



Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC

CSIS Georgia Forum Meeting Notes:

GEORGIA'S KEY FOREIGN POLICY CHALLENGES

Levan Mikeladze, Georgian Ambassador to the United States and Canada

Revaz Adamia, Georgian Ambassador to the United Nations

Thursday, November 21, 2002

Main points by Ambassador Mikeladze

Introduction

- While unfortunately Georgia has plenty of problems, most of the domestic and foreign policy problems are related to Georgian-Russian bilateral relations. They are a direct product of Russian policy in Georgia and the region
- Georgia is not alone in this regard—all FSU republics had similar problems with the Russian Federation
- The question is what Russia does and does not want from the former Soviet Republics. The answer is, Russia still does not accept the sovereignty of its former republics
- Russia has suspended the application of international law in its dealings with Georgia. Its policy toward Georgia is hostile, aggressive, and humiliating
- There are a number of facts to support this:
 - Permanent violation of Georgian airspace and bombardments
 - Non-implementation of Istanbul commitments (regarding withdrawal and closure of Russian military bases)
 - Sending paratroopers into the Kodori Valley
 - Supporting the separatist movements in Georgia
 - Refusing to extradite Igor Giorgadze (accused of attempting to assassinate Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze)
 - Psychological and media warfare against Georgia
- Four reasons for Russia's negative attitude towards Georgia:
 - Georgia's move toward the West
 - President Shevardnadze's role in the break-up of the Soviet Union
 - Persistent Georgian requests for Russian withdrawal from military bases
 - East-West pipeline projects that bypass Russia

Acute Problems in the Georgian-Russian Relationship

Pankisi Gorge

- Five years ago, most Georgians had probably never heard of the Pankisi Gorge, but today it is well-known in the entire world. Even President Bush is very familiar with it.
- From the beginning of the second Chechen War, Russia has accused Georgia of sheltering Chechen terrorists
- For its part, Georgia warned about the danger of Chechens being squeezed into Georgia, and tried to gain the presence of the international community on the Georgian-Chechen border
- We managed to secure OSCE monitoring of the Chechen and Ingush sections of the border. We are negotiating with the OSCE and Russia to expand monitoring to the



Center for Strategic & International Studies Washington, DC

- Dagestani section of the border
- President Putin's statement of September 11, 2002 is well known—this statement further inflamed tensions
- Overall Russia's anti-Georgian campaign serves a number of reasons:
 - It is a justification of the Russian military failure in Chechnya
 - It satisfies the military's ambitions toward the former Soviet Republics
 - It shifted international attention away from the acute problems in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to the relatively minor problems in Pankisi
- The real reason behind this anti-Georgian campaign is that Georgia did not allow Russia to conduct a major military operation against Chechnya from Georgian territory
- For Georgia this was a wise decision because:
 - It allowed Georgia to maintain neutrality in the conflict
 - It would have negatively affected the Georgian government's relations with the Kists (ethnic Chechens living in Georgia)
 - It would have had serious side-effects—it is not easy to recall a successful story of a Russian campaign against terrorism
 - It would have increased the already existing Russian military presence and related problems
 - Russian military did not solve any problems in other parts of Georgia, so it would not solve the problem in Pankisi and probably later on Georgia would have fruitless discussions on their withdrawal.
 - It would have meant a spillover of the conflict on Georgia and other areas
- Georgia itself conducted a major military operation in the Pankisi Gorge
- The goals of this operation were to:
 - Reestablish the Georgian government's authority in the area
 - Rid Pankisi of criminal elements and Chechen fighters
 - Avoid bloodshed among the peaceful population
- These goals were met: Today there are no illegal armed groups in Pankisi
- There are about one or two dozen criminals who are hiding among the law-abiding population. This fact made it difficult to fully complete the operation
- We hope that by the end of November the operation will be fully completed
- The Moscow theater tragedy proved that Georgia was correct in its approach to this problem as it showed that Pankisi is not the main source of the problems in Chechnya—Pankisi was a problem, but was exaggerated by the Russian media. Russian operation would have serious negative side-effects.

