Communicating Georgia

Georgia's information campaign in the 2008 war with Russia

Artur Jugaste

Advisor: Prof. Kristina Riegert

A Master's Thesis presented to the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication

Stockholm University

2011-05-30
Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. 2
1. Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 3
2. Background .......................................................................................................................................... 5
  2.1. The war in South Ossetia .................................................................................................................. 6
  2.2. The PR war in the media .................................................................................................................... 8
  2.3. U.S. foreign policy towards Georgia .................................................................................................. 9
3. Literature review ................................................................................................................................... 12
  3.1. A competition for symbolic power ...................................................................................................... 12
  3.2. Governments managing foreign media .............................................................................................. 14
  3.3. Journalists in foreign conflicts .......................................................................................................... 15
  3.4. Choosing a framework for this study .................................................................................................. 17
  3.5. Information and Influence Campaigns .............................................................................................. 19
  3.5. Research questions and hypotheses ................................................................................................. 20
4. Method and material ............................................................................................................................ 22
  4.1. Interviews ......................................................................................................................................... 22
  4.2. Framing analysis ................................................................................................................................ 24
    4.2.1. Extracting frames from PR texts .................................................................................................... 25
    4.2.2. Content analysis of news articles .................................................................................................. 27
5. Mapping Georgia's media management techniques ......................................................................... 29
  5.1. PR prior to the 2008 war .................................................................................................................... 29
  5.2. PR during the war ............................................................................................................................. 30
  5.3. Main messages - telling Georgia's story ............................................................................................ 33
  5.4. Results ............................................................................................................................................ 34
  5.5. The truth and the PR war .................................................................................................................. 36
  5.6. Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................... 37
6. Results of the framing analysis .......................................................................................................... 39
  6.1. PR frames – war vs peacekeeping .................................................................................................... 39
    6.1.1. What is the problem and who is responsible? .............................................................................. 40
    6.1.2. Causal implications ....................................................................................................................... 42
    6.1.3. What should be done? ................................................................................................................... 44
  6.2. Media frames – support to Georgia's framing ............................................................................... 45
    6.2.1. What is the problem and who is responsible? .............................................................................. 45
    6.2.2. Causal implications in newspaper articles ................................................................................. 48
    6.2.3. What should be done? ................................................................................................................... 50
    6.2.4. Use of sources ................................................................................................................................ 51
  6.3. Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................... 52
7. Discussion ........................................................................................................................................... 53
  7.1. U.S. foreign policy and the war coverage in the press ...................................................................... 53
  7.2. The importance of Georgia's pre-war campaign .............................................................................. 55
  7.3. Media's needs turned to Georgia's advantage .................................................................................. 57
8. Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 59
Bibliography ............................................................................................................................................ 61
Appendix 1 – Coding scheme ................................................................................................................ 67
Appendix 2 – Origins of coding categories ............................................................................................ 69
Appendix 3 – Article list ........................................................................................................................ 71
Appendix 4 – Russian PR in the South Ossetia war .............................................................................. 74
Abstract

During the 2008 South Ossetia war, Georgia and Russia fought what the English-language media called "a public relations war". This was an interesting example of modern information warfare where governments allied with public relations agencies battled for symbolic power on the media field.

This study investigates the information campaign that the Georgian government launched to promote their framing of the conflict in the English-language media. First-hand information about the campaign strategies and techniques is gathered by interviewing the people who worked as PR consultants for the Georgian government during the war in 2008. The eventual PR output is mapped and press release texts are compared with articles from The New York Times and The Washington Post in a framing analysis.

The results indicate that Georgia won the PR war as the coverage in the U.S. newspapers clearly supported Georgia’s framing. This outcome is attributed to the Georgian side’s media management activities that skillfully anticipated the needs of the foreign correspondents covering the conflict.

However, the study points out that the supportive coverage was not the result of Georgia’s information campaign only. Other factors have to be taken into account, most notably the U.S. administration's strong backing of the Georgian leadership that shaped the tone of the articles written about the war.

Future research should look at how the war was covered in countries with less explicit political support for Georgia, as well as investigate the PR efforts on the Russian side during and after the war.
"Indeed, if the Georgian Army had been as aggressive as its public relations campaign then the war for South Ossetia might have ended very differently."

Tony Halpin and Roger Boyes in The Times on 13 August 2008 (Halpin & Boyes 2008)

1. Introduction

In August 2008 Georgia and Russia fought a war that has been dubbed "the little war that shook the world" (Asmus 2010). The war lasted formally only five days and the scale of the action may be considered small in terms of modern warfare, but the implications of what happened were much larger. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, Russia used military force against a sovereign neighbour state. What is more, experts concluded that by taking its tanks across the Georgian border, Russia had "mounted a direct challenge to European security" (Cornell et al. 2008, p.28).

Anyone following how the war was covered in the American and the British press could notice that a media critical perspective emerged in the public discourse. Journalists in the English-language news media noted on several occasions that a "media war" or a "PR war" was fought between Georgia and Russia. An interesting aspect of this was the tendency by the journalists to claim that Georgia won the PR war. Indeed, there seems to be widespread consensus on Georgia being a winner of the PR war. The defeat was acknowledged by Russia's military thinkers and even Russia's Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has been reported to have congratulated "the organizers of the Western propaganda machine" shortly after the war (Goble 2009, p.189).

Besides a few anecdotal descriptions in the press has no one explained what was behind Georgia’s success in the PR war. Nor have there been critical analyses asking if the claim that Georgia won the PR war is actually true. What evidence is there to support it?

Some have written that as a result of Georgia’s PR the world media painted a picture of the war as "Big bad Russia against plucky little Georgia" (Traynor 2008). If so, what did the Georgians do to achieve this much acclaimed success? What was the "slick operation" (Halpin & Boyes 2008) that Georgia’s PR advisors reportedly launched, like?

These are the questions that this thesis will seek to answer.

The study draws on a research agenda proposed by the media and war researcher Piers Robinson who suggests studying modern government PR in two steps. First, the government PR strategies and output (such as press releases, speeches, media briefs etc) should be mapped. Second, the PR output should be compared with the eventual media coverage in a framing analysis (2004, pp.105-106).

The strength of Robinson’s proposal lies in the combination of the two focuses. So far, authors have put...
down government PR techniques and others have looked at the eventual result of such techniques by studying the media coverage of wars. However, very few have created a direct link between the two by examining the PR techniques and the eventual media coverage within a single case study. This thesis intends to narrow that research gap with a detailed case study of PR techniques in a very recent war.

Converting Robinson’s agenda to the study of Georgia's PR in the 2008 war, this study has two parts. First, Georgia’s wartime PR, the strategies and actions are described on the basis of interviews with people involved in the PR work in 2008. In the second part of the study, an attempt is made to evaluate the impact of Georgia’s information campaign on one of its main targets – the U.S. media. Georgia’s press releases from August 2008 are compared with the war coverage in The New York Times and The Washington Post in a framing analysis.

Together, the two-step analysis constitutes a case study of the Georgian government's information campaign in the 2008 war that will contribute to the knowledge about modern media management techniques.
2. Background

An important milestone in the history of modern Georgia is the year 2004 when the current president Mikheil Saakashvili came to power with the Rose Revolution. The revolution marked not only a change in Georgia’s president’s office, but a generational shift in the entire political top and a fresh start for the country’s evolution as a democracy. Georgia broke with its past, during which the country had been described as being "in turmoil unceasingly since the collapse of the Soviet Union" (C. Robinson 2002).

However, Mikheil Saakashvili’s new government inherited an environment of corruption, criminality and poverty. The state institutions were weak and underfunded, and the central government had no control over a significant part of the country’s territory (De Waal 2010, p.189; Nilsson 2009, p.89).

President Saakashvili set out plans to tackle all these problems. He promised to build a stronger state, liberalize the economy and reduce corruption in the country. He would also continue Georgia’s orientation towards the West and try to achieve its ambitions to become a member of NATO and the EU.

To achieve all of this, the emphasis was put on political reforms, but also on public relations and lobbying. As Georgia was adopting the Western ways, so was it adopting Western style reputation management. Saakashvili has been described as a politician with a penchant for public relations stunts and flamboyant gestures (De Waal 2010, p.195; 201). He is known for making his TV performances in front of a Georgian and an EU flag (Georgia is not a EU member), underlining Georgia’s European identity.

One of the ways how the Georgian government used public relations to achieve its political goals was by drawing international attention to the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. By embarking on "a campaign to publicize the existence of those conflicts", the government hoped to mobilize the EU to participate in the conflict resolution process (Nilsson 2009, p.92).

Georgia’s reputation in the West became extremely important for its leadership. It has been even written that Georgia’s primary asset in its relations with the West was its image as a rapidly democratizing country and a success story of Western engagement in the region (Nilsson 2009, p.100).

However, in November 2007, President Saakashvili’s international image received a considerable blow when his government sent the police to crack down on opposition protesters. Saakashvili then declared early presidential elections.

It was then Saakashvili hired a Brussels-based PR agency Aspect Consulting to coordinate international public relations. It was said publicly that the agency was to help the Georgian state "manage increased interest from the media following the elections" (O’Connor 2008). However, the agency was also to launch a proactive campaign to restore Georgia’s reputation after the 2007 protests. The main task was to ensure that Georgia would be seen in the West as a worthy candidate for NATO membership.
This is nicely summed up in a presentation file produced by Aspect Consulting in the beginning of 2008. Titled "Communicating Georgia", the presentation describes the strategy for lifting Georgia's image in the eyes of its European partners. The presentation ends with a definition of the aim. Under the title "Our ultimate objective" is a picture with Georgia’s president Mikheil Saakashvili shaking hands with NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. A text balloon above Scheffer's head reads "Welcome to the club!", indicating that the objective has been met (Aspect Consulting 2008).

By the summer of 2008 the Georgian government together with its PR agency had managed to achieve notable results. Among those were a number of supportive articles in prestigious Western newspapers. The country was making progress on the diplomatic front as well: Western leaders ensured Georgia would soon be a NATO member.

However, the Georgian government's cooperation with Aspect Consulting took an entirely new turn when on 7 August 2008, war broke out in South Ossetia.

### 2.1. The war in South Ossetia

The origins and the course of the war have been highly contested by the Georgian and the Russian sides. According to Georgia, the war was a Russian invasion that was planned in advance. Russia invaded Georgia in order to annex the two breakaway regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and thereby destabilize the sovereign state of Georgia (Saakashvili 2008b). Georgians stress that the Russians already invaded when the Georgian military launched a defence operation (Tagliavini 2009c, p.187).

Russia's version is that the war broke out as Georgia attacked Ossetians and the Russian peacekeepers (Tagliavini 2009b, p.188). The Russians saw the conflict as an attempt by the aggressive government of Georgia to solve the conflicts with by force. Georgia's government resorted to violence and launched a military operation against the capital of South Ossetia (Medvedev 2008). Russians claim that the Georgians were committing genocide against the South Ossetians and killing Russian peacekeepers, thereby prompting Russia to intervene to protect them (Tagliavini 2009b, p.188).

In September 2009 an independent assessment to the origins of the war was presented by the EU's fact-finding mission in the so-called Tagliavini report. According to the report, Georgia sparked off the conflict by attacking the capital of breakaway South Ossetia. It was stated, however, that an explanation of the war has to take into account the run-up to the war: the years of provocations, mutual accusations, threats and violence that preceded (Tagliavini 2009b, p.31).

The report blamed Russia for creating tensions and provoking the Georgians for years leading up to the start of full-scale hostilities. It was stressed throughout the report that both sides bear blame, saying "there is no

---

2 Russia’s foreign minister Sergey Lavrov referred to Georgia’s government as a "criminal regime" (Washington Post 20.08.2008a – a reference to the article list in Appendix 3).
way to assign overall responsibility to the conflict to both sides alone" (2009b, p.32).

Regarding the war crimes the report said that there is no evidence of genocide against Ossetians, but that ethnic cleansing against Georgians had been evidenced (Tagliavini 2009b, p.430).

As a result, "everybody has lost" in the conflict, the report's author Heidi Tagliavini later wrote in an article (Tagliavini 2009a).

However, Western experts have stressed the role of Russian policy in provoking the conflict and that Russia was deliberately taking steps that would eventually lead to a war (Lucas 2008, p.145; Smith 2009, p.123). Former U.S. diplomat and a political analyst Ronald Asmus has provided what many consider the best account of the actions the Georgian government and its Western allies before and during the war. His conclusion is that "the war in South Ossetia is inconceivable without the prehistory of Russian pressure, violations of Georgian sovereignty, provocations and threats, all of which had left the Georgian leadership very much on edge." (Asmus 2010, p.37).

Edward Lucas, editor of The Economist and an expert on Russian foreign policy, also sees the build-up to the South Ossetia war as a line of Russian provocations, the aim of which was to test if and how the West would react, and how far Russia could go. Seeing that there were no direct reactions it concluded that there are no limits. This was seen as an opportunity to act (Lucas 2008, p.145).

Russia had three motivations to act this way. First, it saw the declaration of Kosovo's independence in spring 2008 as pure ignorance of its interests and the war in Georgia was meant as "payback time" for that ignorance (Talbott 2008; De Waal 2010, p.222).

Second, the war was as a show of force by Russia, meant to send a signal to the West that Russia is a global power that will defend its interests. In that sense, the aggression was not directed only at Georgia but at the West as well. It was meant as a sign that Russia will fight back "Western enroachment on its boarders" (Asmus 2010, p.218).

Third, Russia launched the war campaign to block Georgia's ambitions to join the EU and NATO and to reassert Georgia's belonging to the Russian sphere of influence (Asmus 2010, p.216; De Waal 2010, p.221). While joining the EU and NATO was clearly not on the immediate agenda, NATO had promised that Georgia will soon get a Membership Action Plan – a step that was seen as a "casus belli" in Moscow (Talbott 2008).

The bottom line is that the August war was not just a regional conflict over the small South Ossetia, but the war was seen as the result of a much wider geopolitical struggle between Russia and the West. A struggle, the outcome of which would redefine power relations on Europe's borders. Given this great symbolic importance that was attributed to the conflict, it is understandable why the media became one of the battlefields.
2.2. The PR war in the media

The conflict was widely covered by the international media from 8 August but The Times was the first to write about a PR war between Georgia and Russia on 13 August. The newspaper ran an article titled "Georgia loses the fight with Russia, but manages to win the PR war". The story described how the Georgians had launched "a slick operation" to keep the journalists updated with events and stated that the Russians had largely neglected the international media (Halpin & Boyes 2008).

Soon after that the argument that Georgia won the PR war was made by journalists in The Guardian (Traynor 2008; Wilby 2008) and The New York Times (Clifford J. Levy 2008).

The PR war and the involvement of public relations agencies became a media topic in itself. For example, the BBC made a radio documentary about "PR battle" (Rodgers 2008) and the Swedish tabloid Aftonbladet introduced the Georgian PR-consultant Patrick Worms as "The man who leads the war against Russia" (Hansson & Carlsson 2008).

The journalists of the Guardian painted the most vivid picture of the PR war. They wrote that there was a "vacuum" in the media regarding Georgia in August 2008, because reporters were on holiday and nobody understood what was going on (Wilby 2008). Georgia's "Brussels-based PR men" took advantage of the situation by selling to the media the story of plucky little Georgia being attacked by big bad Russia, which the media overtook without much criticism (Traynor 2008).

Claims that Georgia won the PR war have been made outside the media as well. The Russia analyst Paul Goble has written that Georgia "came out better in the information war" (Goble 2009, p.191), describing Russia's actions as "a fierce propaganda campaign" that backfired on them (Ibid, p.188)\(^3\).

Furthermore, even the Russians themselves initially admitted losing the PR war. Shortly after the war Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin "congratulated" the organizers of what he called the Western propaganda machine. "It is remarkable work! But the results are poor. And they always will be because this work is dishonest and amoral," Putin has been reported to have said (Ibid, p.189).

In addition to these subjective assessments, there have been some empirical studies of the media coverage of the Georgia-Russia war.

Cordula Nitsch and Dennis Lichtenstein from the German Augsburg University studied the coverage of the war in eight European and Russian newspapers. Their study produced a result that contradicts the claim that Georgia won the PR war. Counting the sources in each article they found that Russian sources were cited more frequently than Georgian ones. This was so in both, Russian and European media.

They also looked at how the news media was framing the war and they observed that all media interpreted

\(^3\) See Appendix 4 for an overview of Russian PR during the war.
the war mainly through what Nitsch and Lichtenstein named the "New World Order" frame. This referred to
the difficult situation that the new world political order has posed, where "international alliances are in flux
and changes in the former relationships are to be expected" (Nitsch & Lichtenstein). As this frame was
neither pro-Georgian nor anti-Russian, this finding does not support the claim that the media coverage was
predominantly against Russia.

