

**GENERAL TALKING POINTS FOR ISRAEL VISIT
BY MR.DAVID GAMKRELIDZE, NCP CHAIRMAN
DECEMBER 2002**

1. Two Preliminary Issues

Or what we might call Israeli misunderstandings which we must be careful about

a) *Chechnya*—In several conversations this weekend, it appears that we have to be very careful with how we present the Chechen issue during the discussions. Most in Israel appear to have an identification with what Russia is doing in Chechnya, because of the view that Chechens are Muslims terrorists with connections to organizations and countries that are also fighting Israel. Of course such a point of view is extremely misleading, but I think that it would be better to present the Chechen issue in this light, rather than in what we might call the “pro-Chechen” light that most Georgians usually present it in. I would continue to mention the fact that we feel for the refugees and that our poor state has done a great deal to assist them, but I would end it at that. I would not discuss the issue of whether these guys are rebels, terrorists, or what have you. Instead, I would move the discussion to Abkhazia, and say that we too have suffered at the hands of the Chechens and the Ingush in Abkhazia, who all fought on the side of the Abkhaz. If discussions move toward what should be done in Pankisi, we should emphasize the following two issues:

- That there is, or rather was, a problem there, and we recognize it and are working to solve it, both on our own and with American assistance.
- We are unwilling to have Russia be a part of the solution, because their hope is to use this against Georgian sovereignty, and for us that is an unacceptable price to pay. But we should not excuse our opposition to Russian action in Pankisi with a claim that these guys are not real terrorist—it seems that Israel so much needs to justify its actions in Palestine and elsewhere with the word “terrorism” that it is willing to accept actions by a lot of other countries which are questionable as terrorism as well, just to ensure that no one is arguing with Israel’s actions. This is why they are very sympathetic to Russian action in Chechnya, and to the Chinese so-called anti-terrorist activities in their Muslim region (even though that too is in reality an anti-separatist, rather than an anti-terrorist, campaign).

b) Georgia's Choice: Iran or Russia—According to one individual that I spoke with, there was (and might still be) a view in Israel that Georgia faces two bad choices—to be either with Iran or to be with Russia. But in these two choices, for Israel, Russia is better for Georgia's orientation, even though there is a great deal of anti-Semitism in Russia, because Iran might very well be one of the most dangerous enemies that Israel has. I have not thought at all about Georgia turning toward Iran, however, it might be useful to do a little research and look into the areas where Iran is trying to invest in Georgia, and then talk about how dangerous this is (it really is dangerous; this state is worse than Iraq as far as I am concerned, and I know that Rustavi 2 reported about their desire to get water from Kakheti or something—pretty unacceptable, I think, and we might get US sanctions as a result). At the same time, it is essential to explain that Georgian people do not want to turn toward Russia, even though Russia will try to manipulate the elections, etc., and gets its own candidate. As a result, we should explain that there is a third alternative—the United States, and that in making Georgia a stronger US ally, can and should play a strong and important role.

2. Why is Israel interested in Georgia/Eurasia region

There appear to be several areas of interest. I will start from the general, regional interests, and then move into the specific ones. Most of the things here are geopolitical and economic, but there are moral or value interests which for Israel are also very important (they all deal with the Georgian Jewish population, in Israel, in Georgia, and in third countries in Europe and the United States).

a) Preventing Muslim Influence in the Caucasus/Central Asia—there appears to be a view in Israel that Iran will try to influence the region, and that it is essential to prevent this from happening. Iran is bad because it funds terrorist organizations like Hezbollah, it has long range missiles which can reach Israel, it is trying to get nuclear weapons, it has shown absolutely no interest in negotiation with Israel [which is not the case even with Saudi Arabia, which offered a peace plan, though one totally unacceptable to Israel], and no one seems to be ready to take care of it, which is different from Iraq, where the US is very focused on getting rid of Saddam. Iran has clearly tried to be influential in Azerbaijan, and Turkey has moved in to try to prevent this.

