

Armed Forces of Georgian Democratic Republic in 1918–1921

Gruzijas Demokrātiskās Republikas bruņotie spēki 1918.–1921. gadā

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The article is dedicated to the armed forces of the Georgian Democratic Republic (1918–1921). It shows the history of their creation and development, the composition and structure of the troops, as well as provides a brief insight into the combat path. It also shows the contradictions that existed between the socialist leadership of the country and a significant part of the officer corps, caused by ideological differences. The result of these contradictions were two forms of the armed organization of Georgia – the regular army and the People's Guard, which caused discord in the armed forces. This circumstance, among other reasons, contributed to the military defeat of Georgia in the clash with Soviet Russia (1921).

Keywords: Transcaucasia in 1918–1921, Georgian Democratic Republic, regular army of Georgia, the People's Guard, The Soviet-Georgian War of 1921.

Raksts veltīts Gruzijas Demokrātiskās Republikas bruņotajiem spēkiem 1918.–1921. gadā, tajā atspoguļota to izveidošanas un attīstības vēsture, kā arī karaspēka sastāvs un struktūra, bez tam īsumā raksturotas kaujas operācijas. Parādītas arī pretrunas, kas pastāvēja starp valsts sociālistisko vadību un lielu daļu virsnieku korpusa un kas izraisīja ideoloģiskas atšķirības. Šo pretrunu rezultāts bija divas Gruzijas bruņoto spēku organizatoriskās formas – regulārā armija un Tautas gvarde –, starp kurām pastāvēja nesaskaņas. Šī situācija arī veicināja Gruzijas sakāvi karā ar padomju Krieviju (1921).

Atslēgvārdi: Aizkaukāzs (1918–1921), Gruzijas Demokrātiskā Republika, Gruzijas regulārā armija, tautas gvarde, padomju Krievijas un Gruzijas karš (1921).

After the Bolsheviks took over power in Russia in October of 1917, the Transcaucasian political organizations not affiliated to the Bolshevik forces, such as Georgian Social-Democrats – the Mensheviks, Azerbaijani Musavats, Armenian Dashnaks, etc., refused to recognise the new rule and as early as in November organised

a coalition government named the Transcaucasian Commissariat, with Evgeni Gegechkori of the Social-Democrats as its chairman, based in Tiflis (Tbilisi).

This marked the moment when Transcaucasia began to break away from Russia, although right up to April of 1918 it was officially accepted to view the region as the integral part of Russia and to regard the formation of its domestic government as a temporary measure to remain in place until the legitimate government would restore its rule in the country.

I

Against the backdrop of World War I, the main problem the Transcaucasian Commissariat faced was the Caucasian-Russian-Turkish – front, and the half a million Russian Caucasian army, which, exhausted from the lingering war and won over from the command by the Bolshevik propaganda, was fast deteriorating and losing its effectiveness. Soldiers would abandon the front in units, and leaving the heavy artillery behind, set off for the rear to get home as soon as possible. The threat of a Turkish invasion of the Caucasus was getting real. This is why the security picture demanded an urgent formation of national armed forces to occupy the sites deserted by the Russian military. The Transcaucasian government decided to create Georgian, Armenian, Muslim and Russian corps. The initiative was carried out by the military commissariats acting under the respective national councils, who had brought together various political parties and societies.

However, the process did not run as smoothly as contemplated. According to the professional military commanders of the time, there were several factors that hindered creation of the Georgian corps: 1) weaponry and ammunition were scarce;

2) politicians frequently interfered with appointments – they would lobby officers on the basis of political inclinations, rather than professional skill and quality; 3) the recruits were mainly picked from those previously serving at the front, who had been infected by Bolshevik ideas; 4) military morale was weak – there were frequent disturbances, with the highest authority not always recognized; soldiers would attend political rallies or wander around the city, revelling and attending to their own affairs.¹

It became ever clearer that such turmoil was making it impossible to gather a force that would be capable of fighting. The veteran army should have to be urgently dismissed and young servicemen drafted. However, that was easier said than done: the military registration and recruitment had been toppled, orders and commands were either not carried out or executed carelessly. The only exception was the students, i.e. volunteers that were 16 to 20 years of age, who had responded to the patriotic activist propaganda. “*If you had only seen the youth bearing the huge burden*”, writes General Mazniashvili,² “*all the enthusiasm with which they submitted to military discipline!*”³

Alongside the official military organization, the major political parties of Transcaucasia also started to form their own armed units. Thus, for example, Georgian social democrats or Mensheviks organized a workers’ Red Guard, which they used to occupy the district gun-depot in Tiflis on December 12, 1917 (by Julian Calendar), disarming its pro-Bolshevik guard. The operation prevented an attempted Bolshevik *coup d’état* in Tiflis at the end of the year. When Lenin learned of the Menshevik takeover of the armoury that contained a lot of weapons, ammunition and other military equipment, he was quite outspoken in his disappointment and reproach of Caucasian Bolsheviks.⁴

The Red Guard was under the command of the Tiflis Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, with Georgian Mensheviks as a majority and Noe Jordania as the Council's chairman. General Kvinitadze,⁵ who was generally critical of the partisan guards, describes the events of the years 1917 and 1918 in his memoirs, as follows:

*“Do them justice, throughout the domestic life of the Republic, the Guard actually made a big difference. Apart from their immediate role to look out for the successes of the revolution, they more than once acted to maintain order in the country, nipping in the bud any action against the order both amongst the public and sometimes even in some units of the army being formed at the time, where the corps, having been inherited from the Russian army, was poisoned by Bolshevism.”*⁶

II

The process of disintegration of the standing Russian army was also precipitate on the Western – Russian-German front. Hence, the Soviet government was forced to agree to separatist negotiations with the central powers. On December 2, 1917 (by Julian calendar), both sides signed a ceasefire in Brest-Litovsk, opening doors for the peace talks that began on December 9 of the same year. In compliance with the Brest process, on December 5 the two sides signed a further ceasefire for the Caucasian front, which then ran along the Black Sea, to *Gümüřhane*, Erzincan, Mus, Lake Van and further to the Persian border. However, the Transcaucasian government refused to join the Brest-Litovsk talks and did not recognize the terms of the peace treaty concerning the concessions of land in Transcaucasia.