Another study compared the war coverage in ten newspapers from the U.S., Europe, Russia and Georgia
with the official narratives of the Georgian and Russian leaders (Heinrich & Tanaev 2009). The results
showed that the Western media generally supported the Georgian argument with the exception of single
newspapers like the Guardian being critical towards Georgia. This finding seems to support the view that
the media was more eager to accept the Georgian version of events. However, there are some unclarities in
the presentation of data in this study, and the sample of articles is small (considering the large number of
media outlets that are analysed), which raises doubts about the validity of the results.

Olga Baysha's framing study of The New York Times showed that the paper mainly framed Russia's actions
as unacceptable but, at the same time, it was widely using a cooperation frame that Baysha summarized as
"Russia is a difficult but valuable partner" (Baysha 2010). According to Heinrich and Tanaev the NYT started
out as pro-Georgian but expressed criticism of its leadership later when the war was over but its cause was
being analysed (Heinrich & Tanaev 2009).

2.3. U.S. foreign policy towards Georgia

The U.S. has been a strong supporter of Georgia's democratization and reforms, investing heavily both

The U.S. government states that it supports Georgia in its "ongoing transition to a free, prosperous, market-
oriented democracy firmly anchored in the Euro-Atlantic community". For this, the U.S. government is
spending considerable aid money. Since 1991 it has provided over $3 billion in assistance to Georgia,
including a $1 billion post-conflict assistance package in the aftermath of the 2008 conflict (U.S. Department
of State 2011). This has made Georgia into one of the largest per capita recipients of U.S. aid money (De
Waal 2010, p.3).

The Bush administration has been described as taking a special interest in the South Caucasus region, and
as being a strong supporter of Georgia. Vice President Dick Cheney called Georgians "America's best
friends." (De Waal 2010, p.3). President Bush himself was the subject of a culmination in U.S.-Georgia
relations when he visited Georgia in May 2005 and held a speech on the Freedom Square in the capital
Tbilisi, praising Georgians for their reforms (Ibid).

With years Georgia built a broad base of support in Washington and when the war broke out in August
2008, the U.S. administration was unanimous in its backing of the Georgian side. A support for Georgia's sovereignty and a condemnation of Russia's actions were repeating themes in their public statements.

On Friday, August 8 when the war had broken up The United States State Department issued a press release saying "We deplore today's Russian attacks by strategic bombers and missiles, which are threatening civilian lives." (NYT 09.08.2008)

State Secretary Condoleezza Rice called an immediate ceasefire and called on Russian forces to cease attacks and withdraw forces from Georgia. She stated U.S. support for Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity – a theme that would be repeated in all following U.S. statements (The White House 2008b).

On August 9 the White House announced that president Bush was deeply concerned about the situation in Georgia. The statement called for both sides to refrain from further action (The White House 2008a).

But on August 11 when Russian troops were reported to be moving towards Georgia's capital Tbilisi, president Bush was already much tougher, saying that Russia was brutally escalating the conflict. Bush made his toughest remark by condemning what he saw as Russia's aim:

*It now appears that an effort may be underway to depose Georgia's duly elected government. Russia has invaded a sovereign neighboring state and threatens a democratic government elected by its people. Such an action is unacceptable in the 21st century.*

He also sent a clear warning signal to Russia saying that its leadership was jeopardizing its relations with the United States and Europe (The White House 2008b).

On the next day, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice repeated the demand that the Russians stop military actions. She expressed her support to Georgia by saying that "the United States stands for the territorial integrity of Georgia" (The White House 2008c). She repeated this message in an interview with the TV channel ABC (The White House 2008d).

In yet another statement on the August 13 President Bush urged Russia to stop military action and announced that Condoleezza Rice would travel to France to meet President Sarkozy and then to Tbilisi "to personally convey America's unwavering support for Georgia's democratic government". The President also announced that a humanitarian mission would be sent to Georgia.

Bush said that this was part of a U.S. effort "to rally the free world in the defense of a free Georgia" (The White House 2008c).

The statement also repeated a threat, saying that Russia was putting at risk its aspirations to "integrate into the diplomatic, political, economic, and security structures of the 21st century" (Ibid).

On the August 15 president Bush delivered a longer statement, talking about Georgia as a courageous
young democracy that wants to integrate with the West. Bush evoked memories of the Cold War, implying that Russia was preventing its smaller neighbour from fulfilling its aspirations. "The Cold War is over" Bush said and added, "Bullying and intimidation are not acceptable ways to conduct foreign policy in the 21st century" (The White House 2008c).

On August 16 Bush repeated his demand that Russia withdrew its forces (The White House 2008d).

In his last statements issued in August 2008 (issued on August 25 and 26) President Bush condemned Russia's decision to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (The White House 2008b; The White House 2008c).

It follows from the statements that the Bush administration was putting out a clear message during and immediately after the war: it condemned Russia's actions and called it to withdraw forces; it stated U.S. support to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity; and it warned Russia that its actions were damaging its relationship with the U.S.

What is more, several U.S. officials also travelled to Georgia to convey their support in person. State Secretary Condoleezza Rice was the first to fly to Tbilisi to meet president Saakashvili, but later Vice President Dick Cheney, Senator Joseph R. Biden Jr. (who was to become Obama's vice presidential running mate) and John McCain's wife Cindy McCain made the trip as well (Eggen 2008). The Washington Post noted that "Georgia has quickly become a favorite destination for U.S. politicians" (Ibid).

It should be also mentioned that for a short time the Georgia conflict became an issue in the U.S. presidential campaign. John McCain and Barack Obama used the opportunity to demonstrate their style of approaching foreign affairs. When the war broke out, John McCain quickly made a tough statement demanding Russia to cease military operations, while Barack Obama showed a more careful line and asked both Russia and Georgia to show restraint (Bumiller 2008). However, as the war continued Obama took a tougher stand as well and eventually both candidates clearly condemned Russia's actions (Shear & MacGillis 2008). It is not irrelevant here that both McCain's and Obama's foreign policy advisers had lobbied for Georgia in Washington (Cooper et al. 2008; Bumiller 2008).
3. Literature review

3.1. A competition for symbolic power

States, like any other social agents, compete for power. One part of the competition is a struggle for physical power, such as military force or economic superiority. But there is also a struggle for non-material factors like trust and respect – things that constitute "symbolic power" (Bourdieu 1991).

Symbolic power is "a power of constructing reality" (1991, p.166). The one with the symbolic power (or the greatest amount of it) controls the social reality and defines the symbols that are the basis of our common understanding of the world. It is a power of "making people see and believe" (1991, p.170).

What is at stake in the states' fight for symbolic power is their right to impose a definition of the world that is best suited to their interests (1991, p.167).

The media is one field where this struggle to maximise the symbolic power takes place. Symbolic power is expressed through media by its ability to define situations and frame “reality” (McQuail 2010, pp.462-463).

In the media field, government officials usually have the upper hand in the struggle for symbolic power because they are in a prioritised position to define the news. It has been widely documented how the media rely on governmental sources and thereby let themselves be guided by the views of the political elite, instead of being driven by general public opinion. This is especially so in the foreign policy and national security contexts, where research has shown that the mainstream media tend to rely heavily on high government officials to frame the news (Lawrence 2010).

This was evident in Daniel C. Hallin's (1986) study of how the U.S. press covered the Vietnam War. Hallin showed that, contrary to the widely held belief that the media caused the Americans to lose the Vietnam War, the coverage in the U.S. press mostly supported the administration's war policy and the U.S. involvement was not questioned initially. The media reflected the government’s version of events and only when dissent appeared in the administration itself, did the media start asking if the war was worth the effort.

Hallin explained this by the nature of the journalism practice in the U.S.. The routines and assumptions that the practice is based on, such as objectivity and balance, ensured that the journalists frequently relied on governmental sources for information in their stories. Although there was criticism in the news, this was downplayed for being "subjective" (Hallin 1986, p.70).

According to Lance Bennett, the U.S. media's relationship to the government is characterised by "indexing", which means that news content follows the range of debate among official sources. Journalists consider it as their job to objectively cover what the leadership is saying, not criticise it or cover it from their own
subjective viewpoint. This means that minority viewpoints and alternative voices often get less attention. This leads to a situation where "the mainstream news generally stays within the sphere of official consensus and conflict displayed in the public statements of the key government officials" (Bennett et al. 2007:49 cited in McQuail 2010, p.243).

Government officials also play an important role in defining what have been called the national news values. These reflect the fact that newsworthiness is defined by the geographical, cultural and political proximity of a story to the audience in question (Riegert 2010, p.202). As these factors are different for every nation, the understanding of what counts as important news varies from country to country.

News about foreign wars and conflicts have been shown to depend especially on the country's foreign policy orientation (Riegert 1998). Foreign policy orientation is a combination of factors that define a country's role on the international arena: its ideological assumptions about the world, its national interests and goals, the official stances of its government, and historical relationships with particular regions (1998, p.14). The point for the media here is that the importance of a foreign news issue is determined by whether it is relevant to these foreign policy factors. As Riegert explains, "The closer a conflict is – geographically, politically, and culturally – and the more engaged the foreign policy elite is, the more attention and resources are given to the story" (Riegert 2010, p.205).

However, there are claims that the media's independence has grown and that the politicians no longer have a decision making autonomy or an autonomy to define the news (Carruthers 2000, p.198). The globalisation of the news media and especially the emergence of international media corporations brought forth channels like the CNN and BBC World who became powerful agenda setters. They are seen to have an impact on foreign policy issues, especially when it comes to governments' decisions about getting involved in a foreign crisis or military campaign. With their extensive newscovering capabilities, global news channels constantly report about wars and conflicts in various parts of the world. The "do something!" frame that these reports often carry puts pressure on governments to take action in response to the crisis.

When governments do respond to a highly mediatized crisis, this has been taken as proof of the international media's agenda-setting function – the "CNN effect" (Ibid.)

What this means is that, while domestically, governments are provided with the symbolic power that gives them considerable control over the political news agenda, then internationally they are in a tough competition for symbolic power together with other countries, international organisations and interest groups.

In a war situation, the struggle for media attention and support can be especially intense as the media have become to play a central role in warfare. Most contemporary wars receive massive media coverage, turning the media into the stage where people experience war (Webster 2003, p.64). Politicians need the public's
support for the war and they need wars to be seen as justified. For this the public is kept up to date with the war events via media, in other words, people have to participate in wars as spectators (Tumber & Webster 2006, p.165). Military thinkers have understood that this attention can be exploited – information and media coverage can be turned into a weapon. Therefore, the media’s role has become increasingly important in warfare and we cannot understand the conduct of war without considering the media’s role in it (Hoskins & O’Loughlin 2010, p.4; Matheson & Allan 2009, p.16).

In their efforts to get the support of the international media and the foreign publics, governments often turn to professional public relations agencies for help.

3.2. Governments managing foreign media

The issue of governments hiring PR firms to represent their interests to foreign audiences is not widely covered in social science literature. The subject would certainly deserve more attention considering the important role that PR firms play. For example, Jarol Manheim (1994) has described that American PR and lobbying firms are central in carrying out the strategic political communication of foreign governments. In 1994 there were hundreds of firms providing U.S.-directed public affairs services to international clients and this was a rapidly growing industry (1994, p.136).

Research has also shown that the efficacy of the work of PR firms can be very high. In general, much of the materials PR firms produce do get used by editorial offices. For example, Barbara Baerns studied political reporting in a German newspaper and found that it was mostly based on press releases and press conferences (1987, in McQuail 2010, p.325).

More specifically, the impact of PR companies on a country’s reputation in foreign media was shown by Manheim and Albritton (1984), who did a study of six nations that paid for public information campaigns in the U.S. in the 1970s. They found that the countries' image in the U.S. media improved soon after their respective governments had signed a contract with a U.S. public relations firm. By this they proved that public relations campaigns were having an influence on the country’s reputation in foreign media. However, the researchers’ focus was on the media coverage only and their study did not explain what the agencies did to achieve this influence.

Some accounts of the techniques that American PR agencies use when working for foreign governments have been provided in relation to the Gulf War and the Kosovo War. The Gulf War provided one of the most well-known cases where a PR agency was involved in persuading the U.S. government for a military intervention. The international PR giant Hill and Knowlton helped the Kuwaitis to generate support among the U.S. publics for taking military action against the Iraqi invasion. This was done by training Kuwaitis to make media appearances, drafting speeches, scheduling speaking tours, monitoring and analysing
legislative initiatives, distributing video and other materials, and tracking public opinion (Manheim 1994, p.141). Hill and Knowlton even had a TV crew in Saudi Arabia to produce its own video and send it to news services and networks (Ibid).

In addition to these basic PR tools, the firm was also involved in some more controversial activities such as feeding the media with a story of Iraqi soldiers killing newborn babies. It was strongly questioned whether this story was true (Ibid).

In the Kosovo War, it has been reported that PR firms were used by the Serbs, the Croatians, the Bosnians and the Kosovo Albanians prior to the war to get the international opinion to support their side and to prepare for a possible military intervention (Riegert 2003, p.20). Notably the role of the American consultancy Ruder Finn, who worked for the Croatian government, has been described. Ruder Finn used the following actions:

- setting up a crisis communication center in contact with the media
- media appearance coaching of leaders
- sending fax updates on developments in Bosnia-Herzegovina to media contacts and others
- writing letters to and organising contact with world leaders
- placing articles on in the editorial pages

It can be concluded that public relations agencies have been shown to have an ability to improve a country's reputation in the foreign media, but a little is known about the ways how they achieve this impact. From the wartime communication cases cited above it can at least be concluded that there is a focus on proactivity – anticipating the media’s needs and interests by feeding them with information in the form of written statements, briefings, press conferences and so on.

3.3. Journalists in foreign conflicts

Having pointed out some of the tools and techniques that governments use to influence coverage in foreign media, it is necessary to describe the conditions in which foreign news are usually produced.

There is a number of factors that influence journalists who cover foreign events. First, the work of a journalist is seen to reflect the national journalist culture that he or she belongs to. The journalist culture is defined by how the media work in a particular national and political context. The way how the journalists interpret their role in that context has certain consequences for the norms and practices that the media apply (Riegert 1998, pp.50-51).

A difference is made between the Anglo-Saxon and the continental European journalist culture. In the Aglo-
Saxon culture the journalist is seen more as a detached mediator who disseminates information quickly and impartially. The notion that a journalist has to be objective, balanced and impartial in his or her work is held in high regard. Whereas in the Continental culture the journalist's role is seen more subjective, as an interpretator or investigator who can be politically engaged in the topics he or she covers (Riegert 1998, p.55; Riegert 2010, p.204).

The doctrine of the U.S. press, therefore, is that of a "detached journalism", although this is not always so. For example, it has been noted how the September 11 events produced more emotional journalistic expressions from the U.S. journalists than the objectivity ideal would allow. As the nation was going through a trauma after the terrorist attacks a "journalism of attachment" emerged and the journalist’s role as an active interpreter and an emotionally engaged storyteller became recognized (Tumber & Prentoulis 2003, pp.227-228). This means that the objectivity ideal sometimes becomes ambiguous for American reporters as well.

Second, journalists covering foreign affairs are influenced by institutional constraints. This is apparent in how media globalisation has had an effect on the media industry and its ability to cover foreign affairs. Riegert (2010) notes that economic pressures have made it more difficult for news organisations to produce quality journalism about what happens in the world. One reason is that foreign correspondent networks have been drastically reduced. "Typical for many news organisations today is the use of a combination of rewritten news agency material, free-lance journalists and "parachuting" correspondents, who fly off to different hot spots at a moment's notice" (2010, p.201). She adds that this trend is especially visible in the U.S.

Third, one has to take into account the extremely tough environment that foreign correspondents are put into in cases of military conflict. They have to cope with technical and transport problems, and not the least with issues concerning their own safety – war correspondents and media personnel are often among the casualties of war (Tumber & Prentoulis 2003, p.219).

Their work is further complicated by the fact that there are often limitations imposed on the media. It is common that when a violent conflict breaks out, governments try to control information by limiting the journalists’ freedom of movement or by direct censorship of what they write (Riegert 1998, p.48).

Moreover, as news organisations are "parachuting" correspondents to war zones – sending a reporter to a country only when a crisis occurs – reporters have to cope with a lack of local knowledge. As they land in a conflict region in the middle of action they have little background knowledge, no network of local contacts, and they are most likely to be confronted with language problems. This makes it difficult for them to get access to important information and judge the reliability of sources in a foreign country (Ibid.). The "parachuting" correspondents themselves describe their life as "constant work, confusion, and frustration"
Fourth, the work of journalists is shaped by certain reporting routines and working methods that they follow. When journalists are covering a foreign conflict, they know their editors back home expect them to file reports quickly. Therefore they have little time to make themselves familiar with the background and the details of a situation. This makes it likely for them to interpret events according to earlier preconceptions. As there are always space limitations as well, the journalist has to consider what the readers know of the subject, so that the story "makes sense". The result is that journalists tend to focus on familiar frames and stereotypes which conform to what the editor and audience expects (Riegert 1998, p.47).