Istanbul Agreement Commitments

- This is one of the main points of friction in Georgian-Russian relations and is a major determinant in Georgian domestic and foreign policy
- The issue: the Russian military presence in Georgia is illegal—it lacks a legal basis and contravenes the freely expressed will of Georgia
- The Istanbul commitments contain three major points:
 - The overall reduction of the Russian military armaments on Georgian territory



Center for Strategic & International Studies Washington, DC

- The closure and withdrawal of the Gudauta and Vaziani military bases
- The necessity of reaching an agreement on the two remaining military bases in Batumi and Akhalkhalaki
- Georgia was the first to welcome the implementation of the first block of commitments
- The second block was only partially completed—Vaziani has been closed, but Gudauta remains unresolved
- For the third block, Russia initially suggested 25 years for the temporary deployment in Batumi and Akhalkhalaki bases. I do not think 25 years is a “temporary” deployment
- Russia then suggested 14 years, which was subsequently lowered to 11 years, but this still would mean open-ended presence
- Georgia has presented a well-calculated plan of 3 years for the withdrawal. The official Georgian position is that if Russia does not completely implement the Istanbul agreements then Georgia will not ratify the adapted CFE treaty
- Russia wants the adapted CFE treaty ratified because of commitments taken by the NATO allies and Eastern European states. But Russia also wants to get new flexibilities and possibly revise the adapted CFE treaty, or for Georgia and Moldova to ratify adapted CFE without implementation of Russian commitments

Georgia’s Aspiration for NATO Membership

- A few hours ago the Georgian delegation arrived in Prague for the NATO summit
- President Shevardnadze will make a statement about Georgia’s intention to strive toward joining NATO
- This is in line with Georgia’s strategic decision to integrate into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures
 - There is no other issue within Georgia that has as much consensus as the decision to integrate Georgia into the Euro-Atlantic structures
 - This aspiration will help Georgia to speed up reforms within the Georgian armed forces and cope with its domestic and foreign problems including the “frozen” conflicts on Georgian territory

Main Points by Ambassador Adamia

Abkhazia—Boden Paper

- The Boden Paper is the key to defining the relationship between Tbilisi and Sukhumi (The Boden Paper is a confidential UN document that outlines a proposed distribution of constitutional competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi for the resolution of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict)
- The basic principle of the Boden Paper is the territorial integrity of Georgia
- Although there are a number of aspects of the paper that the Georgians do not agree with, it may serve as the starting point for negotiations
- The Group of Friends of the Secretary General on Georgia (U.S., UK, France, Germany, Russia) wasted two years to convince Russia to sign on the Boden Paper
- Although Russia has “approved” the document a year ago, it is consistently blocking the



Center for Strategic & International Studies Washington, DC

- Security Council from endorsing the paper
- Today, Russia is demonstrating that it holds a different view of the paper than other members of the Group of Friends. When the Group of Friends attempted to meet with the Abkhaz side to discuss the Boden Paper, Russia refused to come as a member of the Group of Friends, and insisted on participating as the Facilitator of the Conflict. This forced the cancellation of the meeting
- By refusing to move ahead with the Boden paper, Russia is trying to undermine the Group of Friends, prolong the process, and maintain the status quo
- This is indicative of Russia's foreign policy goals in general

Russian Policy Toward Abkhazia

- Russia is also trying to legitimize the Abkhaz regime. For example, Russia's official records frequently refer to the leader of the separatist regime as Prime Minister, and Russia tried to convince the UN Security Council to invite the Abkhaz "Prime Minister" to take part in a Council meeting
- The mass issuance of Russian passports to the residents of Abkhazia can not be viewed as anything but an attempt to annex Abkhazia
- The passport issue has also raised new questions about the conflict
 - Can Russia be an unbiased facilitator in the conflict if a majority of the residents of one side are Russian citizens?
 - Will we arrive at a situation when Russia will justify explicit involvement in the conflict to protect its citizens?
- Russia signed the CFE treaty in 1999 in Istanbul which stipulated the removal of Russian military bases from Georgia
- Despite its claims to the contrary, the base in Gudauta (Abkhazia) remains with all of its personnel, and all OSCE efforts to verify the alleged base removal are blocked by the Russians
- Russia also provides the Abkhaz with new weapons and technologies
- Russia has also tried to gain control of the Kodori Valley (the only region of Abkhazia controlled by Georgians) by turning it into a hotbed of provocation and lawlessness—this process was only prevented by the personal intervention of Shevardnadze
- This past August a high-level governmental delegation arrived from Moscow to discuss concrete measures of improving the Abkhaz economy. Measures discussed included establishing closer ties between the two central banks, the purchasing of real-estate with Russian capital, and direct investment into the resort industry
- The Abkhaz leadership has become emboldened by the Russian position; the Boden Paper is constantly rejected and the efforts of the Group of Friends to meet with (so-called Prime Minister of Abkhazia) Anri Jergenja are constantly rebuffed
- The worst result is that no one seems to care about the 300,000 refugees from Abkhazia
- The Abkhaz have conducted a policy of ethnic cleansing against the Georgians since 1993 and the Abkhaz leadership has placed harsh restrictions on the Georgian population. For example, it is illegal to teach children in the Georgian language in the Gali district, as well as in entire Abkhazia



Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC

The Master Plan

- Abkhazia holds the key to understanding Russian intentions of regaining power
- Despite Russia's declared respect of Georgia's territorial integrity and independence, it has consistently directed all of its actions against it
- The reasons for Russia's policy are:
 - President Shevardnadze's role in the breakup of the Soviet Union
 - Georgia's pro-western foreign policy, including President Shevardnadze's stated goal of joining NATO
 - The development of the East-West energy corridor
- Russia will not change its policies toward Georgia after President Shevardnadze's term is over
- Russia still considers itself a superpower on the regional level and is making every effort to maintain presence in the post-Soviet space
- The Primakov Doctrine was designed to create problems for the Newly Independent States to win time until Russia regained its strength—evidence of this doctrine can be found from Moldova to Tajikistan, where internal problems were created to guarantee Russia's involvement and (military) presence
- Russia's main goal is to regain its lost power and recreate the bi-polar security system
- If Russia were to succeed it would mean the end of the East-West energy corridor, enabling Russia to remain as the main energy supplier in the region. It would also allow Russia to keep controlling all energy transit systems in the post-Soviet space
- Considering the possibility of deterioration of the situation in the Persian Gulf, a scenario could develop, whereby Russia emerges as the main energy supplier for most of Europe, thus gaining the ability to dominate world energy prices. The consequences of such developments should not be underestimated

Q&A

How will the U.S.-Russia rapprochement affect the U.S.-Georgia relationship?

Ambassador Mikeladze

- Georgian National Security Advisor Tedo Japaridze was just in Moscow meeting with his counterpart, Vladimir Rushailo as well as law enforcement ministers and the prosecutor general
- Japaridze and Rushailo issued a joint statement saying that their negotiations were positive. While one could hardly call it a breakthrough in the Georgian-Russian relationship, it is at least a positive sign
- I do not think the recent rapprochement in U.S.-Russian relations is a long-term development because there are still many divisive issues, especially concerning ideology towards the main international political issues. Still, improved U.S.-Russian relations positively effect the Georgian situation as well as U.S.-Georgian relations
- The U.S. attitude toward the Georgian-Russian relations, U.S. steadfastness and warnings of danger of spillover of military actions in Chechnya was very decisive over the last



Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC

several months

- The U.S. can do more to resolve Georgia's ongoing conflicts, especially regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the CFE agreements
- Russia has monopolized the peace process in Georgia with its three roles as peacekeeper, facilitator, and open supporter of the separatist regions
- A larger involvement of the international community would force Russia to be more constructive

Ambassador Adamia

- If the U.S. increased its role, we would see a faster resolution of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict
- We had a number of conversations with diplomats, and I do not think that there are practical, or even legal obstacles to increase the U.S. role in the peace-process
- There is a unique situation regarding the peacekeeping mission for the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict because Russia is the sole peace-keeper—there is no other conflict where only one country provides the peace-keeping forces
 - This is peace-keeping from the Russian point of view; they are keeping that peace, and that peace, etc

I agree that Russia is a huge problem, but I wonder if there are also problems within Georgia. You said that Russia has ignored international laws and created many problems in Abkhazia, and I fully agree. However, on August 6, the Georgian Parliament recommended that Georgia withdraw from the CIS, but President Shevardnadze has said nothing about this. Georgia was bombed repeatedly, and decided to buy anti-aircraft missiles from Ukraine. The Parliament allocated 11 million laris for this purpose, but the finance minister refuses to provide the money, declaring that he has “good information” that Russia will not attack. These are examples of how Georgia is not doing internally what is necessary to run a country. I was wondering if you could comment on this issue