By early 1918, the Russian army on the Caucasian front had been replaced by Georgian and Armenian units. These forces, which were mainly constituted by a conglomerate of volunteer brigades, spread along the front in smaller groups covering key sites. According to General Odishelidze,⁷ the commander of the Caucasian front at the time, *“the corps were composed of regiments of about 200–300 soldiers each, and you could easily refer to them as disorderly gangs and by no means as regiments”*.⁸ While the Turkish troops they faced did not hold any numerical superiority, they [the Turkish side] had much better organizational capacity and discipline. Musavats usually avoided a direct engagement with the Turks and explained such behaviour with religious views. They were much more concerned by the Soviet regime in Baku (i.e. the Baku commune). Failing to secure Caucasian troops for the settlement of the Baku problem, Azerbaijani politicians finally declared they would find “other forces” to aid them, quite clearly referring to the Turks.⁹

The ceasefire on the Caucasian scene was broken in February 1918, when the Ottoman command used the violence allegedly deployed by Armenian military forces against the Muslim part of the population to launch an offensive.¹⁰ General Odishelidze tried to respond using flexible resistance and even ceded part of the land to shorten the frontline. But what with the disorder and disorganization on the front, as well as with the instability within the Transcaucasian region, the resistance was weak and lacking in a centralized effort. In February of the same year, the Ottomans seized Erzincan, followed by Trabzon and Erzurum in March and Batumi and Kars in April. Zurab Avalov (Avalishvili), a Georgian diplomat, lawyer and historian, describes the process, as follows: *“the Caucasian front started to collapse as a*

dilapidated building".¹¹ General Kvinitadze refrains from delving deep and comments briefly: "The reasons were the same as previously destroyed the Russian army, later moving on to the armies of the countries where the revolution had taken place."¹²

III

On April 22, 1918, Transcaucasia government used the opportunity of the peace talks with the Ottoman side to officially declare its independence. Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic was founded, with the social democrat Akaki Chkhenkeli as the Prime Minister; however, the republic only lasted for a few weeks, after which it broke up into the sovereign republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia (May 26–28, 1918). By this time, the Georgians had already entered diplomatic talks with the Germans and asked for help from the European countries. German troops landed in Poti, projecting outposts towards the Turkish lines. This stopped the Turkish advancement into the heart of the country. On June 4, the three newly formed states signed separate peace treaties with the Ottoman Empire, Georgia and particularly Armenia, ceding significant territories. Armenia thus became restricted to Yerevan and its surroundings. The Turkish-Azerbaijani treaty was easily a formality: the document just reiterated the already existing unequal status of the two allied countries. The Ottoman troops assisted the Azerbaijani in capturing Baku and remained there until the end of World War I, too.

Thus, from June to November of 1918, Transcaucasia was under the influence of the German block. The Georgian Social Democratic Party, having separated from the Russian Mensheviks, had come to power in Georgia and was enjoying

extensive popularity in the country, with Noe Jordania as the Head of the Cabinet from July 1918.

The representatives of German military circle offered the Georgians assistance in organizing the country's national armed forces, but were met with discontent from the Socialist government. Georgian leadership were the followers of Marx's thesis on substitution of the army with armed militia, and were more inclined towards the Swiss model.¹³ Their German advisers, on the other hand, had a project to form a regular army consisting of two infantry and one cavalry divisions. Supported by the majority of Georgian militaries, the German model was passed, but with certain modifications.

The views differed concerning the Red Guard, which had been renamed into the People's Guard after the country's declaration of independence. The Germans were sceptical of the structure born of the revolution, as well as of the red flag that had been raised on the main government building. Their military advisors opposed a creation of militia-like formations, claiming that they would disrupt the integrity of armed forces, but the parliamentary military committee voted unanimously to maintain the party military unit.¹⁴ Eventually, the two sides agreed that the Guard would exclusively deal with internal issues, while in war time it would dissolve and its guardsmen would join the army through their respective enlistment offices. Nonetheless, after the departure of the Germans, the local leadership ignored the stipulation and sent the Guard to act as one unit on the battlefield.

IV

Following the defeat of the central powers in the war, at the end of 1918

the Turkish and German troops left the Caucasus, the Turks having to also abandon the lands gained as a result of the Batumi treaty. They were replaced by the English, arriving in Baku and Batumi. The change in the protecting power disrupted the fragile stability in the region, which had been secured by German presence. The first confrontation was initiated by Armenian Dashnaks, who deemed themselves the only allies of the Entente powers in Transcaucasia as Georgia and Azerbaijan had been marred by their contacts with the German block. Therefore, the Dashnaks believed that the winning powers would support their territorial claims. In December 1918, the Armenian army invaded the borderline areas of Georgia, Borchalo, as well as Akhalkalaki, whose population was mainly Armenian. Battles involving artillery, aviation and armoured trains continued until early January, which saw the arrival of an English unit. As a result of negotiations chaired by the English general Rycroft, a part of Borchalo district was announced a neutral land under the governance of the English officer. The final settlement of the territorial issue was, however, postponed and was to take place within the Paris peace conference. However, in the autumn of 1920, when Armenia faced the threat of Turkish occupation and the English troops had already left, the Armenian government offered the Georgians to occupy the neutral zone, which they did.