3.4. Choosing a framework for this study

In the public discussion the Georgian information campaign in the 2008 war has been referred to as public relations (see Wilby 2008; Halpin & Boyes 2008; Rodgers 2008) and propaganda (Cartmell 2008; Traynor 2008). In media and communication studies public relations and propaganda constitute different approaches to research. It may be added that information and media management techniques have also been studied in public diplomacy and information warfare paradigms. To motivate the framework selection for this study, a short explanation of the different paradigms is necessary.

There is a wide body of research on information management techniques in the propaganda paradigm (see J. Manheim 2011, pp.240-244). Studies identifying propaganda techniques were made already in the 1930s, at the least (Ibid.), and propaganda techniques have been examined in more recent wars as well (Riegert 2003, pp.120-125). However, through its long history propaganda became a pejorative term that clearly carries negative connotations (McQuail 2010, p.530; Pamment 2011, p.38; Luostarinen 2002, p.17; 29). This is characterised by how the notions of lying, deception and disinformation are central in propaganda research; they have been studied as the main characteristics of propaganda (White 1971; Martin 1982).

Therefore, using the term "propaganda" implies that an act of communication is somehow manipulative or deceitful4. L'Etang even claims that the primary intention behind identifying an activity as propaganda is "to condemn it on grounds of immorality" (L'Etang 2006, p.25). As deception is not the focus of this study, the propaganda paradigm will not be used in this thesis.

It may seem natural to refer to information management techniques as public relations. The problem with the public relations paradigm is that it is extremely wide. The term is used to refer to all forms of influence carried out by paid professionals (McQuail 2010, p.567) which makes it difficult to draw the line between what is PR and what is not.

4 There are researchers who have provided a value neutral definition of propaganda, for example Phil Taylor (Taylor 1992, pp.18-19).
Most relevant here is the subfield of PR that is known as international public relations. By definition it is "The planned and organized effort of a company, institution, or government to establish mutually beneficial relations with the publics of other nations (Wilcox, Ault and Agee, 1989, p.395 cited in Signitzer and Coombs, 1992, p.137). However, in reality the international public relations literature has focused only on corporate communications. It has sought to explain how multinational businesses can improve their relations, but it has largely neglected governments' relations with foreign publics (Signitzer & Coombs 1992, p.137).

One could also refer to the information warfare paradigm, or namely what military institutions have defined as information operations. The information operations paradigm encompasses the use of information as a military resource and attempts "to make sense of warfare as an exercise in information processing" (Brown 2003, p.90). This approach sees information campaigns as not having a political aim, but a military one – the purpose of managing information is to support other military operations and the general war strategy.

Public diplomacy theories are better suited for the analysis of the relationship between a nation state and its foreign publics (Signitzer & Coombs 1992, p.138), which is under focus in this thesis. By definition, public diplomacy includes "efforts by the government of one nation to influence public or elite opinion in a second nation for the purpose of turning the foreign policy of the target nation to advantage" (Bennett & Paletz 1994, p.132). This definition is helpful in that it explains the political aim of a government (the foreign policy outcomes it is trying to achieve) as the driving force behind an information campaign. The effect of the campaign can be judged according to whether those aims are met. However, the public diplomacy concept also has the downside of being very wide; it draws together a wide list of activities ranging from international broadcasting and cultural diplomacy to educational exchanges (Brown 2003, p.91) that are not related to the topic of this thesis. The public diplomacy activities can rather be seen as policies and long processes, whereas this thesis focuses on a short and intense campaign.

While each of the approaches mentioned above explains the communication process slightly differently, there are obvious points of convergence5. They all describe the process of an actor, with a certain intent in mind, using information to bear influence on its targets. Be it propaganda, PR, public diplomacy or information operations, two notions are central: information and influence. Therefore, these concepts can all be referred to as information and influence campaigns (Manheim 2011) that are described in the next section.

5 Manheim has noted that public diplomacy can be seen as the practice of propaganda "enlightened by a half a century of empirical research into human motivation and behavior." (Bennett & Paletz 1994, p.134)
### 3.5. Information and Influence Campaigns

The framework of Information and Influence Campaigns – or "IICs" – is in a way an umbrella theory that covers all the abovementioned concepts and paradigms. Information warfare, public relations and public diplomacy are all variants of IICs (Manheim 2011, p.20).

An Information and Influence Campaign (IIC) is "a systematic, sequential and multifaceted effort by one actor to inform, or to influence the perceptions, preferences or actions of, some other actor or actors" (Manheim 2011, p.18). This way the IIC definition itself does not add much new to the above mentioned concepts, which all describe one actor’s efforts to inform and influence others.

But what is relevant for this thesis is the way how Manheim has systematized the knowledge about media management techniques that are used in campaigns. Drawing on a large body of literature about strategic communications management, media theory and various persuasion techniques, Manheim concludes that the organizer of an information and influence campaign will most likely concentrate on two kinds of efforts towards the media.

First, the aim of someone running an IIC is to get access to the media. For this campaigners have to get journalists to distribute their arguments and support their cause. Journalists are expected to be impartial in their job so they cannot support a campaign explicitly. Therefore the media's support is solicited implicitly by understanding what the professional needs of journalists are and by helping them fulfil their needs (Ibid, p.28). In other words: to get media access, good campaigners help journalists do their job.

Section 3.3. described the specifics of the work of foreign correspondents and information campaigns need to address these. But what characterizes all journalists is that they consider themselves as storytellers. For someone organising an information campaign this means providing the journalists with a good story, and a good campaigner knows what constitutes a good story for journalists.

This also includes ensuring that the journalists have maximum access to decision-makers and important events, because this is one of the media's main needs (Manheim 2011, pp.28-29).

Therefore, the first dimension of media management in an IIC is taking into account the psychic and professional requirements of journalists and turning them to the campaign's advantage.

Second, the actor will develop a particular lexicon for communicating with the media. He chooses the words and expressions that explain the issue from his viewpoint and in a way that is useful to him. The lexicon is used to define what is at stake in the campaign for the actor (Manheim 2011, p.23). The selection of language is hugely important because as Manheim notes, "The fate of nations turns on such matters of definition" (Ibid.)

---

6 Howard Tumber and Marina Prentoulis (2003, p.224) argue that storytelling is an important ritual especially among war correspondents, who use it as a way of expressing the extreme events that they often witness.
Those definitions do not occur naturally but it is the campaign effort that constructs them. Using the different ideas and understandings that lay deep in the society as building blocks, the campaign constructs a particular definition of the issue at hand.

It is in this framework that Georgia’s role in the PR war with Russia will be studied. Defining Georgia’s actions in the PR war as an information and influence campaign, we investigate their efforts in

1) addressing the media's needs

2) and developing the lexicon that defined what was at stake in the conflict.

To sum up it can be said that governments, who have significant influence over their national media, nevertheless compete for attention and influence on the international media arena as well as in other countries’ media channels. The competition is especially fierce in times of war and conflict. In this competition governments sometimes seek assistance from public relations firms, who are able to organise effective reputation management campaigns. But little is known about what these campaigns contain and how they achieve their influence on the media.

This study will narrow that knowledge gap by investigating Georgia’s information campaign – a campaign which has been claimed to have brought the country a victory in its PR war with Russia.

### 3.5. Research questions and hypotheses

Piers Robinson has proposed studying media management techniques in two steps. First, the PR techniques and output (such as press releases, speeches, media briefs etc) should be mapped. Second, the PR output should be compared with the eventual media coverage in a framing analysis (2004, pp.105-106).

Following Robinson, the first aim of this study is to map the strategies of Georgia's information campaign. The first research question is:

Q1 What media management techniques did the Georgians use during the 2008 war with Russia?

We know from the theory of information and influence campaigns that an actor will try to maximise its access to the media by taking into account the journalists’s professional needs. We can thus expect that the Georgian government took measures to proactively provide journalists with necessary information and access to key officials.

The second aim of the study is to evaluate the impact of Georgia's campaign and to scrutinize the claim that Georgia won the PR war. The second research question is:

Q2 What evidence may support or argue against the claim that Georgia won the PR war with Russia?

The evaluation is done in two parts. First, we use Georgia's PR consultants' own assessment of their work as
an indicator of Georgian PR success. Did the members of the Georgian PR team consider themselves winners of the PR war? This draws on the way in which PR campaigns are normally evaluated – by judging if the initial aims were met. We defined Georgia’s efforts as an information and influence campaign that was organised with a political intent. What the intent was and if the PR consultants felt that it was achieved, were questions put to the Georgian PR team. Their indication serves as one type of proof that the claim of Georgia winning the PR war holds or not.

Second, the effects of Georgia’s media management activities are judged by a framing analysis. This will look at how the war events were framed in the Georgian and Russian PR texts and in two U.S. newspapers. The analysis is described in more detail in the next chapter. The intention is to find out how well the Georgian and Russian PR frames resonated with the American media.

As the theory of indexing and studies of the media coverage of previous wars have shown, the U.S. media shows great deference to state sources and the official version of events. As was shown in the background chapter, the Bush administration very openly supported the Georgian government during the war and it condemned Russia’s actions. We can therefore expect that in this political context the Georgian PR had a visible advantage over the Russian PR. The hypothesis is that the Georgian framing resonated better with the U.S. newspapers’ coverage of the war.
4. Method and material

To study wartime media management techniques, researchers consider it important to combine different methods. For example, Susan Carruthers is critical of research that only looks at media coverage and writes that a more fruitful approach "is to undertake both quantitative research and interviews, and to ground these in more general theoretical understanding of how the media function" (Carruthers 2000, p.210).

Similarly, Piers Robinson argues for a need to do a framing analysis of war coverage and then triangulate the results by interviewing the journalists and the PR people involved in media management during the war (P. Robinson 2004, pp.105-106; 109). The preferred way is thus to combine quantitative content analysis with a qualitative method such as interviews.

That is also also done in this thesis. The first research question about Georgia's media management techniques is answered by qualitative interviews with seven people who were involved in the wartime information campaign in 2008.

The second research question which seeks for evidence of the Georgia's information campaign's effects on the media coverage is answered by a framing analysis. Georgian and Russian press releases are compared with news articles in two U.S. newspapers, with the focus being on possible similarities in their framing of the war events.

4.1. Interviews

The interview method is chosen because the most valuable information about Georgia's information management techniques exists in the form of human experience. The knowledge and experience that the consultants working for the Georgian government and producing the PR output had is exactly the kind of information needed for mapping the information campaign.

Moreover, the group of Georgia's PR consultants was rather small and interviews could be arranged easily. Initial contacts with them indicated that they would be ready to talk openly about their experiences.

The semi-structured interview is a method for finding out about the interviewees' knowledge about the topic under study (Flick 2009, p.156). The aim is to reconstruct the interviewee's knowledge about the issue at hand. In this particular study the interviews will provide their subjective version of whether and how Georgia’s information management helped the country win the PR war in 2008.

The semi-structured interview method relies on the expectation that the interviewees are more likely to express their subjective viewpoints in an openly designed interview situation (Flick 2009, p.150). The interview process is not standardised and the questions are not fixed, but the interview guide mentions topics that are addressed in open questions. The questions refer to scientific literature on the topic as well.
as the researcher’s presuppositions (Ibid, pp.156-157).

The interview guide for this study was developed on the basis of theoretical literature on wartime information management techniques and a small number of reflections on the Georgia-Russia PR war that have so far been published in the media and elsewhere (see the Background chapter). The interviews generally followed a similar pattern, although the guide was slightly revised before each interview to focus on the parts that were most unclear and spend less time on those that earlier interviewees had answered in detail. The interviews covered the following topics:

- Georgia’s PR before the war – What was the Georgian government’s PR objective? Why was a PR agency hired? What were the results of the pre-war PR? How did they affect Georgia’s starting position in the PR war with Russia?

- PR during the war – What was the government’s strategy in distributing information? What was the political aim during the war? What were the main messages for the English-language media? How was the PR work coordinated? What was the interviewee’s personal role in the communications work during the war?

- Media relations during the war – Which media was in Georgia during the war? What were the government’s activities towards the media? What was their attitude towards Georgian officials? What information did they get and how? What information was restricted from them?

- Evaluation of the results: Why did the media write that Georgia won the PR war? Did the interviewee think this was true? What political outcomes did this have for Georgia? What was the general role of the media in the war? What could have been done differently in PR? When did the PR war end?

Interviews were conducted with seven people who either worked directly for the Georgian government or were involved in the PR efforts in August 2008. The interviewees were chosen so that the important parties involved in Georgia’s information activities were represented. These were the Georgian government, namely the National Security Council that was coordinating all communications work during the war; the PR agency Aspect Consulting that was helping the government manage its contacts with the Western media; and the team of Estonian consultants who were aiding both the government and Aspect in their work during the war.

All but one of the interviewees were in Tbilisi during the war. The interviews were conducted in Tbilisi, Brussels and Tallinn. The following people were interviewed:

- Patrick Worms – former partner of the PR agency Aspect Consulting that worked for the Georgian government from November 2007. During the war Worms was running the media centre for foreign
• Lasha Darsalia, Director of the Analytical Department, National Security Council of Georgia

• Dr Alexander Rondeli, President of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies

• Giorgi Kandelaki, member of the Georgian Parliament – was in the UK during the war, gave interviews to British news channels

• Eerik N. Kross, Tiit Matsulevitš, Priit Heinsalu – members of a team of Estonians who consulted the Georgian government in governmental communication from 2007. During the war they supported the media management team in Tbilisi as well as organised a humanitarian mission of volunteers from Estonia.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the author. Some of the interviewees asked not to be cited in this thesis. For this reason the quotes used are not attributed to the particular interviewees with the exception of Patrick Worms. As he was in charge of the media center during the war and was in direct contact with the journalists, he provided the most valuable information for reconstructing the media management process.

The interviews will also be important in that they help describe the context in which the PR output and the news articles were produced, explaining the significance they acquired during the war. The PR and the media texts are the focus of the second part of the study.

4.2. Framing analysis

The second aim of this study is to do an independent evaluation of Georgia’s media management efforts. The best way is to approach the PR war as a social phenomenon constituted in texts (Krippendorff 2004, p.xiii). We can assume that if there was a PR war, it was manifested in the texts produced during the war – in the newspaper articles and the governments’ press materials. This is the material that is left of the war that took place two and a half years ago before the writing of this thesis, and this material can easily be studied.

In this framework, the Georgian and Russian PR texts are seen to reflect both sides’ versions of what happened in August 2008. We assume that from the government press releases contain their main PR messages and their definition of the conflict.

The newspaper articles, on the other hand, represent the media’s understanding of the conflict. A systematic reading of the articles will reveal the journalists’ definition of the conflict.

If Georgia won the PR war, the media coverage must have had clear similarities with the Georgian PR messages. To examine in which ways the PR texts and the news articles were similar, and to what extent the
newspapers carried the Georgian PR themes, the texts were compared in a framing analysis.

In order to separate between Georgian and Russian frames in the news, the Russian press releases were included in the analysis, but the Russian PR itself was not under focus in this study. Themes that were promoted by the Russians were discerned from their government’s press releases. In the content analysis the aim was to see if the news article was similar to Georgian or Russian PR frames.

The framing analysis approach is chosen because it allows to reveal the ideological agenda behind texts as well as the tactics with which the ideology has been written into a text. Frames have been defined as powerful tools for bringing values and moral judgements into a text, and constructing the reality in a certain way (Allern 2010). When a news topic is framed, it is being connected to an ideology, but without showing obvious signs of bias. Frames are „little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters” (Gitlin 1980, p.6 cited in Allern 2010, p.3, emphasis added).

This is also why framing analysis has been often used to analyse public relations materials. Researchers have distinguished between two types of frames: public relations frames and media frames (Lim & Jones 2010, p.293). A public relations frame indicates „how public relations practitioners constructed messages”, and a media frame indicates „how the media organized news stories” (Ibid.).

This distinction is necessary to answer the question that interests public relations researchers the mosts – the question of PR effects. Comparing PR and media frames is one tool for searching links between the two; for searching for proof that the PR material had some influence over the news. A correlation between PR and news frames has been used as evidence of journalists being influenced by PR (Froehlich & Rüdiger 2006, p.24).

The aim of this study is to extract the PR frames used in the 2008 war and compare these with the media frames to see if there are similarities. This presupposes two steps of the analysis: identifying the frames in the Georgian and Russian PR texts and subsequently studying the news articles, looking for similarities with or traces of the PR frames in them.