Ambassador Adamia

- Having been in Parliament for ten years, I could provide many more examples
- Regarding the CIS, I do not think that it was bad that the president chose not to address this issue
 - The CIS is the format where we have the best documents on the conflict including the sanctions
 - We are insisting on having that language inserted into the UN documents, without any success
 - The CIS, as such is not a problem for anyone. In fact, it is a good forum for the presidents to meet three or four times a year
- Regarding the other issues, there are many problems with corruption, law enforcement, religious and minority rights. Of course we should deal with all of them
- We hear plenty of criticism on these issues not only from outside Georgia, but also inside—you can open any newspaper in Georgia and read about these issues



Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC

- How to fix the problems would be on the agenda of the person planning to run in the 2005 presidential elections
- The speed of reforms is very slow, and I would welcome faster reforms

Ambassador Adamia, you said that President Shevardnadze will eventually make a formal application for NATO membership, but it is clear that Georgia's membership will not happen in the next few years. Given what you have said on the current situation with Russia, could you predict what kind of security arrangements we will see in the next five to ten years in the South Caucasus, including in both Armenia and Azerbaijan?

Ambassador Adamia

- Georgia will not be a member of NATO very soon, but I am not pessimistic because there are very rapid developments
 - Could anyone imagine in 1998 that we would have ten new members of NATO?
 - 9/11 really speeded up that development
 - I dare say that in the near future there will be more turbulence in the region that could speed up the process
- I am not saying that it is inevitable for war in Iraq, but the probability is very high and certainly that will influence the security situation in the South-Caucasus
- Georgia has managed to have good relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan, and that is of utmost importance
- We have maintained neutrality in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and we are actually playing a good role in that conflict's resolution
- There are some movements toward the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, although no one knows what is going on
- The most difficult are the relations with Russia
 - The Russian state is becoming stronger than it was during Yeltsin's period, but that process should be handled carefully
 - We can see what is happening with the electoral bodies and the Chechen conflict
 - There is a generation growing up in Chechnya that knows nothing but war
- I do not think there are any mechanisms other than integration into the Euro-Atlantic structure that can provide security for Georgia

What was the rationale behind closing the Chechen representation in Georgia, and how would you summarize the results of the October 6, 2002 Chisinau meeting between Presidents Shevardnadze and Putin?

Ambassador Mikeladze

- One of Russia's main complaints to Georgia was that Georgia permitted the existence of a Chechen representative office in Tbilisi
- The truth is there never was official representation of the Chechen Republic in Georgia
- The people running the office were Kists (Hizri Aldamov). Aldamov used his apartment as the "representative office," and when it caused the Georgian government so much



Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC

trouble, he himself offered to close down this office

- In Moscow there is a semi-official Abkhaz representation—unfortunately we were not able to discuss this issue with our Russian counterparts

Ambassador Adamia

- The issue is as tricky as everything else in Georgia—something that did not even exist was closed down

Ambassador Mikeladze

- The Chisinau meeting was very positive
- We can not speak of a breakthrough, or major progress in Georgian-Russian relations, but before Chisinau there was almost a state of war with Russia
- The Chisinau meeting helped calm down the rhetoric and tensions, including Russian media coverage on Georgia
- Cooperation is not limited to the border guards—there is strong cooperation between the secret services and national security councils

Ambassador Adamia

- There were also some technical improvements concerning the border guards
- I spoke with General Chkheidze, who is commander of the Georgian border guards, and he said that the level of relations between the Georgian and Russian border guards is much higher
- For example, a few weeks ago the Georgian border guards received information from their Russian counterparts that there was a group of military personnel on the Georgian side (which turned out to be a regiment of Georgian soldiers)

You both mentioned that you would like the United States to help more on the Abkhaz issue. What have U.S. officials told you, and what is your evaluation of that?

Ambassador Mikeladze

- It is a long process and we are in the process of discussion
- Over time the involvement of the U.S. and the international community will increase

What is the process of the development of the national security strategy in Georgia? What strikes me as unusual is that the Ministry of Defense has approved a White Paper without developing a national security strategy. That means there is no official document that conceptualizes a wider security understanding of the region. This raises speculation of a lack of cooperation with Georgia's foreign friends for security.

