

## **Lecture at Middlebury College by Mr. David Gamkrelidze, MP December 3, 2002**

### **Introduction: About Georgia**

Before I begin, I would like to express my gratitude to all of the students and faculty who are here today, taking time from their very busy schedule to attend this event. Through my association with a recent Middlebury graduate, I have had an opportunity to hear much about this college. The visit that I have had here today certainly proves that this is a very beautiful and unique institution, one that everyone who is associated with it should be proud of.

The topic that I have been asked to discuss today, the role of Georgia as a US ally and a democracy in a region where most governments are largely authoritarian and democratic, touches on two of the main themes that I will be discussing with US officials later this week in Washington. However, given that many here probably know very little about Georgia, or the region in which it is located, I would like to begin with telling you a little about our country, its geography and its history.

Georgia is located in the South Caucasus, surrounded by Russia, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Black Sea. It is a very small country, of only five or so million people, but has a very old history. Considered "civilized" by Greeks, who called most non-Greeks "barbarians," Georgia is the place where the Jason is said to have found the Golden Fleece. Only a few years ago, the oldest human skull outside of Africa was found inside Georgia. Georgia flourished in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, but suffered from a number of foreign invasions later on, including from the Mongols and the Turks.

Georgia was annexed by Russia in the early 1800, and for almost two centuries was part of the Russian empire. It became independent following the Russian revolution, but the Red Army entered Georgia in 1921, when Georgia was forced to become part of the Soviet Union. During the Soviet rule, Georgia was the hotspot of anti-Soviet protests at least four times, far more than any other Soviet republic, even though two Georgians—Stalin and Eduard Shevardandze—both played vital roles in Soviet history. In the mid-1980s, the protests against the Soviet Union became quite radical, largely led by students. Georgia became the first country to elect a democratic Parliament, in 1990, a year after a massacre of Georgian students by Soviet troops in 1989. Soon thereafter, Georgia would become the second Soviet Republic to declare independence.

During the 1990s, Georgia was seen in the West as a model of democratic development. In many respects, Georgia did achieve a great deal in building a liberal democracy, especially when compared to other countries of the Soviet Union, with the exception of the Baltics. Georgia has basic separation of power; authority does not flow solely from the office of President; we have a vibrant and competitive public sphere, with active political parties; Georgian civil society is very strong; and citizens are genuinely interested in self-government. In recent years, there has been some criticism of our democracy, but almost all regional analysts still agree that Georgia presents a unique opportunity for real democratic consolidation in the former Soviet Union.

Many of the problems that we have encountered in this decade have come from the north—Even though Georgia has been independent for over a decade, Russia still has not accepted it as a country which has the right to choose its own destiny. Nowhere else has Russian pressure been greater, and nowhere have people suffered more at the hands of Russia’s most Soviet imperialistic activities. To this day, Moscow supports two separatist movements inside Georgian territory—in a Black Sea region called Abkhazia, and in a central Georgian region which is often referred to, though incorrectly, as Southern Ossetia. Moscow also spares no efforts to try to influence politics inside Georgia, supporting leaders whose ultimate wish is to make Georgia a semi-Russian colony, in some respects similar to Belarus. In addition to threatening Georgian independence, this gravely endangers the development of democracy in our country, given the political trends and limitation of freedom that we have seen in Russia in recent years.

### **Background: US Policy to Georgia/Caspian Basin**

In the face of this pressure, one of the most critical elements in helping sustain Georgia and allowing it to be different from the authoritarian states that surround it—Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Caucasus itself, as well as all Central Asian states—has been extremely strong level of commitment from the United States.

Early into the Clinton Administration, to a large extent due to pressure from Congress, particularly Republican Senators John McCain and Sam Brownback, the Caucasus-Central Asia became an area of significant interest to the United States. The region was largely of interest because of energy resources in the Caspian Sea, and the need to find routes other than Russia through which the oil and gas could be transported. Georgia presented an important element of the energy corridor, through which oil and gas could move from Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and other countries into Turkey and rest of Europe. At the same time, Georgia was of

particular interest to America because of the man who has been our leader—Eduard Shevardnadze, considered by many as one of the architects of Soviet policies that ended the Cold War. I remember this Spring meeting Senator McCain who began his conversation by saying—“you know, I have two heroes, Teddy Roosevelt and Eduard Shevardnadze. If you ask Jim Baker, the Cold War would not have ended without him.”

