

C. On the Georgian PKF Battalion

1. What was the strength and armament of the Georgian Battalion during the escalation and at the launch of full-scale hostilities?

By August 2008, the Georgian Peacekeeping Battalion deployed in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone was composed of 541 soldiers, including 500 soldiers of the 11th light infantry battalion of the 1st Infantry Brigade with an attached armored battalion of the same Brigade – 41 soldiers and 13 Armored Vehicles BMP-2. The strength and armament of the Georgian PKF Battalion remained unchanged during the escalation of the conflict, as well as after the full-scale hostilities were launched.

As already reported in the answer to question 3 of the military set of questions, the Georgian Peacekeeping Battalion had four checkpoints of its own in the following locations:

- Village Avnevi (1 Georgian platoon).
- Sarabuki Heights (1 Georgian platoon).
- Village Kekhvi (6 Georgian peacekeepers).
- Village Tamarasheni (6 Georgian peacekeepers).

One platoon of the Georgian PKF Battalion was deployed as part of the joint Russian-Georgian checkpoint on the Tsveriakho Mountain right above the Georgian bypass road (Eredvi-Kheiti) and per one observer from the Battalion served at joint checkpoints in the following villages:

- Kekhvi
- Prisi
- Megvrekisi
- Vanati
- Kverneti
- Tamarasheni
- Artsevi
- Avnevi

The Georgian Peacekeeping Battalion had three permanent locations in the conflict zone, where its personnel were accommodated:

- in Village Zemo Nikozi (311 soldiers and 6 Armored Vehicles BMP-2),
- in Village Eredvi (104 soldiers and 7 Armored Vehicles BMP-2); and
- in Village Achabeti (126 soldiers).

Several senior officers of the Georgian PKF Battalion were also stationed in the central headquarters of the JPKF in the town of Tskhinvali, the so-called “Nizhniy Gorodok.”

2. What was the role of the Georgian PKF Battalion during the escalation and the deployment of regular Georgian forces?
 - a. In the belt South of Tskhinvali?
 - b. In the string of Georgian villages North of Tskhinvali?
 - c. Along the Georgian by-pass road (Geri- Dmenisi- Sarabuki Heights etc.)
(Please specify action, time and location)

The main tasks of the Georgian Peacekeeping Battalion during the escalation of the conflict, as well as during the hostilities, based on the general principles of the JPKF activities in the conflict zone, was to: a) protect civilian population; b) block the activities of illegal armed groupings; c) prevent the delivering of firearms, armament, military hardware, explosives and other materials into the conflict zone that could be used for terrorist, sabotage and military purposes; etc.

Starting from July 29 2008, South Ossetian de facto regime irregular forces intensively targeted Georgian peacekeepers deployed in the conflict zone along with shelling central government controlled villages in the region. As already reported in the answers to the military set of questions, on July 29, at 22:00, South Ossetian de facto regime irregular forces shelled the Georgian peacekeeping checkpoint on Sarabuki heights with 100mm and 120mm artillery. On August 1, from 21:30 onwards, South Ossetian de facto regime irregular forces shelled the Georgian villages of Zemo Nikozi, Kvemo Nikozi, Avnevi, Nuli, Ergneti, Eredvi and Zemo Prisi with large caliber artillery, including the locations of Georgian peacekeepers. The shelling continued overnight and stopped only in the morning on August 2. On August 2 and 3, the JPKF conducted monitoring of most of the villages damaged by the shelling and on August 4 issued a report confirming the fact of the shelling of Zemo Nikozi, Kvemo Nikozi, Nuli, Eredvi and Zemo Prisi with 82mm artillery, as well as the earlier shelling of Georgian peacekeepers on Sarabuki heights with 100 mm and higher caliber artillery.¹

On August 7, at 14:00, the Georgian peacekeeping checkpoint in Avnevi was heavily shelled with 100mm and 120mm artillery, by South Ossetian proxy regime irregular forces located in the village of Khetagurovo, destroying the Georgian peacekeeping unit's armored vehicle, killing two Georgian peacekeepers, Shalva Trapaidze and Vitali Takadze and wounding five others.² Georgian peacekeepers returned fire in self-defence. Later the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia intercepted a phone call, during which a member of the de facto regime irregular forces confirmed the fact of blowing up an armored vehicle of Georgian peacekeepers in Avnevi with a cannon.³

On August 7, at around 17:00, after the Commander of the JPKF Marat Kulakhmetov refused to give additional security guarantees to Georgian peacekeepers in the town of Tskhinvali. The Commander of Georgian peacekeepers Mamuka Kurashvili ordered officers of the Georgian

¹ See annex 23 of the answer to the question 1 of the military set of questions.

