, for a general overview of evolving Russian views on external involvement in the former Soviet Union.

[9] 'Vozroditsya li Soyuz? Tezisy Soveta po Vneshnei i Oboronnoi Politike' (Will the Union be reborn? Theses of the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 23 May 1996.

[10] For more substantial background on these conflicts, see S N MacFarlane, L Minear & S Shenfield, *Armed Conflict in Georgia: A Case Study in Humanitarian Action and Peacekeeping*, Occasional Paper #27, Providence, RI: Watson Institute, 1995; S Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations: The Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder*, London: Zed, 1994, pp 81–114; and S Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation-Building and Conflict*, Washington, DC: CSIS, 1994, pp 100–141.

[11] *OSCE Handbook 1996*, Vienna: OSCE, 1996, p 21.

[12] Interviews near Gori, June 1996.

[13] Interviews in Tbilisi and Tskhinvali, June 1996.

[14] On this point, see S M Chervonnaya, *Abkhazia-1992: Postkommunisticheskaya Vandeya*, Moscow: Mosgorpechat', 1993.

[15] According to Russian military sources, Russian troops deploying to the line of contact initially faced some hostile fire. This was suppressed through the use of superior firepower, a process facilitated by the force's rather broad rules of engagement. One Russian military officer characterised the latter in the following form: any violation of the ceasefire would be 'immediately and severely punished'. See P Baev, 'Russia's peacekeeping in the Caucasus', a discussion paper for the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs/ Western European Union Conference on 'Peacekeeping in Europe: Assessing UN and Regional Perspectives', Oslo, 17–18 November 1994, mimeograph, p 14. For more general discussion of Russian peacekeeping, see A Raevsky & I N Vorob'ev, *Russian Approaches to Peacekeeping Operations*, Research Paper No 28, New York: UNIDIR, 1994; M Shashenkov, 'Russian peacekeeping in the "Near Abroad"', *Survival*, Vol 36, No 3, 1994, pp 46–69; and S N MacFarlane & A Schnabel, 'Russia's approach to peacekeeping', *International Journal*, Vol 50, No 2, 1995, pp 294–324.

[16] 'SBSE: Missia v Gruzii', mimeograph, Tbilisi: OSCE, 1994.

[17] On this point, see OSCE, 'Third Meeting of the Council: Summary of Conclusions', Stockholm: OSCE, 1992, p 12.

[18] As one OSCE Tbilisi mission member put it in somewhat frustrated terms in May 1996, 'It's so easy to get two people into a car and up to Sukhumi to do some human rights monitoring. But to get the same two people assigned there by two different bureaucracies takes months'. Interviews in Tbilisi, May 1996.

[19] 'Protocol to the Agreement on a Cease-Fire and Separation of Forces', mimeograph.

[20] At a seminar in Moscow in June 1995, I asked what the rules of engagement for the force might be. Russian officers present evinced a degree of confusion on this point, suggesting a degree of unfamiliarity with the concept. Perhaps the best indicator of the Russian view on this subject was provided by a senior officer in the Ministry of Defence who earlier in the seminar had dismissed the definitional travails of Western scholars attempting to address the distinction between peace-building, peacekeeping, peace-making, and so on with the curt comment that it was all 'local war'.

[21] This discussion focuses on peacekeeping. In the overall context of task-sharing between universal and regional organisations, it is worth noting that a UN agency (UNHCR) retained primary responsibility in another key sphere—the status and return of internally displaced persons in Georgia. For an extended discussion of UNHCR's role here, see MacFarlane *et al*, *Armed Conflict in Georgia*, pp 38–42.

[22] 'Report of the Secretary General concerning the Situation in Abkhazia, Georgia', S/1995/181, 6 March 1995.
[23] Interestingly, the problem lay not so much with the local administration in Gali, which recognised the inevitability of return and was seeking means to regularise it. The problem lay with incursions by Abkhaz 'police' from neighbouring districts of Abkhazia, acting presumably on the suspicion of the Abkhaz government that the locals were too soft on the returnees. Interviews in Gali, March 1995.
[24] This is noted in much UN documentation on the conflict. See, for example, 'Report of the Secretary General', 6 March 1995.
[25] Interviews with CISPKF staff officers, March 1995.
[26] The Secretary-General's report of 6 March 1995 notes quite rightly, if rather lamely, that 'neither UNOMIG's mandate nor its strength enable [sic] it to prevent violations of the Agreement or to deter armed groups from entering the security zone. However, UNOMIG's protests, together with the action taken by the CISPKF, help reduce the number and duration of such violations'. It is of course impossible empirically to determine the validity of such a claim. Its timing, however, was unfortunate, since it preceded by one week the most serious incursion of this type.
[27] After the incidents of March 1995, both UNOMIG and UNHCR representatives in the Gali District commented on the serious loss of UN prestige resulting from their inaction, and expressed concern about the possibility of civilian attack on UN personnel. Interviews in Gali, March 1995.
[28] To take one example, a senior staff officer we interviewed in Gali had served on peacekeeping missions in Moldova, South Ossetia and Tajikistan before his placement in Abkhazia.
[29] This had unfortunate humanitarian consequences. Georgian civilians attempting to bypass the tolls had to pass through mine-infested zones, with some fatalities.
[30] An international aid official in eastern Abkhazia told of an instance where a departing CISPKF unit commander had removed all the furniture from a local school, loaded it into a net suspended from a helicopter and flown it all off with him. Interviews in Gali, March 1995.
[31] The UN Office was in 1995 contemplating support of market development in Tskhinvali as a means of building confidence between the Georgian and Osset communities, but an informal feasibility study recommended against proceeding for this reason.
[32] The agreement included provision for screening of potential returnees by the Abkhaz authorities. This process was extremely slow. By the time the process was abandoned at the end of 1994, approximately 310 out of a projected 40 000 displaced persons had returned to the Gali District. Many of these subsequently left their homes again as a result of the security situation.
[33] See MacFarlane, 'Russian conceptions of Europe', pp 234–269.
[34] See 'Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation', FBIS-USR-93-037, 25 March 1993.
[35] 'Vozroditsya li Soyuz', *passim*.
[36] A Migranyan, 'Rossiia I Blizhnee Zarubezh'e'; Russian and the Near Abroad, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 12 January 1994, pp 1, 4.
[37] V P Lukin, 'Our security predicament', *Foreign Policy*, Vol 88, 1992, pp 57–75.
[38] See, for example, S Neil MacFarlane, 'La CEI et la sécurité regionale', *Etudes Internationales*, Vol XXVI, No 4, Decembre 1995, pp 785–797; Andrei Zagorsky, 'Die Gemeinschaft Unabhängiger Staaten: Entwicklungen und Perspektiven', *Berichte des Bundesinstituts für Ostwissenschaftliche und Internationale Studien*, 50, 1992.
[39] The region in question had been transferred from Ingushetia to North Ossetia when the Ingush were deported to Central Asia during World War II. They were allowed to return in the 1950s, but did not get their original borders back. In 1991–92, the Ingush population of the area was 'cleansed' by the Ossets. Federal forces intervened in November 1992 and declared a state of emergency in order to restore order. Since the removal of the Ingush had already been completed, Russian forces essentially served to protect the Osset victory. On this incident, see Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations*, London: Zed, 1994, pp 200–201.