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International Large-Scale Military Exercise 'Immediate Response 2008'



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Tea Kerdzevadze, Georgia Today

The International Training "Immediate Response 2008" conducted with the joint efforts of the USA and Georgian Armed Forces was held at Vaziani Military Base on July 15-31. The mission of the training was to improve combined capabilities and strengthen regional cooperation.

The exercise involved the conduction of a combined brigade-level CPX exercise with Georgian Armed Forces to develop a common understanding of coalition staff planning procedures; combined live-fire FTX/STX to train on tactics, techniques and procedures for the conduct of coalition security and stability operations and to deploy the 21st TSC EECF and exercise limited theater opening capabilities.

In total, 1,630 servicemen participated, including representatives of the Joint Staff, Land Forces Staff, IV Brigade, the 41st and 42nd Battalions and Engineer Battalion Company from Georgia. From the USA, 1,000 military servicemen took part in the exercise including the United States Army Europe, 3rd Battalion, 25th Marine Expeditionary Unit, 1st Battalion 121 Infantry Regiment Georgian National Guard (Atlanta, Georgia) and 5045th General Support Unit. As well as Georgian and American participants, 10 servicemen each from Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Ukraine took part.

The exercise consisted of two stages. First of all, the practical and theoretical parts of the CPX exercises, situational and field trainings were held. The second stage comprised staff and command training. IV Brigade Staff participated in the first stage which underwent the training with modern computer equipment. Within the JKT Program, the I Brigade by which it streamlined decision making process, took direct participation in the planning process and elaborated the action plan. After approving the plan, the operations were carried out via computers.

Preparation for the military training "Immediate Response" started in summer 2007. Since then, planning conferences were held from time to time to discuss and arrange all kinds of issues concerning the exercises, including logistical and medical support and equipment transportation. Georgia provided 90 percent of the logistical support for the exercise with local resources, including railway, customs clearance and security issues. In the framework of the logistical support, Georgia also modernized Vaziani Military Base as well. The rest of the equipment - basic field gear, tents, power generators, logistical vehicles and two HH-60 Blackhawk medical evacuation helicopters - were shipped from the United States, Germany and Italy.

The opening ceremony of Immediate Response 2008 was held at Vaziani Military Base on July 15. The ceremony was opened accompanied with the national anthems of five countries. The Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff of the Georgian Armed Forces LTC Alexander Osepaishvili and SETAF Brigadier General William B. Garrett delivered speeches. BG Garrett stated that he welcomed the exercise Immediate Response 2008 saying it was an honor and a privilege to be in Georgia. "Over the next several weeks, we will live together, work together and train together. This is an invaluable opportunity to get to know and understand one another, to learn about different cultures and to build enduring relationships between professional militaries," said the Brigadier General. He also expressed particular gratitude towards the

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Georgian Armed Forces for the strong support not only for the exercise but also for continuing service with the American forces, allies and partners.

The training scenario envisaged a peacekeeping operation in Iraq. This training helped the IV Brigade with its preparations to be deployed in Iraq. The US Marine Corps and the American National Guard Company carried out the field operations with the IV Brigade Staff. The joint training took place on Vaziani firing ground and Vaziani airport. Settlement models were arranged on Vaziani airport where the soldiers were trained how to battle within inhabited areas. Their main purpose was to create and implement a full range of operational tasks; to set up check-points, seize settled areas, convey information, patrol, etc.

The scenario of the training was the following: the situation was held within a built-up, inhabited area. As the terrorists carried out sudden attack over the inhabitants, the Georgian and American militaries patrolled and evacuated and rescued the citizens. If any of the inhabitants were wounded the soldiers administered medical assistance and transported them to the appropriate facilities. After this the military servicemen implemented the clearance operation from the terrorists within the inhabited area.

On July 21, President Mikheil Saakashvili, Minister of Defense David Kezerashvili, the Chief of the Joint Staff of GAF Brigadier General Zaza Gogava and the Deputy Chief of JS LTC Alexander Osepaishvili attended this training and became acquainted with the joint Georgian-American training. At first, they visited the tactical operations center and command post of the US division. Then they went to Vaziani Airport to see the demonstrated training. After the end of the demonstrated exercise, the President of Georgia delivered a speech to the Georgian military servicemen who had participated in the training, saying: "The main task of Georgian officers and soldiers is training. This international exercise is a unique case as we have the possibility to hold trainings along with the representatives of the best army in the world for a month. I think that we have created a new military school in Georgia in recent years. Believe that what all of you have learned now will remain in our country and will be shared with the future generations. That is why we have to train theoretically and practically as this is a precondition of victory. The main thing is to get acquainted with independent decision-making and free thinking."

