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Cable title: **UKRAINE: IMPACT OF GEORGIA CRISIS ON DOMESTIC**

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C O N F I D E N T I A L KYIV 001557

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR RS UP

SUBJECT: UKRAINE: IMPACT OF GEORGIA CRISIS ON DOMESTIC POLITICS

REF: KYIV 1550

To: SECSTATE WASHDC - PRIORITY

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From: AMEMBASSY KYIV (KYIV 1557 - PRIORITY)

TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR RS UP

Captions: None

Subject: UKRAINE: IMPACT OF GEORGIA CRISIS ON DOMESTIC POLITICS

Ref: KYIV 1550

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Classified By: Acting PolCouns Robert Scott for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

1. (C) Summary and Comment. Events in Georgia have triggered front page charges/countercharges between Moscow and Kyiv -- including dueling MFA statements on Russian deployment of its Black Sea Fleet (BSF) off the Georgian coast and Russian attacks on Ukrainian arms sales to Tbilisi. While DFM Yeliseyev on August 11 provided Post a readout of GOU actions and analysis in the international arena (refel), the crisis has also impacted Ukrainian domestic politics. Much of the domestic focus has been on Crimea and the basing of the BSF in Sevastopol. There have been calls from Our Ukraine MPs to identify the level/number of Russian passport issuances for Crimean residents to "avoid a repeat of the Georgia scenario," while Party of Regions and Communist MPs have placed varying degrees of blame on the GOU for its sale of arms to Georgia. Expressions of support for Georgia among Ukraine's population, such as protests in front of Russia's embassy and Lviv consulate, have been accompanied by signals of support/solidarity for South Ossetia from the Mayor of Kharkiv and some Crimean residents. Political analysts are beginning to assess the impact of the Georgia crisis on Ukraine's NATO/MAP aspirations, with initial assessments trending towards events in Georgia strengthening Ukraine's argument for MAP and increasing the possibility of a positive outcome at the December NATO Ministerial. Post will focus on developments in Crimea in the run-up to the expected return of BSF units -- and anticipated increased frictions between



Kyiv and Moscow regarding control/transparency of BSF basing.  
End Summary and Comment.

#### Battling BSF Statements

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2. (U) The issue of BSF basing came to center stage with an

August 10 exchange of statements by the Russian and Ukrainian MFAs. The Ukrainian statement noted that the BSF deployment of the Georgian coast would, in effect, entangle Ukraine in an armed conflict -- and posited that Ukraine "reserved the right" under international and Ukrainian law to bar entry into Sevastopol of BSF ships returning from actions off the coast of Georgia. It also expressed concern about Russia's continued delays in negotiating the status of the BSF stationed in Ukraine in regard to its deployment during crisis and its role in regional conflicts.

3. (C) Moscow's rebuttal noted that Russia was "puzzled" by the tone and content of Ukraine's statements concerning the BSF, and questioned why Ukraine has supplied arms to Georgia if it was concerned about being drawn into an armed conflict. Further, it stated that it was acting within the provisions of the 1997 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Russia and Ukraine as well as the 1997 agreement on the status of the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol. (Embassy note: the 1997 agreement on BSF basing only requires Russian notification of departure and does not include any provisions limiting the scope of action. DFM Yeliseyev admitted this was the case during an August 11 meeting (reftel.) End Note.) The statement concluded that "the main goals of the Black Sea Fleet's mission in the coastal waters of Abkhazia is to protect Russian citizens residing in the region, provide assistance for the Russian peacekeeping units in case of an armed attack, and to provide humanitarian relief for the civilian population in the conflict zone.

4. (U) Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Grigoriy Karasin said that he would lead talks concerning the return of the Russian BSF to Ukraine. Commenting on the issue, he said, "Kyiv knows our position on the Ukrainian government's previously released statements, which do not promote the strengthening of close relations between our two countries". Vice Speaker of the State Duma and member of the Fair Russia block, Aleksander Babakov, who is the parliament's acting liaison with the Ukrainian government, told reporters that Ukraine's statement about the possibility of closing the port of Sevastopol to the returning BSF ships was "hasty and ill conceived".