² See annex 33 of the answer to the question 1 of the military set of questions for the list of casualties among Georgian peacekeepers.

³ See annexes 75 and 76 of the answer to the question 1 of the military set of questions for the telephone intercept and its transcript.

peacekeeping battalion to leave the headquarters of the JPKF in Tskhinvali. At 17:10, despite casualties among Georgian peacekeepers and the shelling of central government controlled villages, Georgian peacekeepers unilaterally ceased fire to defuse tensions. This decision was communicated by the Georgian State Minister for Reintegration, Temur Yakobashvili to the Commander of the JPKF General Marat Kulakhmetov at 17.00. In spite of that, at 20:30, South Ossetian de facto regime irregular forces resumed the shelling of Georgian peacekeepers in village Avnevi and at 23:30, intensified their artillery fire on all positions of Georgian peacekeepers in Big Liakhvi, Little Liakhvi and the Frone valleys.

After Georgian regular forces were deployed to the region and started defensive military operation, carrying out the order issued by President of Georgia at 23:35 on August 7, members of the Georgian Peacekeeping Battalion continued to serve their duties on all checkpoints in the conflict zone. Georgian and Russian peacekeepers were standing side by side on all joint peacekeeping checkpoints until late in the evening of August 9. No incidents occurred between them.

On August 8 and August 9, the Georgian PKF Battalion maintained its positions and protected the civilian population in villages to the south of Tskhinvali, as well as in the central government controlled villages in Big Liakhvi, Little Liakhvi and Frone valleys, despite massive bombardments by Russian military aircraft and artillery.

On August 9, the Georgian PKF Battalion helped to evacuate civilian population from Big Liakhvi, Little Liakhvi and Frone valleys.

On August 9 at 22:30, after the evacuation of the local population from Big Liakhvi Valley was completed, the Georgian PKF Battalion unit, together with Georgian police units, started to leave this valley via the Eredvi-Kheiti bypass road, abandoning positions in villages Kekhvi and Tamarasheni, as well as its location in village Achabeti and by 02:00 on the morning of August 10 was fully re-deployed to village Eredvi in Small Liakhvi valley. Immediately after the withdrawal from Big Liakhvi Valley, the Georgian PKF platoon left the joint Russian-Georgian checkpoint on the Tsveriakho Mountain.

On August 10, at 10:00, the Georgian PKF Battalion, together with Georgian regular troops, retreated from Frone Valley to village Zemo Nikozi, south of Tskhinvali. Around the same time, the personnel of the Georgian PKF Battalion left Small Liakhvi valley, including its location in village Eredvi. A few hours later, the Georgian PKF Battalion abandoned all of its checkpoints to the south of Tskhinvali, including its location in Zemo Nikozi and retreated southwards in Gori district.

As Russian troops started to advance south from the town of Tskhinvali on the morning of August 11, the Georgian PKF Battalion, together with most Georgian regular forces, moved from Gori district to the east and by 22:00 took positions near the town of Mtskheta in order to defend the capital Tbilisi.

3. To what extent did The Georgian PKF Battalion coordinate with Special Forces of the Georgian Ministry of Interior and with the Georgian militia (under Sanakoyev administration)?

The Georgian PKF Battalion was always in close coordination with Georgian police in terms of safeguarding the civilian population of the central government controlled villages in the conflict zone from attacks by South Ossetian de facto regime irregular forces.

During the hostilities in August 2008, the Georgian PKF Battalion and Georgian police units (including the MIA Special Forces and the Temporary Administration's Anti-Terrorist Center) also coordinated the evacuation of civilian population from Big Liakhvi, Small Liakhvi and Frone valleys, as well as from the town of Gori and the surrounding villages.

4. From which direction did the Georgian PKF Battalion participate in the attack on Tskhinvali? (South: Avnevi, Nikozi; North: Tamarasheni; East: Georgia by-pass road Geri-Dmenisi?), if at all?

The Georgian PKF Battalion did not participate in the attack on the town of Tskhinvali.