4.2.1. Extracting frames from PR texts

Content analysis provides the best methodological tools to study the framing in PR and media texts because it addresses the question "how contemporary society operates and understands itself through its texts" (Krippendorff 2004, p.xx). With the PR war being a social phenomenon that manifested itself in texts, content analysis is suitable for investigating it.

The question is whether one should begin with a qualitative or a quantitative content analysis. Some framing researchers have started with a qualitative reading of texts, inducing the frames from the texts (Froehlich & Rüdiger 2006). The frames are then taken as a basis for a quantitative analysis of a larger
amount of material. Others promote a more deductive approach using predefined frames that are drawn from previous studies (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000). However, the problem with predefined frames is that, so far, there is no consistent set of frame categories that would be applicable to various kinds of news texts (B. Scheufele & D. Scheufele 2010, p.129; Reese 2010, p.24 in same volume).

Therefore, the best way to go about a framing analysis is to take a midway between the deductive and inductive approaches. The current study does not rely on predefined frames, neither is the approach purely inductive. Instead, framing theory is used as a guide to begin the content analysis of the Georgian and Russian PR texts.

Entman's definition of framing is taken as a basic model for the analysis:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (1993, p.52).

This definition is operationalized by breaking it into four framing functions that will be looked for in the Georgian and Russian PR texts:

1. problem definition
2. causal implications
3. attribution of responsibility
4. treatment recommendation

With these three framing functions in mind a systematic reading of the Russian and Georgian PR texts from August 2008 was done. This meant going through the press releases issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia that were collected from their websites. Altogether, the Georgian MFA website had 124 press releases and the Russian MFA website 134 press releases from August 2008.

From each press release the four framing functions were extracted. This gave a long list of different variants of each of the three framing functions. To turn this list into a manageable coding scheme for the content analysis, similar functions were grouped together. For example, all Georgian press releases counting the actions of the Russian army (that the Russians are destroying Georgian military facilities, bombing civilian infrastructure or conducting cyber attacks on Georgian websites etc) were grouped under a single category "battle action". This category would also include Russian accounts of Georgian military acts (that Georgia has attacked the South Ossetian population and the Russian peacekeepers). This process is exemplified by a

---

7 Entman's definition has been operationalized in a similar way before (Sheafer & Gabay 2009)
8 Acquired from http://georgiamfa.blogspot.com/
As a result of the regrouping, a coding scheme of eight categories was developed. Category 1 included the five problem definitions that were present in the PR texts: (1) battle action, (2) war crimes, (3) ceasefire violations and (4) humanitarian crisis.

It should be said that a fifth problem definition was added during the coding of the newspaper articles as it turned out that a large number of articles defined the problem not like any of the PR texts. This produced a new problem definition sub-category that was labeled "political tension". This sub-category was created so that not too many articles would end up under the obscure label "Other". Note that "political tension" was an entirely media-promoted problem definition that did not come out in the PR texts.

Category 2 applied to responsibility attribution. The responsibility for the problem was always attributed to the other side.

Categories 3, 4 and 5 corresponded to the causal framing functions – what the article presented as the cause behind the problem. Category 3 referred to the claims that both sides were making about the other side's unlawfulness and deceitfulness.

Categories 4 and 5 referred to specific Georgian and Russian frames.

Category 6 corresponded to the treatment recommendation in the text.

Finally, the last two categories were added to record the sources that were cited in each article. This was done to get an indication of the journalists' use of sources. For example, if the Georgian framing dominance would coincide with a dominance of Georgian sources, this would indicate that the framing originated from the Georgians.

The coding scheme can be found in Appendix 1.

In the introduction the aim of this study was phrased as exploring the backgrounds behind the claim that Georgia won the PR war. This will be done by a framing analysis of all the articles on the Russia-Georgia war in the New York Times in August 2008.

4.2.2. Content analysis of news articles

The focus of this analysis is on the American newspapers The New York Times (NYT) and The Washington Post (WP) because the Georgians put a special emphasis on these papers in their information campaign. The importance of these papers can also be explained by their position in the U.S. society. As the nation's leading news organizations they are important sources of information for political elites. Regarding the NYT

\[10\] When asked which media channels and outlets they considered most important during the war, the NYT and the WP were among the first to be mentioned by Georgia's PR people when interviewed for this thesis.
it has been written that other newspapers are likely to reproduce what it prints, which means that the NYT often sets political agendas and public debates (Krippendorff 2004, p.348; Bennett & Manheim 1993, p.335).

By directing their information to the journalists of the NYT and the WP, the Georgians hoped to mobilize the Americans to support them and to condemn Russia's actions. As Russian tanks rolled into Georgia, the country had no hope for military assistance from other states – diplomatic pressure from the West and foremost the U.S. was their only hope to stop Russia.11

Therefore the coverage in the NYT and the WP was equally important with the diplomatic cables and direct talks that the Georgian leaders had with their U.S. counterparts during the war. Both were important for communicating their message.

The aim of this content analysis is to see if the NYT and the WP articles did carry the Georgian message as it was reflected in their governmental press releases.

The time period under study is limited to August 2008 because that was when physical action took place and it was also the most intensive period in terms of media war. During August the Georgian and Russian foreign ministries issued over 300 public statements regarding the war on their websites. Later that number fell considerably.

The articles were obtained from the LexisNexis database by running a search with the words "Georgia", "Russia", and "war" combined in the query. From the results the selection was limited to articles published during 8th and 31st August 2008. Op-ed articles and letters from readers were excluded because they represent the authors' framing, not the media's framing that is under study here.


The unit of analysis was one newspaper article. This means that during the coding the categories were judged on the basis of the whole article. However, it was always the headline and the lead of the article that defined the problem of the article. This is because the newspaper report is written so that the headline and the lead paragraph summarize the theme of the report, telling the reader what the story is about (Dijk 1988, p.53). The report is also structured according to relevance, which means that main topics appear first (Ibid. p. 41). This is why, when some longer articles reported several problems, i.e. many variants of the problem definition framing function, the one in the headline and the lead was coded.

Coding was done by the author. To check consistency a second coding of 50 articles was done three weeks after the main coding. Intra-coder reliability was strong at 0.91 (Scott’s Pi).

11 That Georgia's fate in the war depended on the West's response to Russia was mentioned repeatedly in the interviews.
5. Mapping Georgia's media management techniques

On the basis of the interviews the following picture of the PR activities can be put together. In some cases the interviews are complemented by information openly available on the Web as well as in the books and newspaper articles about the war.

5.1. PR prior to the 2008 war

As described in the chapter 2, the Georgian government hired the PR agency Aspect Consulting in November 2007. The agency was to improve Georgia’s reputation so that it would be seen in the West as a worthy candidate for NATO membership. To achieve this the PR firm focused on highlighting the country’s development as a democracy and promoting Georgia’s cultural commonalities with Europe. The latter included also softer themes, such as introducing Georgia as the birthplace of wine (O’Connor 2008).

In practice, the team at Aspect worked closely with Western journalists who covered Georgia. It was made sure that the government had stories to interest them. In addition to this, op-ed articles were written by the PR team and opinion leaders to explain what was happening in Georgia and why the country deserved the West’s support.

But the work also included formulating the Georgian message and picking the right frames and keywords that would be comprehensible to Westerners. For example, one interviewee told how the Georgian government was advised to start using the term "creeping annexation" when communicating with the foreign media. This referred to how Russia was gradually increasing its political and military support to the separatist regions – a complex process but labelling it "creeping annexation" made it easier to grasp for the media. Another term was "passportization" which referred to the handing out of Russian passports in South Ossetia. These frames were important in terms of creating the context and the lexicon in which the war would be written about.

Aspect Consulting assessed that it had achieved significant success in improving Georgia’s reputation before the war broke out. By the summer of 2008 Georgia had managed to get a number of op ed articles and supportive editorials published in prestigious newspapers like The New York Times, The Washington Post and Le Monde. Aspect’s team was even surprised over the success of their efforts. As Patrick Worms put it:

I've never had a situation where I had an obscure client that managed so many friends to write so many good things and published in so many influential publications.

The work done prior to the war had very important results in terms of Georgia’s starting position in the information war with Russia. First, it meant that an elementary PR system was already in place when the war broke out. The Georgian government was sending out a regular newsletter, held press conferences and
planned interviews. The officials had basic experience with handling public relations. Although the wartime information campaign was largely built from scratch, it could at least make use of the PR elements that existed before.

Second, the articles that had been published in prestigious publications with the help of Aspect Consulting could be used as background information to corroborate the Georgian version of events. Patrick Worms who met new foreign reporters in Tbilisi every day said that the articles helped against him being taken merely as "a guy who spins". Patrick Worms:

... we could simply point to these articles, we could point to these op eds, we could point to these stories, we could pull them out - we had them on our laptops - we could pull them out whenever it was required - and give any journalist we met the breakdown.

Third, the work done before the war ensured that the government had developed good contacts with a small group of well-informed Western journalists who were familiar to the local conditions, spoke Georgian or Russian and, as the interviewees put it, actually knew what they were talking about.

The interviewees saw these three achievements of PR prior to the war as major assets for Georgia when fighting broke out in South Ossetia.

5.2. PR during the war

According to the interviewees, the Georgian government was not prepared for a war with Russia, which meant that no PR strategy or crisis communication team existed for the escalation that came in the beginning of August 2008. Most of the interviewees were not in Georgia on the 7 and 8 August when the fighting started but had to cancel their vacations and fly to Tbilisi when reports of the Georgian and Russian troops clashing were already in the news.

Upon arrival in Tbilisi, the non-Georgian interviewees described the situation as chaotic and unorganized. As Georgian officials were all busy dealing with the political, military and humanitarian crises that the conflict had caused, there was no one dealing with the media. As foreign reporters soon started arriving in masses12, the foreign consultants saw it as their first aim to make sure that the journalists would receive information from the Georgian government:

...it was important to take the journalists’... let’s say that information flow that came through the journalists directly to editorial offices... To take that... Under our control would be wrong to say but to direct it so that we’d be the first supplier of adequate information.

Relevant to the general environment where the PR was to be fought was how the timing of the conflict

12 As the Georgian team did not require the foreign media representatives to accredit themselves, it is not known exactly how many of them were in Georgia during the war. One interviewee estimated the total number to be around 500.
affected the news organisations' choices of who to send to cover the conflict.

...this was a holiday season AND the opening of the Olympic Games. [...] Many of the people who would normally do that sort of thing were either on holiday or in China. So you know the channels were scraping the bottom of the barrel...

Many of the reporters coming to Georgia had very little knowledge about the country as well as they were inexperienced in working in crisis regions, and this was felt by the interviewees. One of them described meeting a British journalist who could not even spell the Georgian president's name. This shows that the problems arising from a lack of local knowledge of the correspondents, which were described in chapter 3.3., were also acute in Georgia.

Being inexperienced, these reporters would find it especially difficult to go about their work and the challenges that the situation posed, as described by another interviewee:

For sure, some of them sat in the damn hotel room watching television and had no idea where they should go next, who to turn to, how things are done there... May be you want to drive to the front, but how do you get a car for that? Who do you have to ask for permission? Do you need a permission at all?

What are the security requirements?

It became the Georgian PR team's job to engage those journalists and provide them with information.

What followed was an information campaign, that the interviewees described as chaotic and unsystematic. However, by categorizing the details given in the interviews according to different activities it can be said that the Georgian information campaign had these main elements:

1. A government media centre was spontaneously set up in a hotel lobby in central Tbilisi. There, military maps were put up and troop movements and other events that might interest journalists were marked on them. Patrick Worms said he spent several hours each day in front of the maps briefing ignorant (i.e. lacking knowledge about the conflict) reporters and diplomats. He did this in three languages.

   The atmosphere at the media centre was rather informal as the briefings were held in the hotel lobby and sometimes in the bar. Everything was done to meet the journalists’ needs, as described by the Italian journalist Pio d’Emilia:

   With every journalist’s first name memorized, Worms was there to greet us in the morning and buy us beers at night. He would summon up whatever was needed: interpreters, drivers, interviews and briefings (d’ Emilia 2008)

2. The journalists in Tbilisi were briefed several times a day. Early in the morning Patrick Worms would appear at the media centre and provide the journalists with the latest information before they
departed for the day.
In the afternoons he would brief newly arrived reporters.

_Briefings would last from 15 minutes to 45 minutes depending on the importance of the briefee and the level of their ignorance. [...] The content of the briefing depended on the briefee – it could go from a general history of Georgian/Abkhaz/Soviet relations all the way to detailed military briefings about the current situation in particular valleys or even villages._

One example of Worms's brief has been put up on the Internet by an American journalist (see Totten 2008).

For reporters covering the war from their editorial offices outside Georgia, international telephone conferences with Georgian officials were held.

3. A team of 60 people was quickly put together and distributed into teams so that work could be done 24 hours a day. One of the most important jobs for them was to collect information from all sources (military, police, government, diplomats, and civilians) about what was happening and process it so that it could be forwarded to the media. According to one of the interviewees, this meant writing the reports into "decent" and "journalistic" English and, if possible, send them to Georgian officials for confirmation. The team tried to make a difference between confirmed and unconfirmed reports when sending them out.

The team members were also going around hotels in Tbilisi trying to register foreign journalists so that information could be sent to them.

The interviewees noted that this was hardly a team of professional propaganda warriors, many people were volunteers who were included in the team simply because they could speak at least one Western language. One person who joined had a daily job at a Georgian restaurant.

4. The collected information was sent out via a media alert system. The alerts went out via two channels: SMS messages and e-mails. The SMS messages were meant primarily for the reporters in Georgia, who were moving around and who did not always have access to Internet. For this, their cellphone numbers had been collected earlier.

By e-mail, media alerts were sent mainly to journalists and important editorial offices outside Georgia.

The media alerts included concise factual information about events on the ground – movements of Russian troops, bombardments, attacks against civilians etc – as well as information about upcoming press conferences.

To avoid crossed messages the media team set different streams for confirmed and unconfirmed reports when sending them out.

---

13 The author tried to get a hold of the SMS messages sent to journalists but there seems to be no archive. The contents of the e-mail alerts are largely the same as the press releases analysed in the framing analysis part of this study.
information.

5. All information that the PR team managed to collect during the day was collected and distributed the next day in the form of Georgia Update, the government’s newsletter that existed already before the war. The daily editions of the Georgia Update summarized the media alerts but the newsletter also included references to the international media coverage of the war, which were chosen so as to reflect the Western support.

In addition, journalists obtained information directly from Georgian officials. Sometimes they would come to the media centre in hotel Marriott to sit down with a journalist for a briefing, but on many occasions they were interviewed over the phone. For example, Georgia’s interior ministry spokesman Shota Utiashvili counted that he gave 1,100 telephone interviews during the war (Rodgers 2008).

Also, president Saakashvili personally played an important role in the media management campaign, often using his own media contacts to arrange interviews. He gave several interviews to large TV channels like the CNN and the BBC World, in one of those he was speaking live at 3 AM Georgian time from his war room (Williams 2008). When journalists later wrote about the PR war, they gave recognition to Saakashvili’s efforts and used his numerous media performances as a main argument to claim that Georgia won the PR war (Wilby 2008; Traynor 2008; Clifford J. Levy 2008; Halpin & Boyes 2008).

5.3. Main messages - telling Georgia’s story

Although the Georgian government lacked a PR strategy for the war, certain themes and messages became central in communicating with the media. According to the interviewees, the main message to the foreign media during the war was that Georgia was a victim of Russian aggression. The aim was to show that Russia was invading Georgia’s sovereign territory and not conducting a peacekeeping operation as it claimed in its official statements.

The media team’s mission was to back the main message by reports of events on the ground. This was done by establishing a continuous flow of media alerts that included chronological lists of Russian actions such as troop maneuvers, aerial bombardments, eyewitness accounts of looting. All facts were written down and presented as evidence of what the reality of Russia’s actions was. In some cases phone numbers of eyewitnesses were added so that journalists could contact and check the facts for themselves. For example, on 13 August a timeline of events was sent out that included Georgian phone numbers:

17:50 Residents of Gori are moving towards Tbilisi by feet, escaping from brutal attacks by Russian troops and Ossetian separatists. Sources:
899 888 143
893 529 336
Some journalists were said to have frequently used these reports as a source for their stories.