From January to April, 1919, Georgian troops had to face units of Muslim Georgian separatists in Akhaltsikhe and Ardahan districts. The rebels were led by the political and military leader and landlord Osman Server Atabek, who had descended from a converted Muslim Georgian noble family and was a supporter of an independent South-Western Caucasian Republic. It is an accepted view among academic circles that

one of the reasons leading to the rebellion among the Muslim populace of Georgia was the fear of the local landlords that the agrarian reform undertaken by the Socialist Georgian government in the country would deprive them of their hereditary lands notwithstanding the regional peculiarities.¹⁵ It was a political decision of the government to create a Georgian-Muslim cavalry battalion ("division") bringing Muslim and Christian Georgians together to serve in the Akhaltsikhe campaign. During the two following years, the battalion fought with merit both in the war and in the country's fight with gangs of bandits operating in the frontier lands. As per the existing archival data, by the September of 1920 the joint Georgian-Muslim battalion consisted of two – cavalry and infantry – squadrons and an MO platoon, the total of 26 officers and 276 soldiers. The battalion commander was Colonel Bakhshi Bek Machabeli, a Georgian Muslim. He had a Christian officer as his deputy.¹⁶

After the departure of the Germans, Georgia's relations with the White Movement in the south of Russia became strained, too. Clashes with White Russian Guard took place around Sochi and Gagra, but an open conflict was prevented by the British, who planted their own garrison in Gagra. In these local conflicts, the Georgian troops were mainly represented by feebly organized volunteer units,¹⁷ but work was already underway to form a regular army. Georgian generals and officers with some service and battlefield experience from the Russian Empire army were actively involved in building of their country's armed forces. Colonel Tevzadze¹⁸ was serving in the committee drawing up current military terms in Georgian, mainly on the basis of Russian statutes. They were checked, edited and translated into Georgian, then published and distributed to the troops being formed at the time.¹⁹

In the summer of 1918, the Georgian Parliament passed its first acts creating the basis for building the military organization in the Republic. These were the law on military duty and military service, statute on military administration, special law on organization of the regular army, etc. These acts made military service obligatory for Georgian citizens from 20 to 45. Conscriptio ns took place in mid-November and applied to the young men turning twenty during the calendar year. The total term of military service was 25 years, of which 2 years of compulsory service, 15 years of reserve and 8 years of citizen militia duty. In the event of emergency, militia could also conscript the citizens 17 to 50 years of age.²⁰ Conscriptio n did not apply to the Muslims serving in the Georgian army on voluntary basis, and Russian Doukhobors, for whom service in the army was against their religious views. In the November of 1919, Minister of Defence Noe Ramishvili supported the proposal of the chairman of the military commissariat of Abkhazia (conscriptio n plans had met with certain difficulties there) to replace the compulsory conscriptio n by voluntary service for Christian Abkhazs as it had been done for their Muslim compatriots.²¹

In autumn 1919, the government approved a project for establishment of the regular put forward by Colonel Aleksandre Zakariadze.²² The proposal stipulated that the army should consist of four infantry brigades, each of which in turn should comprise 4 rifle battalions and battalion (“division”) of mountain artillery. Furthermore, the regular army separately had an artillery brigade, a cavalry regiment, an air attack squadron, an armoured mechanized unit, a border regiment and several other units and ancillary subdivisions. There were six commissioned grades: lieutenant, senior lieutenant, captain, major, colonel and general.²³ The ranks were no

longer awarded for service of a certain term or battle honours. Instead, they were associated with the position held by the officer. General Mazniashvili recalls:

“When a Poruchik [senior lieutenant – G. A.] was appointed by the regimental commander, he would be given the rank of “colonel”. But if, for some reason, the person thus appointed was dismissed, he would lose the rank and be given another that would be relevant to the new appointment.”²⁴

Apart from the regular forces, political leadership of Georgia also developed its partisan organizations, namely, the People’s Guard, recruited from the members or followers of the Social-Democratic Party. However, while initially the Guard was not a state entity and was sponsored privately, after the law on reformation of the People’s Guard was passed on July 2, 1918, it turned into a state military organization, funded by the central budget. The law significantly modified its structure as well, and apart from infantry it also acquired artillery, armoured trains, engineer units, etc.

The People’s Guard was a voluntary organization and its armed soldiers were not obliged to remain in the barracks. They spent most of their time at home or at their workplace. They would only assemble at times of war or when under combat training. Guardsmen were not paid for their service, but their families received a certain welfare assistance at times of war. Salaries were only disbursed to the command officers and logistics staff.²⁵ There were no officer ranks in the Guards command.

The main difficulty the Georgian government constantly faced in the process of building its system of defence was a chronic lack of funding. Therefore, the program they had in mind was never fully realized. Existence of the People’s Guard as

a separate entity was an additional headache. On the one hand, having voluntary formations in the armed forces could be practical as they usually play the role of internal forces and act as a reserve for the regular army. However, forming the People's Guard as a partisan entity proved to be a very unwise step, since it brought significant discord to the army. It was commonly believed that the government paid considerably more attention to the Guard. In general, the ruling Social Democratic circles were suspicious of the professional army officers and, moreover so to those descended from nobility, as their majority did not share the Marxist ideology. Hence, a big portion of experienced military cadre was left out from the project. The apprehension felt between the professional military and the government of Georgia throughout the existence of the independent Georgian Republic runs like a golden thread in the memoirs published later by Georgian immigrants. Notably, both sides generally accused each other of being politically Russophiles: the government blaming the officers of their sympathetic regard of Russian White Guard ideology, whereas the military deemed the Social Democrats to have been devotees of Russian Bolshevism.