It seems, from what I have read and what I have gathered from people, that Turkey and Israel indeed have a very strong relationship, based on the

notion that Turkey is secular and will remain secular. Of course, all of those who want to get Turkey into the EU are pushing for this very much because they know that this might be the best way, if not the only way, to preserve Turkish secularism. Given that I am personally a lot more wary of Islam than a lot of people, I think that to base your national security on the idea that Turkey will remain secular is dangerous. Of course, it might be that I do not understand Islam and/or Turkey well enough. At any rate, if I have suspicion of Turkey, I would guess that many strategic planners in Israel have this view as well, though nevertheless the relationship is very strong now. So Turkey's role in preventing Iranian influence in Azerbaijan and Central Asia has been welcome by Israel, and Israel wants to maintain this informal alliance, if we might call it, that it has developed with Azerbaijan and Turkey. And so, developing relationships in both of these places has been important. However, both the Azerbaijan-Turkish alliance, as well as Israel's friendship with these countries, is in many respects dependent on Georgia. This is where Bzerzinski is very correct—Georgia is the cork on the bottle of Central Asia-Caucasus.

So in this area, it would be useful to push the argument that Georgia is key to stability, democracy in this region, and that without it, influence of radical Muslim countries will be harder to prevent.

- b) Surrounding Arab Counties/Iran—In addition to wanting to prevent Arab influence, Israel also appears interested in surrounding the countries that do not like it with countries that do like it. This is part of a larger strategy to view the Middle East as not ending on the borders of the former Soviet Union, but actually going into these borders. In some ways, this parallels with my argument about “Central Eurasia” in which the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus all have to be viewed together as the geopolitical center of the world.

For this view, Georgia is very important, because it can play a critical role as an ally in this region of countries that might be receptive to Israel, but not because of values but because of need. At the same time, Georgia can be the stabilizing influence here.

- c) Pipeline—The oil and gas pipelines going through Georgia are very important for Israel, because of where this oil will go to; the oil will not go to the United States, but rather to Turkey and then from there to other places, and one of the beneficiaries will be Israel. Israel is most vulnerable to

blackmail from the Arabs on the question of oil, far more than the U.S. or any other country. If Georgia is not secure, then there is a huge problem with this oil—there is no way to get the oil out that is safe for Israel (the Iran route is not even an open question from them, given their eternal fear that Georgians might turn to Iran).

- d) *Georgian Jews*—This issue is of great importance to Israel, largely stemming from the theories of Zionism. The fact that there are so many Georgian Jews, both inside the country and outside, can be used to our advantage, as well as the argument that we have been very good to the Jews historically. This is not something that should be emphasized all the time, but I think that this is an issue we should point out in conversation, off the cuff, by saying what a good relationship Georgian and Jews have.
- e) *Two Countries Under Siege*—Finally, and I think that this is just as important as the strategic matters in a-c, Israel relates to Georgia. The fact is that in many respects, I see and I think many Jews will see, Georgia to be in a very similar position as their own country—surrounded by Iran, Russia, Chechnya, etc., it does not have too many “peaceful democracies” around it, it is struggling to maintain its sovereignty, and it is trying to build a democracy. It is also a Western-style country and it is Christian, unlike any of its neighbors (even Turkey and Azerbaijan, with which it has good relations). [Georgia’s Christianity is very important as well, given that Israel has spent a great deal of time and effort trying to court Christians, in America and elsewhere.] The siege that Israel is facing, is very similar to the siege that Georgia is facing. . As a result, these two countries logically should be friends, given that their interest are very similar at the same time (both want to be friendly with the United States, for example). In other words, because Israel recognizes a great deal of itself in Georgia, it is easy to sell the argument that Georgia and Israel are both fighting the same battle, that they have similar values and ideas.

3. What Can Georgia Offer Israel and What Can We Get Back

In conversations, I think that it is very important to emphasize how much Georgia can learn from Israel, and how useful Israeli experience can be for Georgia. I think that this is true, and also is something that Israel would very much like to be involved in—by having stronger and close relationship with more armies that are supportive of its efforts, there are things that it can rely on these armies to do, in case things really go to hell (if a really bad war begins in the Middle East, etc.).

There is one interest that Israel has with a great many countries, which is to get greater recognition, greater support in international forums, recognition of Jerusalem as its capital, etc. The more Georgia can offer in terms of support for Israel in these international areas, the better it is—for both us and for them. Israel constantly feels itself under siege, especially at the United Nations. I think that we need to emphasize during all of our meetings that we are not fully happy with the extent to which our government has supported Israel at the UN and that more needs to be done—we need to constantly voice our opinion in support of Israel, whenever there is trashing of Israel, for no good reason at all, at places like the UN Human Rights Commission. Simply having an additional country that supports it in these sort of situations is important.