An equally important aim was to show the reasons behind the Russian aggression – that it was preceded by a sequence of provocations that aimed at destabilising the region. The background story about Russia’s opposition to Georgia’s democratic developments and its push for NATO was told. Here the consultants could refer to the op ed articles published in the Western media as part of the Aspect-led campaign before the war. As one interviewee explained, the journalists were told that:

_This was something that had nothing to do with Misha [Saakashvili’s nickname] attacking Ossetia, this was something that had been planned by Russia for a long time. The proof that it had been planned by Russia for a long time is this pile of newspaper clippings from the last six months._

If the first part of the message strategy was backing up the Georgian version, then the other part was undermining Russia’s statements. The interviewees said that it was impotant to refute all the cases where Russians were distributing false information

... _all the cases where the Russians claimed one thing – either because of unknowingness or because they lied – all those cases were brought into the light by the Georgians and showed that the Russians [were unreliable]._

Showing Russia as unreliable and deceitful was a deliberate tactic as it served as a confirmation to the image of a villainous Russia that the Georgians wanted the West to see. The notion that the Russians were lying while the Georgian side told the truth was important to the Georgian PR team as shown in section 5.5.

## 5.4. Results

The media declared Georgia a winner of the PR war, so did the Georgian PR consultants see themselves as winners?

The interviewees agreed that Georgia was successful in the first phases of the PR war when the supportive media coverage helped create a sympathy for Georgia in the West. This was seen to have two direct consequences in terms of the outcome of the war. First, Western support and the French president’s intervention stopped the Russians from taking the capital Tbilisi and from toppling president Saakashvili. Second, the sympathy was behind the significant monetary support from the international community that Georgia received after the war\(^{14}\).

However, they insisted that the Western support was not entirely created with PR but that it was the right

\(^{14}\) Various organisations and countries donated 3.5 billion euros of aid money to Georgia, far more than was expected (BBC News 2008).
combination of factors that led to Georgia coming out better from the PR war.

Two of the factors were the articles published before the war as well as the 20 journalists who knew what they are talking about that have been already described above.

But the consultants also stressed that they were helped by the fact that Russia's own actions contradicted its PR framing and supported the Georgian version instead. When after the declaration of ceasefire Russian troops did not pull out from Georgia, it became clear for everyone that the Russians were not reinforcing their peacekeeping mission, as the official line went, but they were occupying Georgian territory:

When the Russians eventually didn't pull out their troops, stayed in there, built military bases, then after this the thing was clear. [...] Had the Russians pulled out their troops, it would be much harder for the Georgians to explain how it really was.

As Russia was making statements that contradicted their own actions, the Georgian side found their version easier to explain. This gave them an important advantage in the PR war:

...that they came to areas controlled by Georgians – the town of Gori and where else – then that was the shot that gave us an advantage. Because from that moment Georgia became a victim in the eyes of the West.

The other major factor according to the interviewees was that the war posed an existential threat to Georgia. This made it possible to, within 24 hours, put together a team of 60 people and make everybody pull in the same direction. Also, it was noted that the flexible decision making of the Georgian authorities allowed decisions to be taken quickly.

So the common understanding was that Georgia did receive supportive media coverage but that this was not a result of PR only.

However, the interviewees shared the notion that the success of Georgia’s information campaign was limited to August 2008, whereas the PR war continues to this day. It was repeatedly mentioned that some time after the military action in South Ossetia had stopped, the general media image turned to Georgia’s disadvantage. There was no clear agreement on when exactly this happened. One interviewee mentioned that Georgia was "winning the PR war hands down" until an article was published in The New York Times on 6 November 2008 that called the Georgian version of events into question (see Chivers 2008). The interviewee described the story as "extraordinarily damaging" to the Georgian side.

According to another assessment, the tide turned already in September when the Russians launched a countercampaign:

There was some period especially from September 2008 when there was the wave against Georgia. During the war we more or less balanced this Russian information flow but later I think we were doing
well as well but there was some period when there was some kind of... big flow of negative information. And you know... You can see that it was kind of... someone was behind this.

The interviewees pointed out what they saw as the main accomplishment of Russia's post-war PR – this was the fact that Russia later successfully promoted the claim that Georgia started the war. According to the interviewees' assessment many people now believe that the origins of the war lie on the Georgian side, despite Russia's provocations and its violent military operation in Georgia. And that this would not have been so, if the Russians had not launched an informational countercampaign in autumn 2008.

5.5. The truth and the PR war

In their explanations of what was initially at stake in the PR war, the interviewees repeatedly brought up two issues: telling the truth and Georgia's openness to media scrutiny.

The notion that Georgia was telling the truth while Russia was hiding information and distributing lies was shared by all interviewees. They felt they were in a position where they did not have to hide anything or manipulate the information, because the situation on the ground spoke for itself. As one interviewee put it, "The only thing we needed to to was to say what was going on." Another interviewee described the Georgian team's job as "persuading with honest facts".

As there were numerous cases where Russia's actions undermined their official statements the Georgia consultants felt they had the truth on their side. All they needed to do was to report what was going on and this would "portray the real Russian face". As one interviewee in Georgia put it:

*When they Russians are somewhere, they misbehave, they loot, they kill, they rape... they did all of those things here and we just told the world about it.*

In connection to the notion of telling the truth it is understandable why two of the interviewees were reluctant to refer to Georgia's information actions as PR war. It contradicted their version of telling the truth. To accept that there was a PR war implies that neither of the sides told the truth; the battle was simply about who has the better PR company and who sells their version more skillfully. They said the talk of a PR war serves the Russian interest of portraying Georgia's story as "just PR" or a collection of fabrications made by their PR company. But in reality Georgia was pursuing a just cause and the PR merely facilitated this:

*The reality is that ... PR companies are good but but when you are just saying the truth there is not a lot of things to do with it.*

Related to the notion of telling the truth was the principle of openness. The Georgian side stressed that it had nothing to hide from the media and it was open to all kinds of scrutiny. Journalists could access leaders
and move around without restrictions. Government officials were easily accessible for the media. According to the interviews, there was no strict hierarchy of spokespersons and themes – everybody was allowed to give comments. This was not merely because the general of lack of hierarchy in Georgia but openness was used as a deliberate media strategy.

_The Georgians understood it very well that – as they already had 3-4 years of experience with democracy before the war – that you should be open, talk what you feel what you think._

Openness was therefore considered to be a crucial element in Georgia's information campaign, not the least because it was the main thing that separated it from Russia, who was known to be especially bad at making its actions publicly transparent.

When asked if there was anything that the Georgians tried to hide from the media, an Estonian interviewee replied:

_What was there to hide? The Georgians didn't do any monkey business. They weren't the ones who were looting. The Georgians were protecting their homeland. The aggressor was elsewhere._

Finally, telling the truth and being open to scrutiny developed into an understanding among the Georgian PR team that they were fighting for a just cause. James Hunt, the partner of Aspect Consulting, said in an interview during the war that he felt he was "on the side of the angels" while advising Georgia. He added that Aspect was also appealing to "journalists’ sense of right and wrong", indicating that this notion of being on the side of the good guys even became a part of the media strategy (Cartmell 2008).

### 5.6. Conclusion

This part sought to give an overview of how the Georgian information campaign was conducted based on the "insider" perspective, i.e. based on how the consultants working for the Georgian government themselves explained the PR war.

Although an elementary PR system was already in place before the war, no PR strategy or communication team existed for the Georgian government in the beginning of August 2008. The foreign consultants quickly set up a system for providing the journalists with adequate information from the government. Their aim was to show to the world media that the conflict was a Russian invasion into sovereign Georgia, and they felt this was the message that reached the audiences. This was seen as a result of their media management activities but the interviewees also stressed the role of other factors which supported the Georgian case, most importantly that Russia discredited itself by taking its army into Georgian territory. As Patrick Worms put it, "half of my work was doing my job well and half of my work was depending on the Russians doing.
their job badly”.

It can be concluded from their interviews that the Georgian PR people considered their work successful during August 2008 that is the period under focus in this study.

The knowledge of the insiders of Georgia’s information campaign gives important insight to assess the war coverage in the media, but answering the question of who won the PR war can not rely on their assessment only. This is why in the second part of the study an empirical analysis of the PR messages and the news content is done to see if the media adopted the Georgian PR frames. The next chapter describes the results.
6. Results of the framing analysis

The aim of the content analysis was to see how successful Georgia and Russia were in promoting their framing in The New York Times and The Washington Post’s coverage of the war during August 2008. The framing was represented by the four framing functions from Entman’s definition: problem definition, responsibility attribution, causal implication and treatment recommendation (Entman 1993, p.52). In the content analysis the different subcategories of these framing functions were counted in the Georgian and Russian press releases and the news reports.

6.1. PR frames – war vs peacekeeping

According to the press releases issued by the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the conflict that broke out on August 7 was Russia’s attack against Georgia. The war was defined as “military aggression against the Georgian state” (09.08.) and “full-scale open aggression against Georgia” (10.08), against which Georgia had to defend itself. Russia’s actions were widely referred to as an “invasion” that was undertaken to occupy the country and to overthrow Georgia’s government. In a press release on 10 August Georgia announced:

*The attack on Tbilisi Airport offers further evidence that Russia’s invasion\(^{15}\) of Georgia is not about Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The goal of the Russian Federation [...] is to overthrow the democratically elected government of this small European nation* (Georgian MFA 10.08.2008).

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the other hand, defined the conflict as a Georgian provocation. Russia claimed that Georgia had attacked Ossetian people and Russian peacekeepers who were stationed in South Ossetia and that Russia had to intervene to protect its citizens. A Russian statement from August 8 quoted their president claiming that the Georgians were murdering civilians:

*Georgia’s acts have caused loss of life, including among Russian peacekeepers. [...] Civilians, women, children and old people, are dying today in South Ossetia, and the majority of them are citizens of the Russian Federation. [...] as President of the Russian Federation it is my duty to protect the lives and dignity of Russian citizens wherever they may be* (Russian MFA 08.08.2008).

The Russian side was therefore trying to make the point that its actions were an extension of its peacekeeper role in the region, not an act of war on Georgia:

* [...] Russia has maintained and continues to maintain a presence on Georgian territory on an absolutely lawful basis, carrying out its peacekeeping mission in accordance with the agreements concluded. We have always considered maintaining the peace to be our paramount task. Russia has historically been a guarantor for the security of the peoples of the Caucasus, and this remains true today [...]* (Russian MFA

\(^{15}\) From here onwards text in bold is used by the author to indicate emphasis.
These two different definitions of the conflict – one side defining it as war, the other side saying it is a peacekeeping operation – designated how the sides would make use of the four framing functions that were counted in the coding of the press releases.

6.1.1. What is the problem and who is responsible?

As it was said in the interviews, the aim of Georgia's information campaign was to show that the Russian army was invading the country and not conducting a peacekeeping operation as Russian leaders claimed. This is apparent in the coding results which showed that battle action was most frequently presented as the problem in the press releases. It was the main problem definition that the governments promoted.

![Illustration 1: Problem definitions in Georgian and Russian press releases (n=258)](image)

Illustration 1 shows how much emphasis different problem definitions were given in both side's press releases. The reports focusing on battle action were especially dominant in Georgia's press releases. This reflects their strategy that was to distribute regular reports of Russian actions in Georgia. These went out to the media daily, sometimes several times a day. For example, in the night of August 9, the following statement was issued by the Georgian government counting Russia’s military moves:

**Timeline by 9th of August 23:00**

*August 8 - 9, 2008*
22:30 Russian air forces bombarded Chkhalta, administrative center of Upper Abkhazia. No Casualties reported.

By 19:45 Tskhinvali is under ultimate control of Georgian Government troops.

Russian Navy prevented Moldovan Cargo Ship Lotus - 1 carrying wheat from entering Poti Port. Lotus - 1 was forced to go back.

16:35 Oni was bombarded by Russian aviation. [...] (Georgian MFA 09.08.2008).

The Russian side made no attempt to establish such a flow of updated facts. Its emphasis was framing the conflict as Georgian aggression. Whenever Georgia’s acts were mentioned they were condemned and described with vivid language:

Statement of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov Concerning the Situation in South Ossetia […] On the night of August 7-8, just several hours after the agreement had been reached to hold talks to settle the new round of the South Ossetia conflict Georgian military units undertook a treacherous, massive attack on Tskhinvali. A use-of-force scenario was resorted to by the Georgian leadership, despite all the diplomatic efforts that had been undertaken [...] (Russian MFA 08.08.08).

However, unlike the Georgian side, the Russians provided no facts to base their claims on.

The second most common problem definition in the press releases was ceasefire violations. This frame included both sides' claims that the opponent did not fill the requirements of the ceasefire agreement that was signed. The Russians put a greater emphasis on this than Georgia. First it was claiming that the Georgian side was not complying to the ceasefire agreements:

Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov Speaks to Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Eka Tkeshelashvili by Telephone. The Georgian Foreign Minister's attention was also drawn to the statement of State Minister Temur Yakobashvili that the Georgian side had no intention of withdrawing from the conflict zone, which comes into direct contradiction with the assertions that Georgian troops have already been withdrawn from South Ossetia (Russian MFA 10.08.2008).

Later, the Russians used the ceasefire violations frame mainly to argue that it was complying to the agreement, as attention in the U.S. press turned to the Russians' violating the agreement, as will be shown in section 6.2.

Georgia, on the other hand, was more frequently using the war crimes frame in which it drew attention to reports of ethnic cleansing that the government was receiving from the conflict region. On August 19 the Georgian government issued the following statement:

Moscow chooses ethnic cleansing We would like to focus the international community’s attention on the
humanitarian catastrophe unfolding on the territories occupied by the Russian armed forces. There has been no decline in ethnically based mass robbery, persecution and slaughter of people on the Russian-occupied territories. [...] (Georgian MFA 19.08.08).

Georgia also stated in several messages that Russia used cluster munitions against civilians – munitions that have been prohibited by the international community.

The Russian side accused the Georgians of war crimes as well. It promoted the claim that Georgia had committed genocide against the Ossetians:

[...] Georgia has brought up a large amount of heavy military equipment to the conflict zone and embarked on scorched earth tactics, namely started barbarously bombing residential quarters of Tskhinvali and peaceful South Ossetian villages practically from all types of weapons. There are numerous casualties among the civilian population of South Ossetia as a result [...] eight South Ossetian villages have already been erased from the face of the earth (Russian MFA 11.08.08).

The humanitarian crisis frame appeared to a smaller extent in the Russian press releases. The focus was on the humanitarian problems that the conflict had created, such as flows of refugees. This frame was almost non-apparent in the Georgian press releases.

Note that there is a category "no problem defined" which is quite large in Russia's case. This accounted for a number of press releases where no issue was clearly stated. These were usually the diplomatic notices which stated shortly that there had been a conversation between the politicians and the topic of the conversation was briefly mentioned. From the perspective of the media covering the conflict these had no value in terms of communicating what the position of the country was. For example, a Russian press release informed the media about a conversation between two presidents but it made no references to what the issue was:

Dmitry Medvedev and French President Nicholas Sarkozy had another telephone conversation Mr Sarkozy informed Mr Medvedev during this second telephone conversation about his contacts with the leaders of a number of European Union countries and also with Tbilisi, taking into account Mr Medvedev’s assessment of the situation and approaches to take. The two Presidents agreed to continue the discussion in Moscow, where Mr Sarkozy will come at Mr Medvedev’s invitation at the beginning of the week (Russian MFA 10.08.2008).

6.1.2. Causal implications

Three types of the causal framing functions were promoted in the press releases. This was the part of the frame that implied the reasons behind the problem that the press release defined.
First, both sides portrayed the other side as unreliable and deceitful. This theme was especially frequent in the Georgian press releases as 72% of them implied that Russia was lying or not keeping its promises. It was mentioned in interviews that the Georgian team deliberately used the tactic of pointing to Russian disinformation. This was a recurring theme in the press releases:

Russian disinformation regarding Gori [...] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia declares that Russian Federation continues to spread deliberate disinformation by the help of state controlled Russian information agencies and intends to conceal its own aggression (Georgian MFA 19.08.08).

Similarly, when the ceasefire agreement had been signed, the Georgian side showed the Russians' duplicity by emphasizing in their releases that the Russians were not pulling out their troops as promised.

The Russian side depicted Georgia as deceitful as well. For example, on August 11 the Russian MFA issued a statement by the Foreign Minister who refuted "the statement of the leadership of Georgia about the start of the withdrawal of Georgian troops" and said that this does not correspond to reality (Russian MFA 11.08.08). However, the Russians pushed this frame in only a third of their press releases, emphasizing it considerably less than the Georgians.

Second, Georgia and Russia both had their own causal frame that they were promoting. For Georgia this was the Russian occupation frame, which claimed that Russia's aim was to invade Georgia and to force its democratic government to step down. Appearing in 16% of the press releases, this was not a very frequent frame but it resonated well with a number of the newspaper articles, as section 6.2. will show. For example, one statement cited a high Georgian official saying:

"We no longer know the limits of the invading Russian army—Russia seems intent on overthrowing the democratically elected government of Georgia and occupying the country," said Alexander Lomaia, the Secretary of the National Security Council (Georgian MFA 11.08.2008).