Ambassador Adamia

- The security concept was drafted more than two years ago
- The security strategy was approved in an English version, but never in a Georgian language version



**Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC**

- We had a conference in 2000 chaired by Lord Robertson of NATO at which time we had a security paper prepared
- The Ministry of Defense used that security paper to prepare the White Paper, but the White Paper has also only been approved in the English language version
- The national security strategy should never be a static concept and I am happy that work is being done on a new version of the security strategy by the National Security Council

In conflict resolution processes around the world there is almost always a need for some sort of truth and reconciliation process, where the parties reexamine the history from theirs and their adversaries points of view. I was wondering if it would be positive for the Georgians to begin by reexamining the history of the Zviadist period and inviting the Abkhaz to sit down in a neutral place to discuss that period and then the period that followed, which presumably would be of more interest to the Georgian side.

Ambassador Adamia

- Usually such discussions come to nothing because the people involved in the process typically have their opinions formed and these are not easily changed
- What is important is to look to the future—for the Abkhaz the most important thing are guarantees for their security
- The point is that Abkhaz are puppets in the hands of Russia and they will always stay on positions dictated by their masters
- If the big player is removed from the process, it would be possible to come to an agreeable assessment of what happened in 1992, 1989, 1939, or 1925

Ambassador Mikeladze

- I would not suggest to Georgians and Abkhazians to research their past too much because people from the Caucasus tend to be very historically minded and this memory is the cause of most of the problems in the Caucasus
- In my view the historians contributed to the beginning of the conflict by poking into the past
- Georgians lack the opportunity to sit eye to eye with the Abkhazians and have direct negotiations, which is why we have no process in negotiations

Russia says that all Chechens are terrorists and that Russia is in a war against terrorism, and Georgia hosts Chechens. If the U.S. invades Iraq and Russia performs a military operation against Georgia in the name of fighting terrorism, what will happen? Do you have any guarantees from the U.S.?

Ambassador Mikeladze

- There are no guarantees to stop Russia from carrying out a major military operation against Georgia
- The only guarantee is condemnation by the international community
- In my view, Russia has not invaded Georgia because of what the reaction of the



Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC

international community would be

- As you know, Russia has “tested the water” of international support for military action against Georgia through Putin’s letter to the UN and discussions with foreign leaders, but they got disillusioned in obtaining international support for the unilateral operation in Georgia

Although it has deeper roots, one rationale for the Train and Equip Program (T&E) was to address the security problems in Pankisi. If the threat in Pankisi recedes, and if the U.S. turns greater attention to Abkhazia, is Georgia concerned about the U.S. maintaining a strong level of support for the T&E?

Ambassador Mikeladze

- Like the NATO application, the T&E is very popular in Georgia
- It is a terrific program and Georgia values it highly
- We are considering how to proceed after the program is over

During the early 1990s Azerbaijan insisted that Russian troops leave Azerbaijan, despite the war with Armenia. Azerbaijan also insisted that there not be a unilateral Russian peacekeeping force in Azerbaijan. Georgia, however, made concessions to Russia on the issue of basing and allowed for unilateral Russian peacekeeping. Do you think these mistakes have caused Georgia’s current disputes with Russia over the issues of basing and peacekeeping? Are you raising these issues more aggressively in the Council of Europe and in the UN? For example, the passport issue is clearly a violation of Georgian sovereignty; what is the response you get from these institutions to the Russian visa regime?

Ambassador Mikeladze

- Of course it was not an easy decision to host the Russian military bases, but these were not deliberate mistakes
- Georgia was pushed to accept the Russian troops—Georgia received heavier pressure to accept troops than any other former Soviet Republic
- This is because of the geopolitical location of Georgia—blocking Georgia would block the East-West trade corridor and give Russia greater control over the entire region
- Of course we speak about the passport issue with international institutions
- The reaction of the international community is that this is a clear example of the Russian policy of the annexation of Abkhazia
- I agree, however, that there has not been an adequate reaction to what is happening in Abkhazia

Ambassador Adamia

- In general, when people make mistakes they often say that they had no other choice, but in this case there truly was no other choice
- We are openly speaking to international organizations about the passport issue