The view that the government needed the Guard in order to secure its own authoritarian rule permeated all the Georgian immigrant circles opposing the Social Democrats. Thus, touching upon the issue of the People's Guard, Giorgi Kvinitadze recalls:

"[...] the organization was needed to counterbalance the military force and to serve against the possible emergence of any potential Bonaparte. Furthermore, it was a tool to implant and reinforce in the people its ideological tenets. It was a support for the government; just like in any earlier time in history, when governments would

*come up with their own security guards like Praetorians, Janissaries, Oprichniks, etc."*²⁶

From the accounts of V. Tevzadze, the army kept losing its best sub-officers draining away to the Guards for a better payment.²⁷ Commissioned officers were quite annoyed at the privileges enjoyed by the Guards' commanders.

On the other hand, a century long disruption in the development of Georgian military organization also affected the process, as the pause had resulted in a virtually total extinction of national military culture. It was a significant factor even though, as it has been already noted, the country had a vast body of educated officers with the state-of-the-art battlefield experience. It was thanks to these people that the Republic could witness the growth of a worthy generation of officers; and "junkers" (students) of Tbilisi Military School proved this true in the Georgian-Russian war of 1921.

V

What did the Georgian armed forces look like by early 1921?

The forces consisted of three entities: 1) the army and the border guard; 2) the navy; and 3) the People's Guard.

The army and the navy were within the jurisdiction of the Defence Ministry, while the People's Guard was under the command of the Guard's General Headquarters. The two branches would only be brought together at times of war, when a special decree of the government would establish the office of the Commander in Chief to be in charge of all the armed forces and reporting directly to the Prime Minister.

According to the strategic intelligence of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (the RSFSR), at times of peace

the Georgian army consisted of three infantry brigades with 4 battalions each (each battalion was comprised of 40 officers, 617 soldiers and 27 long-service soldiers) and a light artillery battalion with three batteries of 4-gunnery personnel, one separate cavalry brigades (2 cavalry regiments and a light artillery battalion), as well as a separate Georgian Muslim cavalry battalion. The artillery was composed of 5 light and 1 heavy artillery battalions; Out of which, as noted above, 4 light artillery battalions were part of the army brigades (both infantry and cavalry), while the fifth light artillery battalion and the separate heavy artillery battalion were under the direct command of the Defence Ministry.²⁸

The ancillary troops were commanded by the head of the technical engineering corps and consisted of a field engineer battalion, a radio telegraphy troop, an armoured motor unit, one column of tanks,²⁹ six armoured trains, a motor company and one aviation company. The Defence Ministry had proposed to reform the latter into an air battalion in January of 1921.³⁰ Security troops encompassed Tbilisi and Kutaisi guard battalions.

As noted above, the regular army also included the border guard, consisting of 7 regiments with 24 officers and commissioned ranks and 330 or 437 soldiers. Coast guard troops each had 2 steam motor boats.³¹

Upon declaration of martial law, enlistment of reserve forces was supposed to significantly increase the number of the active army and turn brigades into divisions and battalions into regiments within a week.³² Assigned personnel of the infantry regiment (conventional number) was 2225 soldiers and officers, with 32 machine-guns planned in the regiment.

At times of peace, the total regular army had 7 500 infantrymen and over 1 500 cavalymen; at times of war these

increased to 27 000 infantrymen and over 3 000 cavalymen.³³ 90% of the army was composed of Georgians, the remaining part taken up by Armenians, Russians, "Tartars" (a vernacular reference to Turks and Tanscaucasian Muslims) and others. There was a significant number of Russians in the engineering troops.

By the beginning of 1921, Georgian naval forces were composed of one fleet destroyer, 4 wooden fighter aircrafts, 4 mine boats and 10 steamers of various functions. Their command was in the hands of the commander of navy with his staff.³⁴ At times of peace, the navy was placed under the Defence Ministry, the function moving to the Commander in Chief at war times.

As it has already been noted, the People's Guard had both permanent and reserve units, which in their turn, comprised 1 fully complemented battalion and 23 cadre battalions formed by district and regional headquarters. These were not further united in regiments or brigades, leaving room for improvisation under open warfare.

The People's Guards' cavalry consisted of one cavalry regiment. The artillery of the same comprised a brigade of three battalions: mountain, light and howitzer battalion (total 7 batteries). Technical units consisted of troops – engineering, railway and armoured motors. Its soldiers were particularly loyal to the ruling party. They frequently showed courage in the battle, but did not stand out for their discipline and often acted at their own discretion, ignoring the commands. The accounts of General Kvinitadze testify that during warfare the Guard had a destructive impact on the army with its licentiousness, lack of discipline and self-control on the battlefield.³⁵

The armed forces of the Georgian Republic owned several educational institutions: 1) Tbilisi Military Schools (a 2-year course), to produce officers for all kinds of

armies. It also had a sub-officer school of 250–300 men; 2) Drivers' School; 3) A Driving School for the mechanical company; and 4) People's Guard School. Additionally, in 1921 it was planned to establish a military engineering department at Tbilisi Polytechnic School with several sub-divisions: fortifications, aviation, communications or signalling engineering.³⁶ The country had no resources available for a higher military school and it was planned to send Georgian officers to the French military academy.³⁷

VI

Meanwhile, military and political scenery tightened around Georgia. The Bolsheviks, having destroyed the main forces of the White Movement, set off to regain the peripheral parts of the former Russian Empire. The first to fall was Azerbaijan in April of 1920. The battle only lasted for a few days before it was fully taken by the 11th Russian Army, but the republic managed to retain the name and external attributes of an independent state.