Another press release stated that:

Over the past 48 hours, Russian forces have killed over 100 Georgian civilians and soldiers, after targeting residential complexes in Georgia, as well as airports, bases, and other vital infrastructure. The goal of the Russian Federation appears to be the complete submission of the democratic, European nation of Georgia (Georgian MFA 09.08.2008).

The Russians were widely promoting their frame, according to which the cause of Georgia's aggression was its nationalist and violent government. The Georgian president was depicted as a hotheaded politician with a penchant for using force. This causal frame appeared in 41% of the statements issued by the Russian MFA. One of them cited the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov portraying Saakashvili as a troublemaker whom the U.S. leadership can not tame:
Our US partners gave assurances to us that they would not allow the Georgian army trained by them to be used to solve problems in the conflict zones. Obviously they failed to keep Mikhail Saakashvili from the temptation to solve all his problems by way of war (Russian MFA 12.08.2008).

6.1.3. What should be done?

Finally, the fourth framing function was the treatment recommendation. For both sides it was common to structure their press releases so that the first section presented the problem, the middle parts implied the cause(s), and the last section of the text presented a treatment for the problem.

In 22% of its press releases the Georgian government appealed to the international community to stop Russia's actions, as in a press release from August 8:

**Russian Ground Forces Invade Georgia** At this hour, the invading army of the Russian Federation has entered Georgian territory outside the conflict zones of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Georgian army is retreating to defend the capital. The Government is urgently seeking international intervention to prevent the fall of Georgia and the further loss of life (Georgian MFA 11.08.2008).

The Russian side repeated two demands: that Georgia withdraw its troops from South Ossetia and that a non-use of force agreement be signed. These appeared in a fifth of its press releases, as in a statement from August 8:

The only possible and reasonable way out of this situation is the withdrawal of Georgian troops to their initial positions and the immediate signing of a legally binding agreement on the non-use of force (Russian MFA 08.08.2008).

The conclusion from the content analysis of the press releases is that the texts produced by the Georgian government clearly reflected its main aim and message in the war. As one of the interviewees said, Georgia was "desperately trying to use the West to stop Russia" and it is apparent that the press releases were used to channel this message. By distributing the short and concise media updates, Georgia rebutted its general story of the Russian invasion that needed a response from the West. The reports also supported the image of Georgia's openness and increased its credibility.

Russia's press releases lacked a clear focus. The Russian officials made snappy statements that portrayed Georgia as a villain but they made no efforts at trying to base these claims on facts. This way their communication stayed at the level of empty statements. The Russians did not use the press releases to get their message across.

This resulted in that Georgia’s frames resonated better with the newspapers’ coverage of the war, as the next step of the analysis – the study of the news articles – showed.
6.2. Media frames – support to Georgia’s framing

6.2.1. What is the problem and who is responsible?

Describing how the problem was defined in the articles of The New York Times and The Washington Post it is most important to point out that the four PR-promoted framing functions appeared in 51% of the media articles. The resting 49% used none of the PR frames but promoted a different, media-created frame.

As shown on Illustration 2, the most frequent problem definition was political tension, which was not a PR promoted frame and appeared in the news reports only. The political tension articles were mainly about how the conflict had created tensions between Russia and the West, especially the U.S. For example, the NYT wrote on August 15 that according to U.S. officials Russia’s military offensive into Georgia had “jolted the Bush administration’s relationship with Moscow” and that the war had forced them to do “a wholesale reassessment of American dealings with Russia” (NYT 15.08.2008g).

Another example from the NYT shows how the focus was put on diplomacy and political confrontation:

Russia Vows to Support Two Enclaves, in Retort to Bush Russia issued a rebuke to President Bush on Thursday over the conflict in neighboring Georgia, refusing an immediate withdrawal of its troops there, affirming its support for two separatist enclaves and warning the United States to avoid doing anything that would encourage its Georgian ally to reignite hostilities (NYT 15.08.2008e).

The European Union was described as hesitating over how it should react to the conflict. As the NYT wrote:
Europeans agree that Russia overreacted to Georgia's assault [...] But Europeans disagree on what to do about it, with little obvious leverage on Russia, especially on the ground in the Caucasus (11.08.2008b).

The political tension was often seen in wider terms, not only as a reaction to the war in Georgia but a question of what the West should do about an increasingly aggressive Russia. The lead of a NYT story from August 12 is an example of how the conflict was framed as a sign of Russia’s "resurgence" and the lack of a Western response:

*Vladimir V. Putin, who came to office brooding over the wounds of a humiliated Russia, this week offered proof of its resurgence. So far, the West has been unable to check his thrust into Georgia.*

Similarly, when The Washington Post reported about the U.S. decision to cut a space cooperation program with Russia – a step that was seen as one of the first political "casualties" of the Russia-Georgia war – then a U.S. official explained the decision not as a reaction to the war but as a result of the uncertainty created by "an increasingly aggressive Russia, where the prime minister is acting more and more like a czar (WP 15.08.2008b).

The political tension articles were thus constructing a West vs Russia confrontation, where Russia was looked at as a suspicious opponent or even a villain. In this connection references to the Cold War were made frequently, often in citations of U.S. officials like Secretary State Condoleezza Rice:

*Speaking with reporters on the plane to Brussels, Ms. Rice turned up the verbal temperature on Russia, accusing Moscow of bullying its neighbors with its far superior military and reverting to its cold war behavior, "using the one tool that it has always used when it wished to deliver a message" (NYT 19.08.2008).*

Defining the war as a sign of growing West vs Russia tension was beneficial to the Georgian side, because the confrontational framing created doubts about Russia. By positioning Russia as the opponent, its message was discredited in the U.S. press. Georgia, who had clearly positioned itself with the West, found its message a lot easier to communicate. In the newspapers it was often referred as a "close ally of the U.S." (NYT 23.08.2008c).

Coming to the other half of the newspaper articles that contained the problem definitions from the press releases, the following trends can be pointed out.

The battle action and ceasefire violations frames, which were promoted the most in the press releases, were also widely used by the newspapers. Battle action that had been pushed especially by the Georgian side, was the second most common problem definition in the articles. The results also show that the responsibility for the actions was mostly attributed to Russia. It was Russia's battle action that was seen as the problem.
Illustration 3 shows the frequencies of different problem definitions and whether the article portrayed Georgia or Russia as responsible for the problem. A clear majority of the articles focusing on battle action showed Russia as responsible. The headline and lead from a Washington Post article illustrate this:

**Russia Pushes Into Georgia; In Undisputed Area, Troops Seize Town and Military Base.** Russia escalated its war in Georgia again Monday, sending troops and tanks out of friendly separatist enclaves to stage the first major invasion of undisputed Georgian territory (WP 12.08.2008c).

The ceasefire violations problem appeared in 19% of the articles and all of them showed Russia as responsible. This means that whenever the ceasefire violations were written about, the focus was on how the Russians were breaching the ceasefire agreement and not keeping their promises. For example, The Washington Post wrote on August 19:

**No Sign of a Russian Departure** in Georgia; Moscow Officials Say Troops Are Pulling Out, but Forces Appear Firmly Planted in Many Cities. Russian troops remained camped out Monday in a Georgian military base in this western city and in a nearby house said to be the Georgian president's vacation retreat, showing no sign of leaving on what Moscow called Day One of a pullout from Georgia (WP 19.08.2008).

Although in its press releases Russia blamed Georgia for breaching the ceasefire and not pulling back its troops, this did not come out in the news. The war crimes and the humanitarian crises problem that Russia
and Georgia had promoted to a lesser extent in their press releases appeared in less than 10% of the articles. However, Russia received a bad image here as well. In the war crimes frame the stories reported acts of looting and marauding that were taking place in the conflict regions, and some reports of killing on ethnic lines. Illustration 3 shows that the Russian side was mostly seen responsible, as in an article in the edition of Washington Post on August 24 that had the following lead:

*Georgian civilians captured and recently freed by Russian and South Ossetian forces on Saturday described beatings, forced labor and miserable living conditions in prison.*

The responsibility was not always attributed to the Russian Army, but to Ossetian militiamen operating behind the backs of Russian units. However, as the Ossetians were allied with the Russians, they can be seen as sharing the responsibility.

In conclusion, Georgia was much more successful in promoting its problem definition than Russia.

Finally, there was a number of problem definitions that did not categorise under any of the above mentioned frames. These were coded in the category "Other". This included some themes that recurred for several times, like, for example, the U.S. presidential elections. But on the whole, the frames in the "Other" category were not used consistently and they were too insignificant to be brought out separately.

### 6.2.2. Causal implications in newspaper articles

In their PR both Georgia and Russia put a lot of emphasis on depicting the other side as unreliable, unlawful or deceitful, implying that this was the cause behind the opponent’s aggression. The coding of the newspaper articles showed, however, that only Georgia benefitted from this frame function. A third of the articles described Russia as deceitful or unreliable. The Russians were portrayed as either breaking their promises or making statements that contradicted what reporters had seen on the ground. As in this Washington Post article from August 13:

*Even after Medvedev announced an end to operations, Russia continued to bomb the almost completely abandoned city of Gori, which led to the deaths of civilians, including a Dutch journalist (WP 13.08.2008).*

Georgia was described so only in a few cases.
Second, Georgia promoted the Russian occupation frame which explained Russia's actions by its plan to occupy Georgia and change its democratic regime. This cause was mentioned in 25% of the news reports of the NYT and the WP. The strength of this frame was characterised by the fact that it did not appear only in the statements of Georgian officials, but journalists brought it up in their own words. For example, in a New York Times article the reporter listed Russia's actions and then added:

_The ultimate goal, it seems, is the ouster of its president, Mikheil Saakashvili, who is detested by the Russian leadership, and the installation of a government that it considers less hostile_ (NYT 23.08.2008c).

The frame was also supported by U.S. experts and officials such as Richard C. Holbrooke, the former American ambassador to the United Nations, who said clearly that Russia's goal was "to overthrow Saakashvili" (NYT 10.08.2008).

The Russians side responded by promoting its frame that described the Georgian president as aggressive and hotheaded, implying that this was the cause behind the conflict. However, this theme was mentioned in 14% of the articles, which means that it received much less support than the Georgian frame.

A comparison of the frequencies of the Georgian and Russian frames in the press releases and the news reports shows an interesting trend that is depicted on Table 1. The frame promoted by Georgia was in the news more frequently than it appeared the press releases. At the same time the frame that Russia included in 41% of its press releases received a much smaller emphasis in the news. Therefore, the results indicate a
tendency for the newspapers to accept and support the Georgian framing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% in press releases</th>
<th>% in newspaper articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russian occupation frame</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Georgia frame</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Causal framing functions in press releases and news articles (n=146)*

It follows from the comparison of the causal framing functions that Georgia was more successful in promoting its framing which portrayed the Russian side as deceitful and trying to bring down the Georgian government.

### 6.2.3. What should be done?

The treatment recommendation framing function was not that common in the news, appearing in a quarter of the news reports. However, the results again show that the newspapers’ framing supported the Georgian side.

In those articles that did include a treatment recommendation, the most common theme was to suggest that Russia should withdraw its troops. As shown on Illustration 5, this frame appeared in 16% of the articles. Georgia emphasized this theme in only three per cent of its press releases, which does not explain why the frame appeared so often in the news reports.

Moreover, in a fifth of its press releases the Russian government had demanded that Georgia withdraw its troops from South Ossetia but this theme was almost non-existent in the news. There was only one case when a Georgian withdrawal was asked for. Again, Georgia benefitted from how the newspapers framed the conflict.
6.2.4. Use of sources

By and large, the articles cited the Georgian and Russian sources quite evenly. However, Russian sources did get mentioned slightly more often, 53% of the stories cited Russian officials as opposed to the 46% that cited Georgians. This is an unexpected result considering that the newspapers generally supported the Georgian framing. However, the greater number of Russian sources can be seen in connection to the media's tendency to focus on the Russia-U.S. relations in the conflict. This will be explained in the discussion chapter.
6.3. Conclusion

Table 2 sums up the main results of the framing analysis. Each column presents the particular framing function that either Georgia or Russia promoted in their press releases, and the frequency of that framing function in the NYT’s and WP’s coverage in August 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Georgian framing</strong></td>
<td>Battle action 22%</td>
<td>Russia 56%</td>
<td>Russia is deceitful 34%</td>
<td>Russian occupation 25%</td>
<td>Russian should withdraw 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Russian framing</strong></td>
<td>Ceasefire violations 19%</td>
<td>Georgia 0%</td>
<td>Georgia is deceitful 3%</td>
<td>Georgia is violent 14%</td>
<td>Georgia should withdraw 1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Georgian and Russian PR framing functions in the news (% of total amount of articles)

It is evident from the data that Georgia’s framing functions always appeared more often in the news. When Georgia promoted battle action as the problem, this appeared in 22% of the articles and in more than half of them Russia was seen as responsible for the action. When Russia promoted the ceasefire violations frame, this appeared in 19% articles and all of those articles attributed the responsibility to Russia. This makes it clear that Georgia’s framing was much more reflected in The New York Times’ and The Washington Post’s coverage.

This was partly because the Georgians were more focused in their communication, reporting the facts about what the Russian army was doing in Georgia. But this was also due to a general supportive attitude towards Georgia in the media. The fact the Georgian causal frame was amplified by the media while the Russian one was weakened by it, indicates this.

However, as the PR-promoted frames resonated with a half of the media articles, their influence was limited. The other half consisted of a number of frames outside the paradigm of the press releases. The journalists either created these frames themselves or they were promoted by other actors, such as U.S. officials and experts, to whom the journalists turned for comments.
7. Discussion

Journalists have described the situation on the media field in August 2008 as a "vacuum" (Wilby 2008) where Georgia stepped in with its "skillfully presented PR". According to this picture the reporters and editors did not know anything about Georgia nor understood what was going in the war. When they were given a story of "Big bad Russia against plucky little Georgia" by Georgia's "PR men", the media accepted this with little criticism (Traynor 2008). Because of the PR the news media, that would have otherwise been entirely objective and balanced in covering the war, became pro-Georgian. Or so it has been suggested.

However, the results of this study show that such an explanation may overestimate the role of PR in the war. The results indicate that Georgia's information campaign did not have the might that the journalists attributed to it. First, in the interviews the people conducting the information campaign did not give their job that value of creating the West's support for Georgia. They stressed that large international news organisations were too independent to rely on information provided by the Georgian government only and let themselves influenced by its PR. They pointed out that the Western sympathy for Georgia was the result of a combination of factors, including Russia's obviously disproportionate use of force.

One may say that the consultants' assessment is not objective but there is no reason why they should have downplayed the importance of their own work.

Second, the framing analysis of the war coverage in The New York Times and The Washington Post showed that although Georgia was generally more successful in promoting its framing, the media coverage was not dominated by it like the journalists have claimed. Instead, in half of the newspaper articles that were studied the journalists used frames that did not appear at all in the Georgian press releases.

Does this mean that Georgia did not win the PR war? It depends on how we define the terms for winning. If we mean that the pro-Georgian sentiment in the media during the war was entirely masterminded by Georgia's "PR-men", then this study does not produce evidence to support that claim.

However, there is another, more nuanced way of explaining the PR war and Georgia's role in it. This grows out of one main finding of the framing analysis, which was that the newspapers widely framed the war as a political problem. The war was seen as creating tensions between Russia and the West, especially the U.S. It can be argued that this was actually positive from Georgia's viewpoint – this is explained in the following section.

7.1. U.S. foreign policy and the war coverage in the press

Research has shown that the foreign policy of a country plays a great role in shaping how its national media cover foreign conflicts. The foreign policy orientation not only defines the degree of attention that the
media give to an issue, but also the angle from which the media cover it (Riegert 2010, pp.204-205).

In its foreign policy the U.S. had been actively supporting Georgia before the war and President Bush, who had developed a personal friendship with the Georgian president, was strongly advocating for Georgia's NATO membership. When war broke out in 2008, Georgia had strong political backing in the Bush administration and U.S. officials – with President Bush in the lead – voiced clear support to Georgia in their statements during the war. At the same time Russia's actions were strongly condemned.

This study shows that when The New York Times and The Washington Post wrote about the war, they put an emphasis on the diplomatic relations around the conflict. These were marked by the frequently used political tension frame. By focusing on the political discourse, the newspapers were likely to reflect the Bush administration's support for Georgia. This meant that even when the news items did not have the same framing as the Georgian press releases, they still supported Georgia.

That the U.S. newspapers were likely to cover the war according to their administration's view was one of the presumptions of this thesis. Drawing on theories of indexing and national news values, it was hypothesized that the U.S. media reflected the country's leadership's view of the Georgia-Russia conflict. This was precisely the case. As President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary of State Rice, and even presidential candidates Obama and McCain voiced their support for Georgia during the war, a pro-Georgian consensus formed among the U.S. political elite. The media reflected that consensus.