Much money was committed to Georgia as a result, mostly to promote economic and political reforms. As I have mentioned, much has been accomplished. However, much of the aid was managed badly, and was seldom directed to the areas that truly needed it. There was little ideological balance in the policies that were implemented—they were largely left-of-center, and promoted bigger and more powerful government. Our tax system is a good example—Georgian tax law creates so high of a barrier for legal business, that many businesses have no choice but to operate in the black, corrupt market. Our Constitution is another. Written with the aid of Western legal scholars, it claims to follow the American model of separation of powers, but gave far less of a role to the legislature and the judiciary than the American Constitution. This has caused significant problems, but vesting too much power in the hands of the executive and preventing the other two branches from exercising necessary check over the executive.

While all of this aid was important, unfortunately, in the area where aid was most necessary—strengthening the Georgian state, its army, and its ability to exercise control over all of its territory, as well as helping end Russian pressure on Georgia—the Clinton administration often talked the talk, but seldom walked the walk. Assistance to the military was very limited, while US policy toward Russia ignored its actions in the Caucasus and the significant anti-US policies that it was pursuing in the region.

### **Bush Administration: A New Vision**

Based on my observations, the Bush Administration came into office with a plan to increase US involvement in strengthening the Georgian state, and promoting further economic reforms. When I was last in Washington, one friend joked that before the terrorist attacks, President Bush cared about two foreign policy issues, creation of the anti-ballistic missile defense and building the oil pipeline through Georgia.

What was different about the Bush Administration, even before the terrorist attacks, is that many influential members of his team recognized that a region we might broadly call central Eurasia—starting in Ukraine, going though to the Chinese boarder—might very well represent the area of the new geopolitical center of US policy, the same way that Europe played this role in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is no accident, I believe, that Paul Wolfowitz, Bush’s senior foreign policy tutor as they say and Deputy Secretary of Defense, helped establish an Institute for the study of the region when he was Dean of the School for Advanced International Studies in Washington.

While there was recognition of the region’s importance, September 11 attacks gave the US an opportunity to actually put this vision into practice. Immediately after the attacks, US set up military bases in Central Asia, but these will likely remain in the region for much longer than after the campaign in Afghanistan is fully completed. The level of financial support for the countries in the region has grown dramatically. I should mentioned that US non-governmental groups who are fearful of the Human Rights records in many of these countries must continue to press their case, at least to help ensure that the record on fundamental rights begins to improve in Central Asia.

In Georgia, last Spring US began a so-called “Train and Equip Program” to train 2,000 Georgian soldiers which will form the basis of the future Georgian army. This 64 million dollar program is an exponential increase in US military support, and one of the reasons for my trip to Washington now is ensure that this sort of a relationship continues after the program runs its course in 2004. The program is arguably the most important thing that can be done to strengthen the Georgian state, which in turn is necessary for defense of the Georgian democracy. At the same time, discussions are now underway about Georgia’s likely future membership in NATO—something that was never viewed seriously three years ago. Indeed, I sponsored a resolution in the Georgian Parliament making this the principal priority of our foreign policy. Meanwhile, President Shevardnadze followed on Parliament’s unanimous support of this resolution, by announcing last month that Georgia plans to seek NATO membership at the Prague summit.

The Bush Administration’s strong stance in relationship to Russian pressure is also of importance. While Presidents Bush and Vladimir Putin have clearly formed a friendship, this relationship has not stood in the Administration’s way of waiving a very strong message to Russia to stop pressuring Georgia. For example, this summer and fall, Russian planes bombed Georgian territory, ostensibly as part of the war against Chechen separatists, while Moscow more than once threatened to

send forces into Georgia, in effect menacing to annex the country once again. Ultimately what stopped Russian from acting was President Bush's unequivocal commitment to Georgia, which he and other officials at highest levels expressed almost on a weekly basis in August and September. Through this policy, the Bush Administration has helped make Georgia the litmus test for Russia's new foreign policy which President Putin claims to be implementing. If he truly wishes to be what we might call "pro-Western," and no longer wishes to play the "Great Game" for the dominance of Eurasia, he can demonstrate his commitment by ending his pressure tactics on Georgia. Otherwise, it becomes clear that his commitment to this new pro-Western foreign policy is in name only.