The Soviet forces reached the border between Azerbaijan and Georgia and attacked it. It seemed the Bolsheviks had in mind to deal away with Georgia the same way they had done with Azerbaijan: inciting a rebellion in the capital and send the army in on the pretext of aiding the rebels. Indeed, in the early hours of May 2, an uprising broke out in Tbilisi, masterminded by Georgian Communists. Three or four divisions of the 11th Army simultaneously homed in on Tbilisi, which lay in less than 30 miles from the border. However, the country appeared to be ready for the surprise attack and in a joint operation, the rebellion was stamped out by the police and the People's Guards. An armed gang that infiltrated the military school campus was neutralized by the students and school

personnel.³⁸ The government called to the arms and appointed General Kvinitadze the Commander in Chief. As a result, in a couple of weeks, the Georgian forces not only managed to push the enemy to the border, but also entered 17 miles into the Azerbaijani territory. Lenin's government realized that under the given circumstances, prolonged warfare would only bring trouble and decided to temporarily waive its plan to subdue Georgia. Indeed, at the time when the position of the Bolsheviks in North Caucasus and Azerbaijan was still quite fragile, Crimea was in Wrangel's hands and the Western frontier was under the threat of a war with Poland, even a smallest failure in the Caucasus could have far-reaching consequences for the entire region.

The Soviet side declared that it had been dragged into a local conflict between Georgia and Soviet Azerbaijan, and on May 7, 1920, Grigol Uratadze, who was an official representative of Georgia in Moscow, signed a peace treaty, in which the Russian Federation unconditionally recognised Georgia's independence and refrained "*from any involvement in its domestic affairs*".³⁹

Having received the news, Noe Jordania ordered to stop the attack on the front against all the appeal by General Kvinitadze, who believed that now, the main forces of the Russians being locked in the West, it would be possible to act jointly with the Azerbaijani military and push the Russians out of Transcaucasia. However, the head of the government took the peace treaty with the Bolsheviks, who were ideologically close to the Georgian Social Democrats, for a sufficient guarantee of peace. Official recognition of Georgia by the Russian Federation also induced the world's greater powers to do the same and their *de jure* recognition followed promptly. The subsequent events demonstrated, however, that the Bolsheviks

only needed the short-lived peace with the Transcaucasian country to better prepare for its capture and Sovietisation.

The next Transcaucasian republic to fall in the hands of the Soviets was Armenia. The operation proved to be quite easy, as the country had been thoroughly defeated by the Kemalists Turks shortly before that.⁴⁰ Thus, Georgia found itself surrounded by Soviet lands all along its border, with only the southwest being under the control of the Kemalists. Under such circumstances, being on the brink of the decisive confrontation with Russia, which was expected by most in the country, the government again introduced the previously revoked office of the Commander in Chief in December, and appointed General Odishelidze to lead the army. A partial mobilization was also announced.

By early 1921, Georgian armed forces amounted to 25 000 infantrymen and cavalrymen. Ilia Odishelidze, expecting the Soviet invasion in the spring of the same year, believed it was necessary to increase the army to 60 000 men (75 000 including the support services). However, Georgia had neither weapons and ammunition nor clothing and other military resources to unfold the army to the required scale.⁴¹ The problem of making up the shortfalls and all the steps necessary for defence was extensively discussed in the secret report of the Commander in Chief addressed to the government on January 3, 1921. The report did not exclude the possibility of the Kemalists Turkish involvement on the Bolshevik side.⁴²

However, when the invasion came as a Sputnik moment for Tbilisi, it turned out

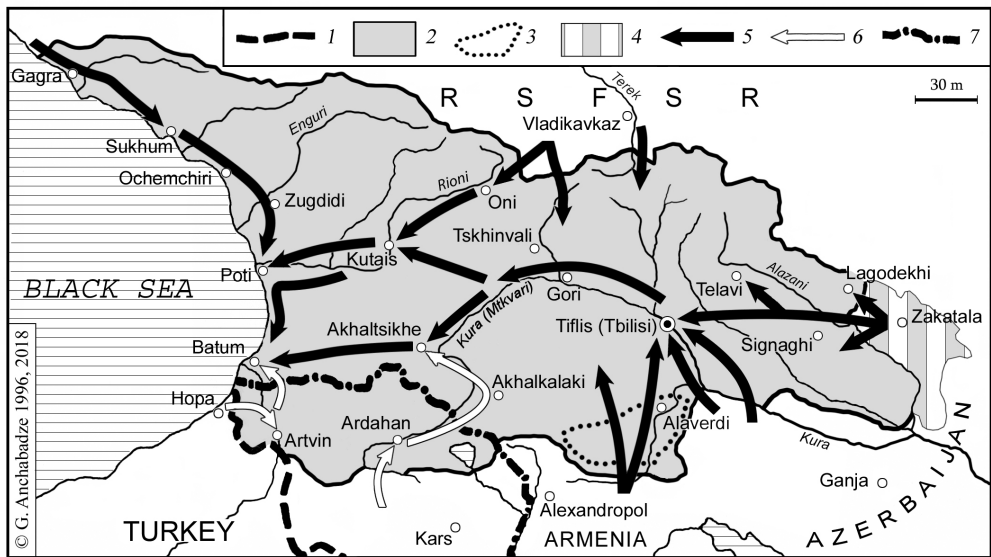


Fig. Georgia in 1921. 1 – Russia-Turkey Border in 1914; 2 – Territory of Democratic Republic of Georgia by the beginning of 1921; 3 – Former neutral zone; 4 – Territory which was disputable between Georgia and Azerbaijan; 5 – The movement of Russia troops in February and March of 1921; 6 – Attack of Turkish troops in March, 1921; 7 – Border between Soviet Russia and Turkey according to treaty signed on 16th March, 1921 in Moscow.

that nothing had been done to prepare for the war. The mobilization plans failed. The infantry battalions should have been unfolded into regiments of three battalions each. But the second and third battalions were not formed due to lack of supplies and regiments were sent to the battlefield as one battalion.⁴³

It has already been noted above that the first confrontation with the Red Army in May 1920 was presented by the Soviet propaganda as a local Georgian-Azerbaijani conflict. This time the war was linked to a territorial dispute between Georgia and Armenia. According to the official Soviet version, the precursor came in the form of a rebellion of local population of the former neutral zone against the Georgian government on February 12, 1921. They allegedly called the Red Army troops positioned in Armenia for help.⁴⁴ Georgian borderline defence lines were caught by surprise and retreated with big losses. On February 16, the Soviet forces crossed the border with Azerbaijan as well, and launching a full-scale war.