What also came out in the framing analysis was that the U.S. press interpreted the political tensions as a sign of new Russia versus West confrontation that was reminiscent of the Cold War era. The same interpretative frame was found by Nitsch and Lichtenstein in the war coverage of the European press (Nitsch & Lichtenstein). The media's tendency to frame the conflict as a return to the Cold War indicates an attempt to "nationalise" the conflict and pick an angle that conforms to national news values.

The theory of national news posits that foreign news are reported according to national interests and the political, cultural and geographical proximity of an issue (Riegert 2010, p.202). Although the Russia-Georgia conflict was politically close to the leadership (due to president Bush's personal engagement), it was geographically and culturally far for the U.S. newspaper reader. One way to bring it closer and to "nationalise" it was to ask what implications does the war have on U.S. national interests. The answer was found in the Cold War reference. According to it, the war was a sign of Russia's come back as a global player and this posed a potential danger to the U.S. The prospect of getting into a new Cold War-style confrontation with Russia made the conflict much more relevant from an American national prism.

This also explains another finding of the framing analysis which was that Russian sources were cited more than Georgian ones. It is understandable that in those articles where the press focused on the tensions

---

16 Nitsch and Lichtenstein's study showed that the same trend appeared in European media: Russian sources appeared more
between the U.S. and Russia, the journalists were more likely to turn to Russian sources for comments. In that context the Georgian sources were actually irrelevant. As a quarter of the articles focused on the political tensions, this increased the amount of Russian sources appearing in the texts.

However, the most important point here is that seeing the conflict in a West vs Russia frame was in Georgia’s interests. The country only gained from such an interpretation because in its public relations lexicon Georgia promoted the same confrontation. In an article written during the war the Georgian president aligned his country along with the West and portrayed Russia as as a villain who acts against Western rules and values:

*Russia’s invasion of Georgia strikes at the heart of Western values and our 21st-century system of security. If the international community allows Russia to crush our democratic, independent state, it will be giving carte blanche to authoritarian governments everywhere. Russia intends to destroy not just a country but an idea.* (Saakashvili 2008a)

As the U.S. newspapers interpreted the war as a sign of Russia's rising aggressiveness and a possible return of the Cold War era, this was in direct support of Georgia's framing.

It can therefore be said that the media coverage in the U.S. newspapers supported Georgia even when it did not reflect exactly the same frames that could be found in the government’s press releases. In that sense the country can be declared a winner of the PR war, or what could be described more precisely as a battle for the support of the U.S. press. Georgia received mostly supportive coverage in the leading U.S. newspapers while Russia’s actions were widely condemned.

However, as the supportive coverage was partly an outcome of the pro-Georgian political consensus, Georgia’s victory cannot be attributed to its information campaign only. Some of the premises for winning the PR war were created much earlier than the summer of 2008. They lie in the close political ties that the Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili had established with the U.S. leadership already years before the war. By developing a personal friendship with George W. Bush and by lobbying U.S. government officials, Georgia ensured a political backing that proved to be of existential value in the war. Without the U.S. leadership's active engagement in Georgia's affairs, the media may have payed less attention and the angle of the coverage may have been different.

7.2. The importance of Georgia's pre-war campaign

Even if Georgia’s information campaign cannot be given the credit for creating the U.S. political support, it accounted for the half of the articles that did reflect the PR frames. The framing analysis proved that among those news items the Georgian framing was largely supported.
What was extremely important in this regard was the pre-war information campaign that helped position Georgia as a friend of the West. The role of the work that was done with the foreign media before the war was stressed by the interviewees as well. They described two achievements: first, about 20 journalists had developed close contacts with the Georgian government and when the war broke out they could be recruited as Georgia’s PR agents; second, a number of articles published in prestigious European and U.S. newspapers could be used for background information while briefing new reporters during the war.

These two practical outcomes point to a much wider sense of how the premises for Georgia’s victory of the PR war were created. Georgia’s PR campaign before the war that was launched by Aspect Consulting was directed towards positioning Georgia as a member of the Western world and showing how it had adopted Western values. Georgia was "embracing the Western paradigm" (Smith 2009, p.123) and emphasizing its "cultural commonalities with Europe" (O’Connor 2008). This was crucial in that it helped build a legitimacy for Georgia in the eyes of Westerners. As Georgia promoted its Western course and aligned itself with Western values, it earned the acceptance of Western audiences and ensured that, once the war broke out, it would be listened to and taken seriously.

This created the basis for the support and the sympathy for Georgia that emerged during the war. Without this previous opinion forming more people would have been completely ignorant about Georgia and could have asked why they should care about a small country on the other side of the globe who was struggling with its neighbor.

The Georgian consultants’ assertion that they were telling the truth during the war can be seen in this light. The fact that they saw it as their function merely to report the facts, “to show it as it was”, to tell the truth, indicates that they knew they had the credibility needed to access the Western discourse. They knew that the West would rather accept Georgia’s message and put it in the context of Russia’s aggression. A great part of the frame-building that described Russia’s policy of provocations towards Georgia had already been done before the war. Describing Russia’s actions with the terms "creeping annexation" and "passportization", these became the building blocks with which the definition of the war was constructed. When fighting broke out in South Ossetia, it was just a question of "filling" the frames and corroborating them with evidence. This was exactly that the Georgians did by reporting the facts from the battlefield.

The pre-war information campaign also meant that a small group of reporters – those who were covering Georgia already before the war – had been given the frames and the terms of the discourse in which the conflict would be made sense of. On August 7 they already knew the background and what was at stake for the Georgians, so in the coverage they produced they would put out the Georgian message. As it was described in the interviews this also had very practical outcomes – the well-informed reporters helped brief their colleagues who had no knowledge of the conflict.
7.3. Media's needs turned to Georgia's advantage

The success of Georgia's framing in the newspaper articles indicates that Georgia's media management during the war played an important role. The media centre established in Tbilisi, the SMS and e-mail streams with continuous updates of battle information, President Saakashvili's TV interviews, and other efforts helped create the support and sympathy to the Georgians during the war.

What is central to those media activities is how skilfully the Georgian side anticipated the journalists's needs and turned them into Georgia's advantage. One interviewee also hinted at this when, being asked why he thought the journalists wrote that Georgia had won the PR war, he replied "Because we gave them what we wanted."

The Georgian team was very clever in taking into account the psychic needs and professional requirements of the journalists who had come to cover the war. War correspondents operate in a stressful environment shaped by institutional constraints, newsroom routines and the specifics of having to work in a conflict region (Riegert 1998, pp.47-48). One of the most difficult tasks for the correspondent is to be "parachuted" to a conflict, i.e. being sent to a conflict on a very short notice. Without a network of local contacts and proper background knowledge, it can be extremely difficult for the correspondent to quickly make sense of the situation and start writing meaningful stories to the editorial office back home.

This was especially apparent in Georgia. Not only had the conflict caught everybody by surprise, it also broke out on the opening day of the Olympic Games in Beijing, and it was the middle of a holiday season. This made it difficult for news organisations to find qualified people to send to Georgia. The interviewees' accounts of completely inexperienced journalists in Georgia indicates that the complications that normally accompany the work of foreign correspondents were especially acute in the 2008 war.

As the inexperienced journalists were "parachuted" to Tbilisi, they were in a situation where they knew nothing about Georgia, had no background information about the conflict, could not speak the local language and had no idea of which sources to turn to. Moreover, the Georgian and Russian sides' contradictory statements had created a general confusion about what was going on, as journalists have described (Williams 2008). In this situation, for a reporter who had a deadline to meet, the Georgian media team's help was practically a lifesaver. From the media centre the reporter could quickly get the basics: an overview of the situation, background information, potential story leads and phone numbers of sources who would give the necessary comments. And the journalist could do his job.

It was not unimportant that the media centre in Tbilisi was run by Patrik Worms who, being a foreigner himself, could enjoy greater credibility with the correspondents than the Georgian officials. Moreover, as Worms was fluent in English, French and German, he could present the story according to the national news values of the country that each reporter was coming from.
For the more experienced war correspondents the Georgian side offered complete freedom to move around, transport if needed, and easy access to sources – the main professional requirements for every journalist (Manheim 2011, pp.28-29). At the same time, the Russians provided extremely limited access to the regions under their control (Tavernise 2008) journalists could only go on media tours organised by Russian officials and even then the media’s view was restricted (Rodgers 2008).

In addition to anticipating the requirements of the reporters in Georgia, the Georgian team also addressed the needs of the 24-hour news cycle. By setting up a stream of SMS and e-mail battle reports the Georgians helped satisfy the media’s constant need for new information and story updates. The Georgian side provided facts about what had happened, written in concise and journalistic language that the media could easily cite and use. At the same time the Russians were making empty statements that lacked similar practical value. Russia offered a "smorgasbord of "varied and contradictory" explanations for what it was doing" (Goble 2009, p.192).

Finally, the Georgians' anticipating and prioritizing of media needs was shown by president Saakashvili himself who took the time to give media interviews even when the battle with Russia was being fought. The journalists acknowledged this. As Jon Williams of the BBC wrote, "For the BBC to have access to someone so influential, as a key moment, is of course vital to our storytelling" (Williams 2008).

The conclusion is that as the Georgian side rightly anticipated the "routines and rhythms" (Manheim 2011, p. 29) of news organisations and the professional requirements of journalists, it laid the foundations for the supportive coverage it would get. The media reported the Georgian version of events at least partly because it was so much easier to get information from Georgia than Russia. This conforms with Manheim’s theory of how actors maximise their access to media in information and influence campaigns. Drawing on that theory it was hypothesized that the Georgians would make an attempt to proactively engage with the media. The results confirm the hypothesis.
8. Conclusion

This study grew out of a scholarly interest towards what journalists called a PR war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008. The aim was to find out how the Georgians managed the media and whether any evidence could be found to support the claim of Georgia’s victory in the PR war.

Through a description of the media management techniques and a study of the eventual media coverage the study has produced evidence that Georgia’s information campaign did help create supportive coverage in the U.S. press. This was done by rightly anticipating the conditions of the media environment and by serving the needs of the journalists who were covering the conflict.

This proves that a small country like Georgia can turn the media’s interest to its advantage by trying to meet the journalists’ needs and proactively provide them with information. Availability of quickly processable facts about events, accessibility to sources and a general openness to public scrutiny are crucial factors that facilitate the media’s work and give an actor greater access to media. This is the lesson that the Georgian government learned. Other small countries, like the Baltics, who are confronted with Russian disinformation campaigns should take notice of Georgia’s experience.

On the other hand the study has shown that a public relations or an information campaign’s effects are limited. The journalists who wrote that Georgia won the PR war overestimated its impact when they stated that the Georgian PR stepped into a Western media "vacuum" and filled it with a pro-Georgian framing. Information campaigns do not take place in a vacuum but in a wider political context. This is especially important when a campaign involves influencing the foreign media who follow their government’s position. In Georgia’s case the U.S. government’s support played a crucial role; without it the Georgian government’s messages would have resonated to a much smaller extent with the U.S. media.

The conditions on the ground supported the Georgian side as well. Had the Russian troops not committed obvious violations of agreements and not acted against its own words, the Georgians would have found it more difficult to communicate their story.

The bottom line is, therefore, that the effects of Georgia’s information campaign should be seen in combination with the government’s other political and diplomatic efforts before and during the war.

The study was exploratory in regard to how this issue can be studied in a scholarly way. As with any social phenomenon there is a question of how it can be delimited and operationalised for an empirical study. The PR war is a phenomenon that can not be directly observed. It is not like in conventional military battle where casualties or enemy damage can be calculated in exact numbers. Neither was it possible to observe the work of the Georgian and Russian media consultants and the American journalists and judge exactly to what extent their work had mutual influence – almost three years have passed since the war during the
Therefore the study was carried out as a textual analysis of press releases and newspaper articles; and they were used to make inferences about the effectiveness of the media management work. The framing analysis approach and content analysis method provided the necessary methodological framework. The framing analysis method proved suitable as it allowed the different realities constructed in the PR texts and the newspaper articles to be compared with one another.

A textual analysis does not provide answers in the form of causal explanations. It does not say that the journalists – or their readers – were automatically affected by the PR framing. However, in this case the inferences made on the basis of the framing analysis combined with the interviews provide the best possible explanation to the Georgia-Russia PR war.

The limitations and simplifications done in this study point out areas that need more research. Future research should investigate how the PR war proceeded after August 2008 and study the widely held belief that in the later stages Georgia lost the PR war.

Also, this study has looked at the war coverage in the U.S. press. Research that would compare the coverage in various countries – for example U.S., Germany and France – would make an important contribution to understanding exactly how important the political orientation was in defining the framing. For example, the German leaders' initial position was much less supportive of Georgia when the war broke out.

How the Georgians and Russians handled their domestic media ought to be studied as well. How is it possible that Russia's actions that received much criticism abroad, were almost not questioned at home?

The Georgia-Russia war definitely provides material for more studies to be written about it.
Bibliography


Halpin, T. & Boyes, R., 2008. Georgia loses the fight with Russia, but manages to win the PR war. *The Times*. Available at: [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article4518254.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article4518254.ece) [Accessed March 10, 2011].


Nitsch, C. & Lichtenstein, D., unpublished. The public discourse on the Georgian war in Russia and Europe: a content analysis of the coverage in traditional print and emerging online media. unpublished.

O’Connor, C., 2008. Georgia in comms push to build links with the EU. PR Week.


Appendix 1 – Coding scheme

Problem definition

1. What is the main problem according to the article?
   1. Battle action
   2. War crimes
   3. Ceasefire violations
   4. Humanitarian crisis
   5. Political tension
   6. No problem defined
   0. Other

2. To whom does the article attribute responsibility for the problem?
   1. Georgia
   2. Russia
   3. both
   4. neither

Causal frames

3. Are the parties being described as unlawful, unreliable or deceitful?
   1. Georgia is described so
   2. Russia is described so
   3. both
   4. neither

Georgian cause

4. Are there any mentions of Russia’s aim being to occupy Georgia; to overthrow the Georgian government; to ruin Georgia’s plan to join NATO and to bring down Georgian economy?
   1. yes
   2. no

Russian cause

5. Is the Georgian leadership described as nationalist, hotheaded or aggressive; tempted to solve conflicts by force?
   1. yes
   2. no

Treatment recommendation

6. What does the article suggest that should be done?
   1. Georgia should withdraw its troops
   2. Russia should withdraw its troops
   3. Both sides should stop action and withdraw troops
   4. No solution suggested

