

Report from the International Group of Experts investigating the possible violations of Georgian airspace and the recovered missile near Tsitelubani, Georgia, 6 August 2007

The International Group of Experts (IGE) investigating the possible violations of Georgian airspace and the recovered missile near Tsitelubani, Georgia, 6 August 2007, has developed this report. The report has been agreed upon by the IGE participants of all four nations (Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, USA)

Background

On 6 August 2007, Georgian authorities reported three violations of their airspace. During the last violation, it was reported that the violating aircraft launched a missile that impacted in a field near Tsitelubani, Georgia.

On 7 August 2007, a Joint Monitoring Team (JMT) consisting of military observers representing the Russian Federation, the Republic of North Ossetia Alania and Georgia together with an officer of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Mission conducted interviews to verify the information given by Georgian officials. The group visited the missile impact site and two observation posts in the area to interview eye witnesses. The group released a report ("The Report of the Joint Monitoring Group"). Later the OSCE released a report based on the monitoring ("Spot Report: Tsitelubani missile incident").

Georgia called for an independent international investigation and four countries responded by sending eight technical and operational experts to form the International Group of Experts (IGE). The countries were Latvia (1), Lithuania (2), Sweden (2) and the USA (3).

The work

The IGE worked from 12 to 14 August 2007. The IGE reviewed the JMT report, the OSCE report and the radar information. On 13 August, the IGE visited the missile impact site and the surveillance radar in the vicinity of Gori. The IGE inspected the debris of the missile at the Ministry of Interior. The IGE also visited the Georgian Air Force (GAF) Air Base to inspect the GAF's Su-25 aircraft. Finally, the IGE visited the Joint Forces Command to review recorded radar information of the events.

Findings

Based on the facts found by the IGE and the JMT and OSCE reports, the IGE has made the following findings:

- An unidentified aircraft flew from Russian airspace (close to the city of Stepansminda) into Georgian airspace and back again into Russian airspace three times. Every pass was conducted by a single aircraft. The first pass into Georgian airspace lasted less than a minute. The final two passes into Georgian airspace lasted significantly longer and the unidentified aircraft went deeper into Georgian airspace. These two passes took place at approximately 14.13 to 14.24 and 14.31 to 14.42 on 6 August 2007 (all times are GMT). During the last pass into Georgian airspace, the aircraft penetrated as far south as approximately N 42° 04', E 44° 15'.

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- A missile impacted in a field close to the village of Tsitelubani at N 42° 02' 12.25'', E 44° 15' 32.40''. The warhead did not explode and the missile had burn marks on the rocket motor nozzle. The IGE identified the missile as a Russian designed Kh-58 (AS-11 KILTER) anti-radiation missile.
- Several eye witnesses saw an aircraft in the area of the impact around 14.30-15.00 GMT. Some witnesses say they saw an object leaving an aircraft with a trail of smoke. Radar information of the last pass into Georgian airspace (around 14.36) indicates that an object separated from the unidentified aircraft.
- The IGE was unable to identify aircraft type or origin.
- The Georgian Air Force (GAF) does not possess aircraft equipped with or able to launch Kh-58 missiles. The GAF does not operate aircraft able to fly the profile flown by the unidentified aircraft.
- The IGE has not been able to verify statements concerning a second impact.
- The IGE has not been able to verify statements concerning a MANPAD being fired at the unidentified aircraft.

Tbilisi, Georgia, 14 August 2007