VII

Armies of the Soviet Caucasian front surrounded Georgia in a wide curve. The main attack aiming at Tbilisi – from the Azerbaijani and Armenian borders – was undertaken by the 11th Army consisting of 4 infantry and 2.5 cavalry divisions even without its reserve capabilities. Ancillary attacks were directed from Sochi (the 31st infantry division of the 9th Army) and Vladikavkaz (troops of the Terek-Daghestani group of forces – the 98th brigade with additional supplies and Ossetian militia).

After the defeat of the Georgian forces at the frontier, General Odishelidze was removed from the office and replaced

by General Kvinitadze. He moved all the existing forces closer to Tbilisi to prepare for a decisive battle at the outskirts of the capital, as its hilly surroundings were helpful to defence.

Lack of forces caused the command to draw the entire contingent of the capital's garrison to the last infantryman (400 men) to fight alongside the field battalions and People's Guard; as well as security units, border guard and undereducated volunteers. The military school gave the army its "junker" company (160 infantrymen) and a newly enlisted battalion of about 300 sub-officers. Several units, such as two infantry regiments were urgently removed from the Turkish border, but they failed to arrive in time. The government only left a couple of battalions and local militia of about 5–6 thousand men for the Sukhumi sector, hoping that defending the positions in the coastal runway they would hold the invasion for a time.⁴⁵

The sources available today do not allow to precisely pinpoint the number of defenders of the capital, however, it is unlikely that their number could have exceeded 10 000 people. These forces, unfolding on three frontal districts, covered the capital from the south and the east in a 25-mile long front.

As for the 11th Army aiming at the capital, its number by the time of the events is defined by Soviet publications of the 1980s to have been over 40 thousand men.⁴⁶ Part of the forces stayed in Armenia and Azerbaijan to guard the "revolutionary order", but the main force and attacking units were located near Tbilisi. The Russians also held a significant advantage in terms of artillery.

The cold February days, the approaches to Tbilisi witnessed a last-ditch battle. On February 19 and 20, the Red charge in the Kojori and Tabakhmela area, slightly south of the city was repelled with short

counterattacks. Thousands of Russian prisoners were taken, but the Georgians no longer had any potential to build on the success. This is why, over the next few days, when the enemy restored a railway bridge blown up by the defenders at the border and brought in armoured trains and platforms with tanks (about 4 to 6 units), the Red Army renewed the charge. The very first serious attack on the left bank of the Mtkvari with the support of the tanks forced the defending People's Guardsmen to abandon the fortified positions and retreat. The Soviet cavalry broke forth to the north of Tbilisi and took over the railway connecting the capital with the west part of the country. The way was cleared shortly, but by the evening of February 24, the capital had been blocked from three sides. The government, therefore, decided to deliver the city, which decision, according to Giorgi Mazniashvili was met with controversial approval in the military circles.⁴⁷ The same night, both the army and the government's trains left the capital, leaving the city open for the arrival of the Red Army on February 25.

The Georgian army retreated in other sectors, too. Capture of the capital heavily affected the army morale and walkouts became common.⁴⁸ According to Aleksandre Sulxanishvili's reports,⁴⁹ initially everyone was sure they would manage to take hold of the Surami range, which runs between Eastern and Western parts of Georgia,

"but on our way, observing our army dragging behind as an abandoned flock of sheep, I started to have doubts [...]. We have not known, in our centuries-old history, delivery to the enemy of our native land and so ignominiously at that; and it had all happened thanks to our wise government".⁵⁰

In early March, when troops of the Red Army, breaking through Abkhazia

and mountain passes, reached Poti and Kutaisi, the war had already been lost. The great powers whose help the Georgian government had banked on did nothing.

The southwest did not show a better picture either. The Kemalists, whose main forces had remained near the Georgian borders after the war with Armenia, demanded from the Georgian government to give up the towns of Artvin and Ardahan, motivating their demand by necessity to defend local Muslims. The government complied, behind the public's back too. There were some in the cabinet who even vainly hoped to be able to push the Turks against the Russians.⁵¹ The former, however, did not linger, proceeding forward, and shortly reached Batumi and Akhaltsikhe.

The Georgian leadership realized that Turkish occupation of the area would jeopardize territorial integrity of the country, and in order to avoid the increasingly real threat of parcelling out the Georgian land, decided to leave everything to the Bolsheviks. In the negotiations of March 17–18, 1921, in Kutaisi, the Georgian side undertook to clear the way for the Soviet forces to Batumi, provided that Batumi district would remain within Georgia. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, promised amnesty to men-at-arms and civil servants of the Republic of Georgia.⁵²

The Georgian leadership took an Italian steamboat from Batumi on March 18, while the Georgian forces still assembled in the seaside town and led by General Mazniashvili moved into the action with the Turks, pushing them away from the area (March 18–20). This was the last success of the armed forces of the first republic. After the Turks retreated, the Bolshevik army, which had been observing the developments, took over the town. However, several days before that, on March 16, Turkey and the RSFSR signed the

Moscow treaty on friendship and brotherhood, according to which Turkey claimed a number of Transcaucasian districts, including those of Artvin and Ardahan.

