

D. On the Special Forces of the Georgian Ministry of Interior (MIA)

1. Which strength did the Special Forces of the MIA have and which armament did they hold during the escalation and after the outbreak of full-scale hostilities?

2. What was their role during the escalation, the deployment of regular Georgian forces and after the outbreak of full-scale hostilities?

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 Special Forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia are mainly represented by two departments within the ministry: the Special Tasks Main Division and the Special Operations Center. The Special Tasks Main Division supports regional police units with special forces and performs various special tasks to protect public order, as for the Special Operations Center, it conducts anti-terrorist and anti-criminal police operations with special weapons and tactics. In addition to that, a small Special Forces unit is maintained by the ministry's Constitutional Security Department, which protects the state from the activities of radical/extremist-minded groups and organizations. The Special Tasks Main Division and the Constitutional Security Department have subdivisions in all regions of Georgia, including Shida Kartli region, while the Special Operations Center is based near the capital Tbilisi.

By August 2008, up to 300 police officers of the Shida Kartli Subdivision of the Special Tasks Main Division of the MIA were serving their duties in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone mainly to the south of the administrative border with Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. They were stationed on 6 checkpoints in villages: 1) Dvani, 2) Kvemo Nikozi, 3) Zemo Nikozi, 4) Ergneti, 5) Mejvriskhevi, 6) Zemo Prisi (Small Liakhvi valley) and were patrolling the roads between these villages on Toyota pick-up trucks. Each checkpoint was manned by 30-40 police officers armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles and machine guns. Their base was located in village Karaleti, Gori district.

At the end of 2006, a small Special Forces unit (Anti-Terrorist Center) was set up under the newly established Temporary Administration of South Ossetia in order to support Georgian police on the central government controlled territory of Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, namely Big Liakhvi, Small Liakhvi and Frone valleys. It was manned mostly by local residents. By August 2008, 185 police officers of the Temporary Administration's Anti-Terrorist Center were stationed on 9 checkpoints: 6 in Big Liakhvi valley to the north of the town of Tskhinvali (3 in village Tamarasheni, 1 in village Achabeti, 1 in village Kekhvi and 1 in village Dzartsemi), 1 in Small Liakhvi valley to the east of the town of Tskhinvali (in village Zemo Prisi) and 2 in Frone valley to the west of the town of Tskhinvali (in village Avnevi). Police officers of the Temporary

Administration's Anti-Terrorist Center were also regularly patrolling the Eredvi-Kheiti bypass road connecting Small Liakhvi and Big Liakhvi valleys. Each checkpoint was manned by 10-15 police officers armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles and machine guns.

As the escalation of conflict started on July 29 2008, the police officers and checkpoints of the Special Tasks Main Division and the Temporary Administration's Anti-Terrorist Center were intensively targeted by South Ossetian de facto regime irregular forces. On August 1, five Georgian Special Forces police officers were wounded as their Toyota pickup truck was hit by two remote-control explosive devices on the Eredvi-Kheiti bypass road. On the morning of August 2, in the result of mortar fire from Tskhinvali an officer of the Shida Kartli Subdivision of the Special Tasks Main Division Irakli Bekurishvili was heavily wounded at the checkpoint in village Zemo Nikozi. From August 5 through August 7, Georgian police checkpoints in central government controlled villages both inside Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia and to the south of the administrative border were fired upon by South Ossetian de facto regime irregular forces using machine guns, mortars, cannons and armored vehicle guns. Georgian police and Special Forces stationed in these villages continued to fulfil their duties without reinforcement and returned fire with their regular weapons towards the positions of the de facto regime irregular forces.

On August 7, following the massive artillery attack on the Georgian peacekeeping checkpoint in village Avnevi, Frone valley, which resulted in the death of two Georgian peacekeepers and responding to the incursion of Russian regular army units into Georgia, the Georgian Government put its police and armed forces on alert. At 14:30, the Ministry of Defense of Georgia declared the mobilization of its forces and at the same time, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia started to reinforce its police and special forces units deployed to the south of the administrative border with Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia: 475 special forces officers of the Tbilisi Subdivision of the Special Tasks Main Division, 175 special forces officers of the Special Operations Center and 100 special forces officers of the Constitutional Security Department were sent to the region (along with police officers from other departments of the ministry) as the bombing of central government controlled villages continued and intensified later in the evening. No reinforcement could be sent to the Temporary Administration's Anti-Terrorist Center inside Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.

After the President of Georgia issued an order to start a defensive military operation in Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia on August 7 at 23:35, the Special Forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia were subordinated to the operative group of the General Staff of the Ministry of Defense of Georgia and received an order to operate on the central direction and, after the 3rd and the 4th Infantry Brigades fulfilled their tasks on the right and left flanks, to enter the town of Tskhinvali, supported by a Separate Light Infantry Battalion and a Single Tank Battalion of the Ministry of Defense, with the objective to neutralize firing positions within Tskhinvali and ultimately reach the Big Liakhvi valley to the north of the town.