I believe that the Administration's policies to the central Eurasia region, and to Georgia specifically, are not accidental, and are all aimed at giving the region a new role in global politics that goes far beyond supplying energy to Europe. There are long-term strategic interests in the region, including influencing the Middle East and potentially needing to contain a rapidly strengthening China. Turkey has served as a key US outpost in the Middle East, but many of its internal problems, including the growing Islamic radicalism which some argue manifested itself in the latest elections, has certainly created a need for another staunch ally geographically close to Turkey. Meanwhile, China is directly warned in President Bush's National Security Strategy, which states that US will not allow any nation to even contemplating a challenge to US military dominance. Realistically speaking, only one country, China, contemplate a challenge to US military dominance, probably not today, but in a decade or two. Central Asia is a vital part of containing the growth of China, and there are only two routes into Central Asia for America—Pakistani-Afghanistan route, problems of which are quite clear, and the Georgia-Caspian route.

As well, there is another critical element that accounts for America's increased level of support for Georgia. Writing in the Fall issue of the *National Interest*, Gary Schmitt, the head of Washington's Project for the New American Century, argues that the Bush Doctrine, with its clear focus on the character of political regimes, forever puts to rest the debate in the Republican party between so-called neo-conservatives and realists, and puts the President on the side of the neo-conservatives. Schmitt's point is that the Bush Doctrine necessitates America's constant and very strong commitment to promulgation of liberal democracy around the world, because only that sort of a regime can be viewed as a true US ally. Given the unique opportunity, almost universally acknowledged, that Georgia presents a special case for consolidation of democracy, the increased interest in Georgia seems sensible.

## Georgia's New Role

In Georgia, few have fully grasped the special opportunity that President Bush's new policies present to our country. Some still believe that our country's role in the world should be simply to serve as an energy corridor. Certainly that is important, both for our economic well being and for our security. Still others do not want to take advantage of this opportunity because it would forever solidify the Georgian democracy and prevent certain non-democratic elements from taking hold of power in Georgia.

I believe that the Bush Doctrine vision envisions for Georgia to become a special outpost of democracy, an area through which the United States can conduct its foreign policy in the central Eurasia region. Because Georgia presents a very good opportunity for planting and spreading the seeds of liberal democracy in Central Eurasia, the U.S. not only is willing to support our country, but also interested in reaping the rewards from this young and growing ally. It is a fact, that America is committed to the promulgation of fundamental Western political values throughout the world; this commitment is most clear not only in the speeches—or the rhetoric—of the current administration, but also in its immediate actions. President Bush, in a monumental step that has brought the consideration of values and the political character of regimes into the center of U.S. foreign policy, stated that the United States “will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere.” U.S. has followed this stance with military and political action, the effects of which are most clear in the countries' unwavering commitment to the War on Terrorism and the disarmament and regime change demands it has been placing on the tyrannical state of Iraq. What the Bush Doctrine means for Georgia, and other countries, is that United States considers it to be in its interest to support the spread of liberal democracy. Because Georgia is surrounded by countries that are either not moving in the direction of this vision, or if moving at all, doing so very slowly, it has a special opportunity to become the outpost of U.S. foreign policy and interests in Central Eurasia.

To achieve this, however, we cannot simply rely on Western, primarily American, support, financial or otherwise. We have much to do ourselves. First and foremost, this includes two things:

- **Strengthening our democratic institutions.** To achieve this, we require

- constitutional reforms for greater balance of power between the different branches of government;
  - a bill of rights which secures citizens natural rights, rather than claiming to grant citizens rights from the government, as the current Constitution does;
  - end of corruption, which in turn requires significant change in the way government relates to the business community;
  - return of power to the local communities, in areas such as education; and,
  - implementation of good laws to govern various aspects of life.
- **Creation of a real army.** We must dramatically increase our commitment to defense, even at the expense of every other government program, because without a real army we can never be certain in our security and we cannot contemplate NATO membership. Georgia must enter NATO, I believe, not simply as a consumer of security from the alliance, but as a contributor of it as well. For example, in Prague, NATO approved a new 21,000 person rapid reaction force, and as a NATO member, Georgia can and should be in a position to contribute 2 thousand men to this force on a constant basis. That will show our commitment to the alliance, and our ability to play a role alongside far more powerful and richer countries.

You might say, I ignored the economy—but that, I am certain, will only happen when our laws are good, when our political system is fully democratic, and when our country is secure. Once these are achieved, economic growth will come even without significant government involvement because as my own experience tells me, economic growth can be achieved only through private entrepreneurship.