Sources

7. Does the article cite Georgian officials?
   1. Cites directly
   2. Cites indirectly
   3. Doesn’t cite
8. Does the article cite Russian, South Ossetian or Abkhazian officials?
   1. Cites directly
   2. Cites indirectly
   3. Doesn’t cite
## Appendix 2 – Origins of coding categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framing function</th>
<th>The framing function in the press releases</th>
<th>Coding category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem</td>
<td><strong>Russia is escalating the conflict</strong></td>
<td><strong>Battle action</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia is bombing or destroying Georgian civilian infrastructure (Poti Port, Gori city centre, other Georgian cities, hospitals and ambulances; blocking highways and roads, blowing up bridges)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia is destroying Georgian military infrastructure (army bases, and/or stealing military equipment)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentions of economic warfare and transport blockade, destruction of Georgian economy (bombing foreign-owned businesses, bombing the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, blocking transport on roads)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentions of a cyber attacks on Georgian websites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentions of Russian military actions outside the conflict zones, inside the Georgian border</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reports of human rights violations (ethnic cleansing, massacring, executing of Georgians; forcing Georgians to leave their homes) committed by Russians or the separatist forces</td>
<td><strong>War crimes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentions of crimes (looting Georgian villages, robbing homes and shops, causing environmental damage)</td>
<td><strong>War crimes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia used cluster bombs and incendiary munitions banned by international convention</td>
<td><strong>War crimes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia is continuing attacks despite ceasefire agreement and Georgia’s withdrawal of troops – violating the ceasefire agreement</td>
<td><strong>Ceasefire violations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian military actions outside the conflict zones, inside the Georgian border</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reports of human rights violations (ethnic cleansing, massacring, executing of Georgians; forcing Georgians to leave their homes) committed by Russians or the separatist forces</td>
<td><strong>War crimes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentions of crimes (looting Georgian villages, robbing homes and shops, causing environmental damage)</td>
<td><strong>War crimes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia used cluster bombs and incendiary munitions banned by international convention</td>
<td><strong>War crimes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia is continuing attacks despite ceasefire agreement and Georgia’s withdrawal of troops – violating the ceasefire agreement</td>
<td><strong>Ceasefire violations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia delays withdrawal of its troops</td>
<td><strong>Battle action</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Geo has attacked South Ossetian civilian population</td>
<td><strong>Battle action</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Geo has attacked Russian peacekeepers</td>
<td><strong>Battle action</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgia committed genocide and ethnic cleansing against Ossetian people</td>
<td><strong>War crimes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>War crimes by the Georgian army (such as shooting Russian wounded dead and opening fire on humanitarian convoys)</td>
<td><strong>War crimes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgia is reluctant to sign ceasefire agreement</td>
<td><strong>Ceasefire violations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgian army is not withdrawing from the conflict zone as it has promised</td>
<td><strong>Ceasefire violations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause</td>
<td>Russia is continuing attacks despite the ceasefire agreement and Georgia's withdrawal of troops – is violating the ceasefire agreement</td>
<td>The opponent is unlawful, unreliable, deceitful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mentions of Russian disinformation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia delays withdrawal of its troops</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia’s actions are connected with historical conflicts (e.g. Russia in Chechnya and Afghanistan; Iraq in Kuwait; the Nazi regime in Czechoslovakia)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia’s aim is to occupy entire Georgia and to overthrow the Georgian government with president Saakashvili</td>
<td>Russia’s aim is to occupy Georgia and overthrow the government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia wants to thwart Georgia’s plan to join NATO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian forces are occupying Georgia – as well as other references to “Russian occupation” and Russian forces being called “occupation forces”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgian army is not withdrawing from the conflict zone as it has promised</td>
<td>The opponent is unlawful, unreliable, deceitful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Georgian leadership’s policy has failed, it cannot be trusted (it has absurd demands, unhealthy ambitions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgia is reluctant to sign ceasefire agreement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Geo resorted to violence despite Russia's diplomatic efforts for a peaceful solution</td>
<td>The Georgian government is aggressive and violent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgia had long been preparing an attack against Ossetian people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgia has breached ceasefire agreements and denied signing a non-use-of-force agreement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgia has received military support from the US, which encouraged it to use force</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgia has used force on separatists before</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatme</td>
<td>Georgia should withdraw its troops</td>
<td>Georgia should</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nt</td>
<td>Georgia should sign a non-use of force agreement</td>
<td>withdraw troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia should withdraw troops</td>
<td>Russia should withdraw troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The international community should stop Russia</td>
<td>The international community should intervene</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3 – Article list

Articles published in The New York Times (n=81)

09-08-2008a Georgian Troops Enter Breakaway Enclave in Region's Fiercest Fighting in Years
09-08-2008b Global Politics Add Oxygen to a Smoldering Dispute
09-08-2008c Russia and Georgia Clash Over Breakaway Region
10-08-2008a Candidates' Reactions to Georgia Conflict Offer Hints at Style on Foreign Affairs
10-08-2008b 1,500 Reported Killed in Georgia Battle
10-08-2008c Russia Broadens Military Campaign as All-Out War Threatens Georgia
11-08-2008a Bitter Refrain Amid Retreat: Where Is U.S.?
11-08-2008b RUSSIANS PUSH PAST SEPARATIST REGION TO ASSAULT CITY IN CENTRAL GEORGIA
12-08-2008a Calling Shots, Putin Salves Old Wounds
12-08-2008b 1,500 Reported Killed in Georgia Battle
12-08-2008c Russia Steps Up Its Push; West Faces Tough Choices Bush Faults Advance Into Georgia - NATO to Meet
12-08-2008d Russian Forces Capture Military Base in Georgia
12-08-2008e For a President With a Pendent for Flourishes, a Rebuke in the Boom of Artillery
12-08-2008f Sons Missing in Action, If Indeed They Found It
13-08-2008a After Mixed Messages and Unheeded Warnings From the U.S., a Conflict Erupts
13-08-2008b Russians Give a Guarded Tour of a Capital
13-08-2008c Packed in Dreary Rooms, Refugees Dream of Home
13-08-2008d RUSSIA, IN ACCORD WITH GEORGIANS, SETS WITHDRAWAL
13-08-2008e Bush Sending Aid to Georgia
13-08-2008f After Mixed Messages and Unheeded Warnings From the U.S., a Conflict Erupts
14-08-2008a Rejuvenated Georgian President Cites U.S. Ties as 'Turning Point' in Conflict
14-08-2008b Russia, in Accord With Georgians, Sets Withdrawal
14-08-2008c Russian Soldiers Occupying Stalin's Birth City Are Buoyed by Battle With Georgia
14-08-2008d A French-Brokered Peace Offers Russia a Rationale to Advance
14-08-2008e Russian Forces Capture Military Base in Georgia
14-08-2008f Conflict Narrows Oil Options For West
14-08-2008g Georgia Files Suit Against Russia, Charging Racial Discrimination
14-08-2008h U.S. AND POLAND SET MISSILE DEAL
14-08-2008i Georgia Files Suit Against Russia, Charging Racial Discrimination
15-08-2008a After Days Of Fighting, Cooperation Is Strained
15-08-2008b U.S. AND POLAND SET MISSILE DEAL
15-08-2008c Voters Select New President As Tensions Mount
15-08-2008d Signs of Ethnic Attacks in Georgia Conflict
15-08-2008e Russia Vows to Support Two Enclaves, in Retort to Bush
15-08-2008f Russia Lashes Back on Missile Deal
15-08-2008g AIDES TO BUSH SAY RUSSIA OFFENSIVE JEOPARDIZES TIES
16-08-2008a For Russian Armor, Even With Rice in Georgia, Cease-Fire Is Not a Red Light
16-08-2008b Rice Presses for Pullout as Georgia Signs Cease-Fire
16-08-2008c In GEORGIA, CALLS ON RUSSIA TO PULL OUT NOW
17-08-2008a Russians Melded Old-School Blitz With Modern Military Tactics
17-08-2008b Belarus Frees Opposition Politician From Prison
17-08-2008c KREMLIN AGREES ON TRUCE TERMS WITH GEORGIANS
17-08-2008d In Battered Villages, Georgians Tell of Looting and Worse, if They Dare to Speak
18-08-2008a Bush, Sending Aid, Demands Moscow Pull Out For Good
18-08-2008b Georgian Crisis Brings Attitude Change to a Flush Poland
19-08-2008a Abkhazia Wrests Gorge From Preoccupied Georgia
20-08-2008a How a Squabble Became a Showdown
20-08-2008b How a Squabble Became a Showdown
20-08-2008c How a Squabble Became a Showdown
21-08-2008a In Battered Villages, Georgians Tell of Looting and Worse, if They Dare to Speak
21-08-2008b Survivors Tell of Ethnic Killing In Wake of Fighting in Georgia
21-08-2008c Despite Yielding Ground, Russia Takes Critical Spots
22-08-2008a Georgian President Vows to Rebuild Army and Pursue Control of Enclaves
22-08-2008b Russia Sends Mixed Signs On Pullout From Georgia
22-08-2008c Georgia Prepares for Refugees; Russians Declare Pullback Finished
22-08-2008d Despite Pullout, Russia Envisions Long-Term Shift
23-08-2008a When the Tanks Work, Pulls the Bulk of Its Forces Out of Georgia
23-08-2008b Russia, Pledging To Leave Georgia, Tightens Its Grip
23-08-2008c In Battered Villages, Georgians Tell of Looting and Worse, if They Dare to Speak
23-08-2008d Russian Actions Reignite Tensions Over Strategic Port in Ukraine
23-08-2008e DESPITE PULLOUT, RUSSIA ENVISIONS LONG-TERM SHIFT
24-08-2008a In Georgia, a Claim Russia Is Making More Advances
24-08-2008b Amid Conflict in Georgia, Somber Memories for Czechs
25-08-2008c A Role for Merkel as a Bridge to Russia
26-08-2008a European Union Treads Gingerly Toward Its Next Move in Russia-Georgia Crisis
26-08-2008b Enclave Hails Tight Embrace From Moscow
26-08-2008c Georgian President Vows to Rebuild Army and Pursue Control of Enclaves
27-08-2008a RUSSIA DECLARES ITS RECOGNITION OF TWO ENCLAVES
27-08-2008b Stocks Tumble in Moscow After Russia Recognizes Separatist Regions in Georgia
27-08-2008c U.S. Killed 90 in Afghan Village, Including 60 Children, U.N. Finds
27-08-2008d Saakashvili's Statement on Russia' Action
27-08-2008e Medvedev's Statement on South Ossetia and Abkhazia
28-08-2008a Russia Adopts Blustery Tone Set by Envoy
28-08-2008b NATO Ships in Black Sea Raise Alarms in Russia
29-08-2008a Regional Security Group Takes a Neutral Stance on Russia's Actions in Georgia
29-08-2008b Russia Deal May Fall, A Casualty Of Conflict
29-08-2008c An Embattled Enclave Yearns to Be Free (and Liechtenstein)
30-08-2008 Georgia and Russia Cut Diplomatic Ties
31-08-2008 Georgia Conflict Resounds At Chess Championships

Articles published in The Washington Post (n=65)

08-08-2008 Around the World
09-08-2008 Russian Air, Ground Forces Strike Georgia;
10-08-2008a Russia-Georgia War Intensifies;
10-08-2008b In a City Upended by War, Desperation and Bravado
10-08-2008c U.S. Assails Russian 'Escalation' Of Crisis
11-08-2008a On the Streets of the Capital, a Sense of Patriotism Mingled With Defiance
11-08-2008b Georgia Retreats, Pleads for Truce; U.S. Condemns Russian Onslaught
11-08-2008c Bush, Cheney Increasingly Critical of Russia Over Aggression in Georgia
11-08-2008d An Indifferent Tourist Becomes an Enthusiastic First Fan
12-08-2008a Bush Questions Moscow's Motives
12-08-2008b Anxiety Hovers Over Tbilisi
12-08-2008c Russia Pushes Into Georgia; In Undisputed Area, Troops Seize Town and Military Base
12-08-2008d The Trail
13-08-2008a Moscow Agrees To Georgia Truce; Russian Attacks Continue After Statement
13-08-2008b Georgia's Defiant President Finds Support in Midst of War;
13-08-2008c In Apparent Truce, U.S. Sees Russian Fear of Global Reproach
13-08-2008d In Pa., Looking Out for No. 2; McCain Mum as Possible Running Mates Campaign With Him
13-08-2008e On Georgia Crisis, McCain's town grows sharper
13-08-2008f In Russia, Nationalist Pride Prevails
14-08-2008a Conflict Makes Clear Who Rules in Russia
14-08-2008b A Convoy Heads for Gori
14-08-2008c Despite Truce
14-08-2008d After Warnings to Moscow
15-08-2008a Russians Leave, Then Return
15-08-2008b Discord With Russia a Worry for NASA
16-08-2008a Medvedev Defiant on Response
17-08-2008a Russia Leaves Troops in Georgia
17-08-2008b Politics
17-08-2008c A Two-Sided Descent
17-08-2008d For South Ossetians, Bitterness Follows Attacks
18-08-2008a Russia Vows Pullout as Troops Dig In; Occupied Georgian City Struggles With Aftermath
18-08-2008b Georgian Ex-Leader Faults Decline in Ties to Russia
18-08-2008c Bush, European Leaders Urge Quick Withdrawal From Georgia
18-08-2008d The Trail
19-08-2008a No Sign of a Russian Departure in Georgia; Moscow Officials Say Troops Are Pulling Out, but Forces A
19-08-2008b That's Entertainment -- or Is It?
20-08-2008a NATO Urges Russia To Withdraw but Will Say Little Else; Envoy Mocks the Allies' Declaration
20-08-2008b Russian Intentions Unclear; Some Troops May Stay For 'Additional Security'
20-08-2008c The Toll of the War in Georgia's North; Region's Residents Face Dwindling Supplies, Violence From So
21-08-2008a Bush Praises Georgia and Condemns Russia; Before Veterans of Foreign Wars, President Keeps Up His Ca
21-08-2008b U.S. and Poland Seal Missile Pact; Deal on Defense System Signed Despite Russian Warnings
22-08-2008a Russian Forces Show Signs of Retreat in Parts Of Georgia; Plans Announced to Strengthen Presence Ou
22-08-2008b An Orchestrated Russian Tour; Classical Concert Caps Reporters' Day Trip Through Occupied South Osse
23-08-2008 Russia Stages a Substantial Withdrawal; Georgian, Foreign Officials DisputeAssertion of Compliance
24-08-2008a In Medal Count, It's 'Haul' Britannia
24-08-2008b Georgian Civilians Tell of Miserable Conditions as War Captives
24-08-2008c Georgian Democracy A Complex Evolution
24-08-2008d Choice of Biden Fits the Reality if Not the Starry-Eyed Message
24-08-2008e Support for Each Candidate Holds Steady
25-08-2008a An Uncertain Death Toll In Georgia-Russia War
25-08-2008b Blasts in Georgia Hit Train, 2 People; Officials Blame Russian Weapons
26-08-2008a Russian Parliament Backs Regions in Georgia; Resolution Urges Recognition of Independence
26-08-2008b Georgia’s Russians Express Shame, Anger Over Moscow’s Actions
26-08-2008c Cheney To Visit Georgia Next Week; Ukraine, Azerbaijan Also on Itinerary
26-08-2008d Cindy McCain to Meet With Saakashvili on Georgia Trip; Visit Is Part of the U.N. World Food Program
27-08-2008a U.N. Finds Airstrike Killed 90 Afghans; Most of Fatalities In U.S.-Led Attack Said to Be Children
27-08-2008b Russia Says 2 Regions in Georgia Are Independent
27-08-2008c Crises Reveal Limits of Bush’s Personal Diplomacy on World Stage
27-08-2008d McCain Says Obama Is Confused About America’s Global Standing; Republican Continues To Stress Foreign
28-08-2008a U.S. Military Ship Delivers Aid to Georgia; Vessel Shifts Course, Avoids Port Where Russians Are Pos
28-08-2008b Georgia War Shows ‘Weak’ Russia, U.S. Official Says
29-08-2008a Occupation With No End in Sight; Georgians in ‘Security Zone’ Resigned to Russians’ Presence
29-08-2008b Putin Asserts Link Between U.S. Election and Georgia War
30-08-2008 Russian Offensive Hailed in Mideast
31-08-2008 Around the World
Appendix 4 – Russian PR in the South Ossetia war

In an analysis of the Russia-Georgia information war, Paul Goble has given an overview of the Russian side's message strategy and tactics.

He notes that "Russia began the information war with a great advantage with its powerful government apparatus, state-controlled media, gas-affected relations with many EU countries and the fact that the journalists who would cover the war were situated in Moscow (Goble 2009, p.186).

Russia's three main arguments were:

1) it was Georgia who had provoked the conflict and who was the aggressor;
2) Moscow had to intervene to defend its' citizens in South Ossetia;
3) the West had no basis of criticizing Russian actions because of NATO's intervention in Kosovo.

However, in communicating those messages the Russian government directed its media management activities towards the domestic media and largely neglected foreign audiences. For example, Goble notes that just before the war began, 48 journalists mostly from Russian media outlets were pre-positioned in South Ossetia to cover the war. The state-controlled media was also prepared with graphics and talking points to cover the war. Saakashvili was portrayed in the domestic media as "something between Hitler and Pinochet" (Goble 2009, p.187)

The result of all this was that the domestic audiences strongly supported the Russian government's actions but on the international media arena Russia lost the information war. According to Goble the main problem was that the Russian government kept coming up with new explanations for what was happening and why, leading people to question if anything they were saying was true (2009, p.190). They offered a "smorgasbord of "varied and contradictory" explanations for what it was doing" (2009, p.192)

Some public statements made by Russian leaders were obviously false. For example, the Russian Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov was quoted by the media as saying that "Our ground forces never crossed the border of the conflict zone," when the media reported widely that Russian troops were deep inside Georgian territory17.

According to Goble, the fierce propaganda also "backfired" on Russian officials domestically. For example, putting out a story that Israelis were involved on the Georgian side was picked up by a racist movement to promote xenophobic agendas. Furthermore, the state media channels suffered a loss of credibility as many people turned to alternative news sources on the Internet as well as – ironically – the U.S.-funded Radio Liberty (Goble 2009, p.188)

17  http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/aug/16/georgia.russia2
The most negative consequence of the Russian statements was that they actually generated more support for Saakashvili in Georgia, while the Russian's aimed a precisely the opposite (2009, p.191).

On the whole, this led the Russia analysts to the conclusion that the country had lost the information war. Even the political leadership seemed to agree. Prime minister Putin has been reported to have "congratulated" the organizers of the Western propaganda machine in a public discussion shortly after the war. "It is remarkable work! But the results are poor. And they always be because this work is dishonest and amoral," he said (2009, p.189).