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EAST OF THE ORDER

“We Who Know That Evil Really Does Exist in the World”

By David Gamkrelidze

In recent months, President George W. Bush has been accused by many of conducting a “moral” and “intrusive” American foreign policy that fails to recognize geopolitical “realism” and unduly insists on Human Rights performance scorecards. President Bush has been criticized for calling terrorists and the regimes that support them evil, for supporting Israel in a time of its great danger, for speaking out against corrupt and tyrannical governments and for demanding political transparency, religious freedom and market-based economic reforms.

These criticisms remind many of us who for years craved freedom behind the Iron Curtain of similar accusations leveled against President Ronald Reagan when he called the Soviet tyranny by its proper name — the Evil Empire. Critics of the American President were wrong twenty years ago and they are wrong now.

Today, many countries that President Reagan helped liberate have well-established democratic systems. Others, like my country of Georgia, still struggle to secure meaningful self-governance and freedom, and remain at risk of being pulled back into oppressive authoritarian rule. This is why the post-Cold War world still badly needs a committed American determination to spread and enforce the values that President Bush has properly described as being “right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere.”

In Georgia, the collapse of the Soviet Union gave our people the opportunity to bring centuries-long hopes for freedom to life, and during the last decade seeds have been planted for a democratic future. At the same time, domestic and international enemies of democracy retain much power to impede our pursuit of a liberal polity.

Freedom in Georgia is under constant threat from leaders who do not believe in the rule of law, for whom government corruption is the primary route to personal enrichment, and who discredit values of liberty by espousing them while doing nothing to defend them. As a result, many Georgians have become disenchanted by a “democracy” they associate with nepotism, bad legislation disguised as reform, often-fraudulent voting practices and economic hard times. Uncertain about their power to shape their destinies, many are tempted to accept the inevitability of old-line, anti-Western political and religious leaders.

Those of us in Georgia who embrace liberal democracy thus face the difficult challenge of convincing our countrymen that we really can build a just and stable political community. We need help to do this, and it’s for this reason that robust American commitment to Human Rights and democracy as central elements of American foreign policy can limit and trump those who would return us a dark-age past. Thus, the forceful commitment to democracy in the President’s extraordinary June 24 Rose Garden speech on the Middle East, will have powerful resonance throughout the world.

Likewise, vigorous American enforcement of such laws as the International Religious Freedoms Act and the Trafficking Victims Protection Act will give hope and strength to America’s

friends abroad. Such American initiatives are neither romantic, utopian or intrusive. They send a strong and inspiring signal to women and religious believers around the world. They represent a tough-minded means of advancing American national interests. And, particularly in the eyes of young people, they strengthen America's standing as a model of freedom, justice and dignity.

In the coming years, our young Georgian republic will face a number of important tests, culminating with the election of a new leader to succeed President Eduard Shevardnadze in 2005. Mr. Shevardnadze's accomplishments are many, and Georgians are grateful to him for securing our independence and for turning our orientation towards the West. But success for Georgia in the post-Shevardnadze era will require leadership unequivocally committed to democracy, economic and political freedom, and Human Rights.

We must win our battles against religious violence and must protect the right to worship freely. We must jail the mafia thugs who export enslaved women for prostitution. We must end a drug trade that funds separatist movements in the Caucasus.

We must protect freedom of the press, place limits on the powers of the state, ensure electoral fairness, create an independent judiciary able to protect the rule of law, and delineate separations of power amongst the different branches of government. Finally, we must fight those who wish to replace the Soviet-style government controlled economy with corrupt monopolies operated by "crony" capitalists.

Many of us in Georgia are determined to bring about those changes, and our recently concluded local elections give strong grounds to believe that we can do so. But it is dispiriting to close friends around the world when the U.S. enters into "realistic" alliances with anti-democratic forces. American officials need to ignore the expedient protests of old-guard political leaders when the U.S. makes the maintenance of Human Rights standards and the adoption of democratic reforms important conditions for friendly bilateral relations.

In the 18th century, Alexander Hamilton opened *The Federalist Papers* by contending that it was "reserved to the people" of America "to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government." A similar positive answer is needed to a new question – whether all men and women around the world can live under governments that depend on the consent of citizens, protect Human Rights, and respect freedom.

Coming from where Joseph Stalin was born and where hundreds of thousands of men were lost in the war against Hitler, Georgians know how right Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush were in their understanding that evil really *does* exist in the world. Having played an indispensable role in helping to liberate us and billions of others from tyranny, we now ask America – for our sake *and yours* – to hold our feet to the fire in promoting free institutions and basic rights.

A just and peaceful 21st Century hangs in the balance.

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