



Center for Strategic & International Studies
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“Georgia: Security Challenges and Opportunities”

Irakli Okruashvili
Minister of Defense
Georgia

Russia and Eurasia Program
Statesmen’s Forum

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On June 16, 2005, Georgia’s Minister of Defense, Irakli Okruashvili, spoke at a Statesmen’s Forum at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. The minister spoke about Georgia’s security relations with Russia, the United States, and NATO. The following is a summary of Okruashvili’s remarks.

The minister began by noting that Georgia’s institutional development has accelerated since the Rose Revolution of November 2003. Government institutions are working hard to show progress as the government rushes to make up for lost time. According to Okruashvili, “Georgia lost fifteen years in its path to becoming free and democratic,” and it is rebuilding its defense policy “literally from the ground up.” A “commitment to democratization, modernization, and fiscal responsibility” guides Georgia’s reforms in its security and defense policy. “These three points,” he said, “sum up the key to defense in our country today.”

NATO membership is a major goal of Georgia’s security policy. In reviewing Georgia’s implementation of the Individual Partnership Action Plan, NATO officials have found that the groundwork “for modernization of [Georgia’s] security and defense structure” has been completed “to standards recognized by our Western peers.” As it works towards the goal of applying for an Individual Membership Action Plan (IMAP) next year, Georgia will be guided by the findings of its Strategic Defense Review (SDR), which will provide a “comprehensive overview of the status and condition of our defense capabilities.” Okruashvili emphasized that the Georgian military needs to focus on the “professional capability and strength” of Georgia’s armed forces and their interoperability with NATO structures.

Okruashvili noted the progress the army has made both in terms of modernization and sustained development. A few years ago, the army itself was considered “a main threat to the country” and few in Georgia wanted to join. Since then, the army has changed its attitude and atmosphere, and the mentality of the people has also changed.

The Georgian military now counts among it 2,500 US-trained troops, with units deployed in international operations in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Georgia is satisfied with the compromise it has reached with Moscow on the removal of Russian troops and considers its recent agreement “a great victory.” However, the declaration is not legally binding and a proper agreement must be signed. Okruashvili noted that the “successful withdrawal of Russian troops from the Georgian territory is very important for relations with Russia,” as well as for the development of freedom and stability within the country.

Okruashvili stressed that all territorial disputes should be solved peacefully and pointed to the plan for a peaceful resolution to conflict that Georgia has proposed. “Territorial integrity ...is very essential for our government,” he said. Georgia is currently waiting for the South Ossetian response to the plan. Okruashvili noted that Georgia’s efforts to integrate with NATO should not be held “hostage” by the country’s territorial conflicts.

With regards to institution building, Okruashvili remarked that Georgia has successfully increased its revenues and budget. The military is now able to provide good salaries and rations to its members, and the infrastructure of the Ministry of Defense has been improved. Similarly, Okruashvili noted that the Georgian police have gone from being an unpopular and untrustworthy force to an institution that 65% of Georgians have stated they trust. Georgia has also successfully adopted changes in its tax legislation.

Okruashvili concluded by thanking the US for its assistance and reiterating that Georgia supports America’s endeavors to promote democratic development in the region and seeks to continue nurturing partnerships with the West.

Summarized by David Gallagher