Conclusions

After the coup in Petrograd in 1917 the process of separation of Transcaucasia from Russia was initiated, it lasted until April 1918, when Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic was established. However, already in late May Transcaucasian Federation broke up into the sovereign republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Georgian Social Democratic Party, having separated itself from the Russian Mensheviks, had come to power Georgia.

During this difficult period near the end of the First World War, the organizing the country's national armed forces was one of the central tasks for Georgian state. Consequently, already in the summer of 1918 the Georgian parliament passed its first legal acts on military duty and military service, statute on military administration, special law on organization of the regular army, etc. Apart from formation of the regular forces, political leadership of Georgia also developed its partisan organizations, namely, the People's Guard, that developed into second national military structure equipped with artillery, armoured trains, engineer units, etc.

The very existence of the special People's Guard as a separate structure besides army evoked additional difficulties, the Guard was not under command of the Defence Ministry, the issues of its

cooperation with the regular army were not fully solved. It was commonly believed that the government paid considerably more attention to the Guard. In general, the ruling Social Democratic circles were suspicious of the professional army officers and moreover so, those descended from nobility, as their majority did not share the Marxist ideology. Thus, a big portion of experienced military was left out of the National army. However, the formation of National Armed Forces was carried out, but the programme of military build-up was not fully completed due to lack of budget and other reasons.

In 1921, the regular army consisted of three infantry and one cavalry brigade, 5 light and 1 heavy artillery battalions, technical engineering corps, etc. The regular army also included the border guard and some naval forces. The People's Guard had both permanent and reserve units, which, in their turn, comprised 1 fully complemented battalion and 23 cadre battalions formed by district and regional headquarters. The People's Guard's cavalry consisted of one cavalry regiment, artillery the Guard comprised a brigade of three battalions. Several educational institutions were established in order to prepare officers. Georgian army waged the war at the Black Sea coast, in Abkhazia, Southern Georgia, Southern Ossetia, on borders with Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, the Georgian army could not endure the most serious examination, the war with the Soviet Russia in 1921. The article deals with the prehistory of this war, its course and results that unfortunately led to the fall of the First Georgian Republic.

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- ² Giorgi Mazniashvili (1870–1937) – Lieutenant Colonel of the Russian Imperial Army and General of Georgian Army. Participated in the Russian–Japanese War and the First World War, and since 1918 – in wars and armed conflicts of the Georgian Republic. In the battle for Tbilisi, he commanded the central defense sector. After Sovietization of Georgia, Mazniashvili was appointed division commander of the newly created Georgian Red Army, but was soon transferred to the position of infantry inspector. In 1923, he was arrested on charges of preparing an uprising, but was released two years later and allowed to travel abroad. For some time, he lived in France, then returned to his homeland, and having no other means of life, engaged in peasant labour in his village. The author of memories of the events in Georgia in 1917–1925. In the years of the “Great Terror” in the USSR, Giorgi Mazniashvili was shot by punitive organs.
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- ⁴ MAMIJA ORAHELASHVILI. *Zakavkazskie bol'shevistskie organizacii v 1917 godu*. Tiflis 1927, s. 51.
- ⁵ George Kvinitadze (1874–1970) – Major-General (1917). Member of the Russian–Japanese War and the First World War. In 1918–1921 served in the armed forces of Transcaucasia and the Georgian Democratic Republic. One of the organizers of the Georgian army. He was an assistant (adviser) to the Minister of War of the Transcaucasian Republic, and then of the Georgian Republic. He served as Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasian Front and was twice appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Georgian forces, in charge of the Tbilisi Military School. After Sovietization of Georgia in 1921, he lived in France. In 1922, Georgy Kvinitadze wrote memoirs dedicated to the brief period of Georgia's independent existence in 1917–1921. The book first saw the light in Paris in 1985.
- ⁶ KVINITADZE, *Moi vospominanija v gody nezavisimosti Gruzii*, s. 46–47.
- ⁷ Ilya Odishelidze (1865–after 1924) – Russian and Georgian military commander, lieutenant-general (1914). He joined the service in 1886. Participant of the Russian–Japanese War and the First World War. In 1912–1914 held a post of Samarkand military governor. At the fronts of the World War I was the chief of staff of the army, then commanded the army corps and armies. From October 1917 to February 1918, Ilya Odishelidze was the commander of the Caucasian army. Then – the assistant military minister of the Transcaucasian Republic, but in April he was removed from the office at the request of representatives of Armenia, who accused the general of nationalism. From 1919, Odishelidze occupied the highest command posts in the Georgian army. From the autumn of 1920 until mid-February of 1921 he was the commander-in-chief of the Georgian troops. One of the organizers of the army of the first Georgian Republic. After Sovietization of Georgia, he lived in exile. Apparently, he died in Istanbul.
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- ¹¹ ZURAB AVALOV. *Nezavisimost' Gruzii v mezhdunarodnoj politike. 1918–1921 gg. Vospominanija. Ocherki*. Parizh 1924, s. 31.
- ¹² KVINITADZE, *Moi vospominanija v gody nezavisimosti Gruzii*, s. 27–28.
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- ¹⁴ DAVID VACHNADZE. *Georgian national roots and Russian Bolshevism*. Tbilisi 2004, p. 61 (in Georgian).
- ¹⁵ VIKTOR NOZADZE. *For the Restoration of Georgia. The struggle for Meskheta*. Tbilisi 1989, pp. 48–49 (in Georgian).