On July 28, a demonstration day for media representatives was held in the framework of the international training "Immediate Response". The event was attended by the Chief of Joint Staff of GAF Brigadier General Zaza Gogava, his deputies LTC Grigol Tatishvili and LTC Alexander Osepaishvili and Head of the US South European Forces Brigadier General William B. Garrett. The event was opened by the Officer of J-3 Operational Planning Department of Joint Forces Col. Erick Nantz who introduced the training presentation. The second stage of the exercise continued at Vaziani Airdrome where Georgian and American military servicemen carried out demonstrative training for the guests.

The scenario was set in one of the small urban areas of Iraq.

The main duty of the peacekeeping forces was to seize the terrorist who was hiding in one of the houses. The terrorist tried to escape when the coalition forces appeared but the troops did their best to detain him. After this, the platoon performed a humanitarian operation and transferred wounded people to hospital by military helicopters.

The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the USA H.E. John Tefft also attended the exercise. After the demonstrative training he outlined the importance of the training, saying: "It is in a spirit of Partnership for Peace, part of the NATO program. It was very rewarding for me to see the joint work of soldiers from different countries. The command post trainings also went successfully. Ukrainian, Azeri, Armenian and Georgian soldiers participated in the exercise jointly. I believe that the exercise fulfilled its main purpose."

Immediate Response is an annual, bilateral security cooperation exercise conducted between US and coalition partners. Approximately 1,600 military personnel consisting of US soldiers, airmen, marines and army civilian employees; and Georgian military personnel make up Task Force Immediate Response 2008. The training is designed to exercise combined interoperability, conduct combined arms live fire, conduct training on responsive medical aid in a combat environment and bilateral training with Georgian and other multinational defense forces. This is the first time that Immediate Response is conducted in Georgia. Poland and Bulgaria has commonly hosted this exercise in years past.

The SETAF Brigadier General William B. Garrett commanded the exercise from American side. We asked him for his thoughts and comments on Immediate Response.

What is the primary aim of the exercise "Immediate Response 2008"? What are the objectives of the exercise?

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We are conducting this exercise to enhance interoperability with a key coalition partner. Georgia has provided consistent support to ongoing operations in Iraq. Georgia is the third largest force contributor to Operation Iraqi Freedom and that means a lot to the United States.

What do you expect from "Immediate Response 2008"?

The combined approach – active participation from all the countries involved – provided an invaluable opportunity to learn about different cultures, and to promote understanding and cooperation between our forces and strengthen our partnerships for the future.

What benefits will this exercise bring for the Georgian Armed Forces?

The Georgian Armed Forces will gain greater tactical proficiency as well as improving their ability to work with coalition partners. But the benefits gained from this exercise are not limited to Georgian Soldiers. American, Armenian, Azeri and Ukrainian service members all benefited from this exercise. I might also point out that the Georgian 4th Infantry Brigade is scheduled to deploy to Iraq next year. The tough, realistic training provided during Immediate Response 2008 will certainly help them prepare for that deployment.

How do you estimate the preparation level of Georgian military servicemen?

The Georgian Soldiers we trained with the last few weeks from the 4th Brigade are fit, motivated, and disciplined. They are eager to learn. They interact well with their coalition partners. American soldiers are very proud to serve alongside Georgian soldiers.

As you are informed the IV Brigade is preparing to carry out peacekeeping mission in Iraq? What recommendations would you give our soldiers in this regard?

Continue to train hard for the mission in Iraq, incorporate the experiences of those who are currently serving in Iraq, and build on those things you learned during Exercise Immediate Response 08.

What obstacles do you see in the process of implementation of "Immediate Response 2008"? What is the most challenging of this exercise?

We don't see obstacles, only challenges. There were several aspects to this exercise that were critical to success; I can not name one in particular. Our Georgian counterparts really went the extra mile to accommodate this exercise and provided excellent support. They were fantastic hosts and we look forward to working with them in the future.

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