In addition, there are specific things that Israel can give and which we need, or that we can give and Israel needs. I think that several seem to make most sense:

- a) *Investment*—Israel is the largest investor in Georgia, which is not unusual, given that the Jewish immigrants generally have a tendency to go back to their “home countries” of old where they used to live. This is also the case in Georgia. The investment is beneficial for Israel for economic reasons, as well as because these sorts of investment make more countries be pro-Israeli. That is very important for Israel because greater foreign investment allows for Israel to be able to influence the governments of these countries when it needs to. Meanwhile, the investment is of course good for Georgia for obvious economic reasons. This gives birth to a question—what can we do to promote greater economic relationship between Israel and Georgia. I think that one area in which they could be quite helpful has to do with technology—Israel has developed a very strong high technology industry, and Georgia can do much to advance in this area. We could get investment and support not only from Israel, but also from Jews abroad who are venture capitalists and anything that can be done to promote this would be good.
- b) *Friendship with an Outpost of Democracy*—This issue I have pretty much covered above, but the fact remains—and it has to be emphasized and overemphasized—that Georgia is unique in that it presents a special case for real democratic consolidation. As a result, it can play a very special and important role in Central Eurasia as a true, stable democracy. We need to do everything to promote this, and that is in the interests of Israel and the United States. As a result, it is very important that Israel support the democratic process in Georgia. At the same time, for all of the strategic

reasons of why Georgia is important, it is essential to show and to emphasize that all of that will go out of the window if Georgia is not democratic since stability is dependent on democracy.

- c) *Buying Military Equipment*—I think that Israel can be very useful to Georgia in providing us with equipment for our military and with providing for training. However, unlike America, it would have to be paid for much of it since it cannot afford to simply give us equipment. However, this is an area in which there could be a great deal of cooperation on both ends, and it would be very useful to us.

4. Additional Issues to Mention

Finally, there are additional issues that need to be mentioned in your conversations, to demonstrate that you are different and are really willing to work with them and to take positions that are good for them. Examples of these include:

- a) *International Criminal Court*—Israel and America are sort of in a lonely fight against the ICC, given how much Europe has supported them. Thus, they too I think would very much welcome support from another country that opposes it. This is a topic especially important for Netanyahu, who, given heavy influence of neo-conservatives on him in Washington, really hates this. So I think that you will want to tell them about this issue, and seek their support on the international arena on this front.
- b) *Embassy*—I know that you are leading against making a big deal out of it, and maybe in some respects it might be too early, but it would still be useful to mention this in meetings. They will eat this up, in a very positive way, I think. Apparently, Kyrgyzstan offered to put an Embassy in Jerusalem when they were first considering to open it and it was a very big hit. However, afterwards there was a great deal of pressure on it from the Arabs not to do it. Charles does not think that this will be very big issues, but at the same time, I think that the Europeans would indeed not be very happy with this right now, given all of the confrontation with the Palestinians. However, we need to beat America to this—i.e., do it before America does.
- c) *Relations in America*—I think that the question of the Georgian-American relationship and ways in which Israel can be a voice for Georgia is also important. This needs to be emphasized in meetings, based on all of the reasons outlined above.

d) Are there issues that they have problems with us on?—I would just check about this and be prepared if they bring it up.

Finally, I think that it might be useful to bring up the issue of the peace process. There are several important issues:

- First, that the peace process is important, and that it is up to Israel to decide what will secure its stability. Do not say that you support a Palestinian state, especially with the Likud, though some in the Likud do support it. I would just not touch what with a ten foot pole. However, I would be strong in saying that it is wrong for the Europeans to try to dictate to Israel what to do—it should be up to Israel, and negotiations cannot happen until there is a partner to negotiate with, and not a terrorist. Do not call Arafat a terrorist with the Labor, but do call him a terrorist with the Likud, especially Sharon and Netanyahu, both of whom hate the guy to death.
- Second, Europeans have been very negative about Israel, and that has to be mentioned in passing as well.