- ¹⁶ NAG, 1836-1-412, pp. 10, 30.
- ¹⁷ KVINITADZE, *Moi vospominanija v gody nezavisimosti Gruzii*, s. 32, 77.
- ¹⁸ Valerian Tevzadze (1894–1985) – Colonel. During the First World War he served in the Russian army, since 1918 – in the Georgian army. After Sovietization of Georgia emigrated to the West and, together with a group of Georgian officers, joined the Polish army. In 1939, in the battles for Warsaw, he commanded the northern defensive sector of the city. Later he was the chief of staff of the 7th Infantry Division of the Army Krajowa. After the Second World War, he lived in Poland under an alien name. His memoirs – “The Road Travelled” – Valerian Tevzadze wrote in Polish. The Georgian translation of his memoirs – performed by his friend Tevzadze, former Georgian junker and Polish officer Nikoloz Matikashvili – was first published in Paris in 1988.
- ¹⁹ TEVZADZE, Notes of a Georgian officer, pp. 25–26.
- ²⁰ Collection of legal acts of the Georgian Democratic Republic, 1918–1921. Tbilisi 1990, pp. 56–58 (in Georgian).
- ²¹ NAG, 1861-1-243, pp. 1–3.
- ²² Alexandre Zakariadze (1884–1957) – General (1919). He graduated from the Tiflis Infantry School (1903). Member of the Russian–Japanese and First World Wars. In 1918–1921 he served in the Georgian army. One of the organizers of the armed forces of the Republic, chief of the general staff (1919–1921). In the years 1922–1939. served in the Polish army. Division General (1927). Participated in the Polish–German war of 1939. Alexandre Zakariadze – author of memoirs: “Democratic Republic of Georgia – 1917–1921”. He died and was buried in France.
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- ²⁴ MAZNIASHVILI, *Memoirs, 1917–1927*, pp. 148–149.
- ²⁵ Collection of legal acts of the Georgian Democratic Republic, pp. 16–17.
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- ⁴⁹ Alexandre Sulkhanišvili (1895–1990) – a military leader, an active participant in the national liberation movement in Georgia. In 1921, he served in the Guards cavalry. During 1922–1924 – in the insurgency and partisan movement as part of the group of Colonel Kayhosro Cholokashvili, with whom he went abroad after the defeat of the anti-Soviet uprising in 1924. He lived in France, then in the USA. Shortly before his death he returned to his homeland. Alexander Sulkhanišvili is the author of memories of the events in Georgia in 1921–1924.
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KOPSAVILKUMS

Pēc 1917. gada apvērsuma Petrogradā sākās Aizkaukāza atdališanās no Krievijas, process noslēdzās 1918. gada aprīlī ar neatkarīgās Aizkaukāza Federatīvās Republikas nodibināšanu. Tomēr jau maija beigās Aizkaukāza Federācija sadalījās, izveidojot suverēnās republikas – Gruzijas, Azerbaidžānas un Armēnijas Republiku. Gruzijā pie varas nāca Gruzijas Sociāldemokrātiskā partija, kas bija organizatoriski atšķēlusies no Krievijas meņševikiem.

Šajā sarežģītajā laika posmā, kas sakrita ar Pirmā pasaules kara noslēgumu, viens no Gruzijas galvenajiem uzdevumiem bija izveidot nacionālo armiju. Tāpēc jau 1918. gada vasarā parlaments pieņēma pirmos likumdošanas aktus par karaklausību, militāro dienestu, militāro pārvaldi, speciālu likumu par regulārās armijas izveidošanu u. c.

Paralēli regulārā karaspēka veidošanai Gruzijas sociāldemokrātiskā valdība uz īpaša likuma pamata sāka izvērst savas partijas bruņotos formējumus – Tautas gvardi, kas pārvērtās par otru valsts militāro struktūru ar savu artilēriju, bruņuvilcieniem, inženieru spēkiem u. tml.

Atsevišķas Tautas gvardes pastāvēšana paralēli armijai radīja grūtības bruņotajiem spēkiem; gvarde nebija pakļauta Kara ministrijai, bet tās sadarbības jautājumi ar regulāro armiju kara laikā nebija pietiekami noregulēti. Bez tam tika uzskatīts, ka valdība lielāku uzmanību velta tieši gvardei. Kopumā valdošās sociāldemokrātiskās partijas vadība

neuzticīgi izturējās pret kadru virsniekiem, kuru Gruzijā bija pietiekami daudz (īpaši muižnieku izcelsmes), jo viņu vairākums neatbalstīja marksistisko ideoloģiju. Tieši tādēļ daudzi pieredzējuši speciālisti netika iesaistīti nacionālās armijas celtniecībā. Tomēr bruņotie spēki tika izveidoti, kaut arī finanšu trūkuma un citu iemeslu dēļ militārās celtniecības programma netika īstenota pilnībā.

1921. gadā regulārajā armijā bija trīs kājnieku un viena kavalērijas brigāde, pieci vieglās un viens smagās artilērijas divizionis, militāri tehniskās daļas u. c. Bez tam Kara ministrijas pakļautībā bija robežapsardzes spēki un neliela jūras kara flote. Tautas gvardē ietilpa viens pilnvērtīgi nokomplektēts bataljons un 23 rezerves bataljoni, kas bija veidoti pēc teritoriālā principa. Gvardes kavalērija ietvēra jātnieku pulku, artilērija – brigādi no trim artilērijas divizioniem. Virsnieku un apakšvirsnieku sagatavošanai darbojās militārās mācību iestādes.

Gruzijas bruņotie spēki no 1918. līdz 1920. gadam īstenoja karadarbību Abhāzijas, Melnās jūras piekrastes ziemeļaustrumu daļā, Dienvidgruzijas, Dienvidosētijas teritorijā, uz robežas ar Armēniju un Azerbaidžānu un citviet. Tomēr visnopietnākais pārbaudījums, ko Gruzijas armija neizturēja, bija karš ar padomju Krieviju 1921. gadā. Rakstā apskatīta šī kara priekšvēsture, norise un rezultāti, kas noveda pie Pirmās Gruzijas Republikas krišanas.