#### Internal Political Disputes Over Weapons Sales to Georgia, BSF

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5. (SBU) The Communists and the Party of Regions both weighed in and criticized Ukraine's provisions of arms to Tbilisi, with Communist Party leader Petro Symonenko laying the blame for the conflict squarely on Saakashvili and calling for a criminal investigation into what he called illegal Ukrainian arms sales to Georgia -- which he claimed were undertaken with the oversight of the USG. A statement on the PoR's website criticized Yushchenko for supporting Georgia and predicted it would result in a worsening of ethnic tensions in Crimea. PoR Spokesperson Hanna Herman did

not criticize Yushchenko outright, but accused the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of exacerbating regional tensions through arms sales to Georgia and called on Rada deputies to initiate

an investigation into the Ministry over the matter. PoR MP Yuriy Boyko believes Ukraine is "partially responsible" for the events in Georgia because of its arms shipments to the country. Rada Speaker Yatsenyuk gave a statement from Crimea, saying he would put the issue of Ukraine-Georgia relations on the new session's agenda if the conflict in South Ossetia is not resolved before the Rada reopens on September 2.

6. (U) Ukrainian arms sales to Georgia have garnered press attention, with August 12 media reports focusing on data from the UN Register of Conventional Arms Sales, according to which Ukraine was the main supplier of weapons to Georgia in

2007. The report listed weapons systems sold by Ukraine, including 74 tanks, six armored vehicles, nine large caliber artillery systems, 10,800 rocket systems, and 28,800 small arms. The report notes that the 2007 levels of exports were significantly higher than in 2006.

7. (U) Oles Doniy, an MP for the Our-Ukraine-People's Self Defense (OU-PSD) faction, told reporters that the South Ossetia-Georgia scenario may well be repeated in Crimea, where "chauvinistic elements" are currently "questioning the independence of Georgia and Moldova and allowing support for revanchist feelings." Doniy stressed the need for Ukraine to support its neighbors' territorial integrity and urged all Ukrainian political forces to unite in supporting the agreement governing the BSF departure from Sevastopol in

2017. OUS-PSD MP Olga Herasyuk stated that she did not exclude that Russia would use the same "pretext" of defending its citizens in Crimea as it had in South Osetia, where it had issued large numbers of Russian passports to Ossetian residents. She claimed that Russia was issuing the same type of passports in Crimea, and proposed a survey of Crimean residents to find out who has dual citizenship.

Protests at Russian Missions, NGOs urge Peaceful Resolution  
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8. (U) Ukrainian media sources reported an estimated 100-200 protesters gathered at the Russian Embassy in Kyiv and separately at the Russian Consulate in Lviv on August 11 to protest Russian military operations in Georgia. According to the reports, the protesters were from the local Georgian communities, Ukrainian nationalist groups known for their anti-Russian views, and various NGOs. On the evening of August 11, EmbOff saw two SUV's with large Georgian and Ukrainian flags conspicuously cruising along one of Kyiv's main streets, which drew cheers of support from some onlookers.

9. (U) The Maidan Alliance, a group of Ukrainian NGOs supporting democratic values and greater independence from Russian influence, appealed on its website to the international community to renounce what it called "Russian aggression in Georgia" and to not passively stand by as Russia first subjugated Georgia and eventually Moldova (Transdnistria) and Ukraine (Crimea). The Kharkiv Human Rights Group on its website called for an immediate end to the conflict in Georgia. The statement, released on August 8, noted that military conflicts in the Caucasus, notably Russian military operations in Chechnya in 1994 and 1999, were fraught with mistakes and criminal actions justified by Russia as necessary to maintain constitutional order. The NGO urged Georgia, as an OSCE member, to also seek peaceful means to resolve the conflict.

10. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:  
[www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev](http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev).  
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Website pages 