The Special Tasks Main Division and the Special Operations Center of the MIA formed a task force of 810 Special Forces police officers to operate on the central direction, which consisted of:

- 60 officers from the Shida Kartli Subdivision of the Special Tasks Main Division;
- 475 officers from the Tbilisi Subdivision of the Special Tasks Main Division;
- 175 officers from the Special Operations Center;

- 100 officers from the Constitutional Security Department.

The armament of the grouping consisted of:

- 5, 45 mm Kalashnikov assault rifles (AKS-74)
- 7.62 mm Kalashnikov assault rifles (AKM)
- 7,62 mm Dragunov semi-automatic sniper rifles (SVD)
- 7.62 mm Kalashnikov general purpose machine guns (PK)
- 7.62 mm Kalashnikov hand-held light machine guns (RPK)
- Hand-held anti-tank rocket propelled grenade launchers (RPG-7)

The Special Forces police officers were riding Otokar “Cobra” Light Armored Vehicles, some equipped with 12.7 mm heavy machine guns ("Utyos") and some with 40 mm automatic grenade launchers (AGL). In total, the MIA sent 70 “Cobra” vehicles to Shida Kartli region.

On August 8, at around 06:00, a task force unit of special forces police officers with “Cobra” vehicles, reinforced by several tanks from the MOD of Georgia, moved from village Zemo Nikozi towards the outskirts of Tskhinvali in order to suppress the fire at that village coming from the proxy regime militants located in the southwestern part of the town, the so called “Shanghai” suburb. The MIA Special Forces encountered sniper and massive armored vehicle cannon fire from the Russian peacekeeping headquarters “Verkhniy Gorodok” located on the southwestern edge of the town. As already reported, the roof of the main building of “Verkhniy Gorodok” was used by enemy for correcting artillery fire against Georgian armed forces (*see again annex 90 of the answer to the question 1 of the military set of questions*). Hence, the MIA Special Forces were compelled to return fire towards “Verkhniy Gorodok” from automatic rifles and 12.7 mm heavy machine guns ("Utyos") attached to “Cobra” vehicles and later had to ask for tank support as well.

Later on August 8, at 11:00, the task force of 810 Special Forces police officers of the MIA with 40 “Cobra” armored vehicles, followed by a light infantry battalion and a tank battalion of the MOD entered Tskhinvali from village Zemo Nikozi. As they moved through the town, they encountered fire from different buildings that were used by the adversary for combat purposes. They also came under intensive bombardment by enemy aircraft and artillery in the southern part of Tskhinvali. By 14:30, the task force took control of most of Tskhinvali – its southern and central parts, while the fighting continued on the streets in the northern part of the town. At 20:30, due to intensive bombardment and resistance, the task force withdrew from the center of Tskhinvali and regrouped, holding positions in the southern part of the town. During the night, the task force maintained control of the southern part of Tskhinvali.

On August 9, at 12:00-13:00, because of the character of the battle and presence of multiple reinforced firing positions of the enemy inside the town, the task force of the MIA Special Forces in Tskhinvali was reinforced by the 4th Infantry Brigade of the MOD that entered the town from the left flank. From 13:00 to 15:00, Georgian and Russian troops engaged in intensive fighting in the center of Tskhinvali, Georgian forces mostly controlled the southern part of the town, while Russian forces amassed in its northern part. At 17:00, additional Russian troops entered Tskhinvali. Confronting the Russian air, artillery and ground offensive, Georgian forces maintained control of the southern part of Tskhinvali and the surrounding villages until late in the evening. At 22:30,

Georgian armed forces, including the task force of the MIA Special Forces, began a phased retreat from Tskhinvali and during the night re-positioned themselves south of the town.

Throughout August 8 and until late in the evening of August 9, the Temporary Administration's Anti-Terrorist Center maintained its checkpoints in the central government controlled villages in Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia despite massive bombardments by Russian military aircraft and artillery. On August 8 in the afternoon, police officers of the Temporary Administration's Anti-Terrorist Center had two short exchanges of fire with Russian troops near villages Tamarasheni and Dzartsemi. On August 9, after Georgian forces started to leave Tskhinvali at 22:30, the Temporary Administration's Anti-Terrorist Center abandoned its checkpoints in Big Liakhvi valley and moved via the Eredvi-Kheiti bypass road to Small Liakhvi valley.

On August 10, at 04:00, Russian troops occupied Big Liakhvi valley. At 10:00, Georgian armed forces, including the unit of the Temporary Administration's Anti-Terrorist Center, left Frone valley, which was immediately captured by Russian troops.

On August 11, after 11:00, as Russian troops started to advance south from Tskhinvali, Georgian forces, including all of the special forces of the MIA, retreated southwards in Gori district abandoning their checkpoints. By 22:00, as Georgian armed forces withdrew to the town of Mtskheta in order to defend the capital Tbilisi, the MIA Special Forces stopped at village Igoeti, Kaspi district on the main highway and arranged a checkpoint there.

The MIA Special Forces suffered the following casualties during the war: 6 officers of the Special Tasks Main Division and 3 officers of the Constitutional Security Department were killed. 3 officers of the Special Tasks Main Division are still missing in action.