



Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC

Georgian-NATO Relations and Georgian Security

Featuring:

Mamuka Kudava, First Deputy Minister of Defense
Giorgi Manjgaladze, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
Nika Rurua, Deputy Chairman of Parliamentary Committee on Defense and Security
and
Vasil Sikharulidze, Ambassador of Georgia

Moderated by:

Cory Welt
Deputy Director, Russia and Eurasia Program, CSIS
Tuesday, March 21, 2006
3:00 P.M. – 5:00 P.M.
B1C Conference Room

On Tuesday, March 21, 2006, the CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program sponsored a discussion entitled “Georgian-NATO Relations and Georgian Security.” Dr. Cory Welt made introductory remarks.

Ambassador Vasil Sikharulidze made brief comments about the opportunity that Georgia has to elevate its relationship with NATO through the implementation of substantial reforms. He expressed hope that Georgia would accede to a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) by the end of 2006 and emphasized that there is strong public support for Georgia’s membership in NATO.

Mamuka Kudava spoke about the defense reforms that Georgia has implemented since the Rose Revolution. He emphasized that Georgia is at a critical juncture in its relationship with NATO and that “2006 is the perfect tim[e] for the advancement of [Georgia’s] goals,” particularly to accede to MAP. He recognized that NATO membership is an ambitious goal, but Georgia accepts the challenge. Kudava referred to Georgia’s relationship with NATO as a “[return] to a community of values from which we were barred for [over] seventy years.” Georgia has been active with NATO forces in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq because it shares the democratic values of its Euro-Atlantic partners. Kudava indicated that the NATO assessment team that recently visited Georgia found that Georgia has achieved considerable progress in defense reform and in other areas outlined by the NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan.

Kudava emphasized Georgia’s achievements in defense reform in the last two years. He noted that Georgia has three priority areas. First, Georgia has improved combat capabilities through structural changes in the Georgian Armed Forces (GAF) and is developing a defense planning system, including a newly enlarged defense budget. NATO integration is Georgia’s second priority, achieved by implementing IPAP reforms and creating a Strategic Defense Review (SDR) to define Georgia’s optimal force structure. The final priority is improving management of the defense system. The armed forces are now under civilian control through the appointment of a civilian Minister of Defense, and “the system is now totally transparent [with a] division of powers.” The fact that Georgia “is performing to NATO standards” gives Georgia reason to believe it has a right to push for MAP accession this year. Kudava also

emphasized that experience in Poland and other central and eastern European states demonstrates that MAP participation “gives you immense push toward accelerating reforms,” and he expects the same thing to happen in Georgia.

Kudava stressed that Georgia has three key messages regarding defense reform. First, Georgia has been engaged in a serious and rapid transformation of its armed forces. Second, Georgia is determined to contribute to international security regardless of whether or not it is a member or candidate member of NATO. A third point follows – that “in practice Georgia is already a de facto ally of NATO.” (Mr. Kudava’s entire presentation is available for viewing [here](#).)

Giorgi Manjgaladze commented on the importance of NATO from the perspective of Georgian foreign and security policy priorities. He noted the importance of ensuring international support for Georgia’s democratic development, integration into NATO, and economic growth and energy security. He stated that Georgian “involvement in IPAP and MAP is a dual-edged sword, not only a path for international integration but [also] a tool for internal reforms.” Even though MAP will be difficult, he said, it will be a good tool for internal changes. Manjgaladze emphasized that one of Georgia’s top security issues is the restoration of territorial integrity, and Georgia is “fully dedicated to a peaceful resolution [of conflicts] in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.” He also noted that regional cooperation among states with common views can be a valuable tool for all parties involved. Sharing experiences among cooperative countries allows them to achieve common goals such as the promotion of democratization in their near abroad. Georgia helps accomplish this through membership in the Community of Democratic Choice (CDC).

Nika Rurua spoke about the increased role of the Georgian Parliament in implementing reform. He pointed out that Parliament has taken on an increased role in oversight of defense reform. The role of the Defense and Security Committee is especially important on the issues of ministerial budgets, transparency, and competence. He explained that this committee, along with the Parliament and the Minister of Finance, have developed the first medium-term expenditure framework (MTF) for 2006-2008, and the Minister of Defense plans to develop a detailed defense budget for 2008-2010 using new planning, programs, and budgeting systems. A new procurement board will define procurement policy and management procedures. This board will also ensure clear and transparent prioritization of expenditure of funds for all major projects and programs. Rurua mentioned that a central step toward creating a credible defense system was the establishment of several guiding documents, including the National Security Concept, Threat Assessment, and the National Military Strategy. He also pointed out that a military ombudsman is to be established as part of the Public Defender’s office. This person will be appointed by Parliament and have a deputy devoted to military complaints.

Discussion

On past corruption in the government procurement system, Kudava acknowledged that previously “the system was very corrupt,” but the war on corruption is “in the process of [being] won...and [d]rastic reduction of corruption is one of the successes of this government.” The new law on procurement for all public offices was adopted in 2004 and states that any procurement over 10,000 laris (approx. US\$5500) must be submitted based on tenders. He mentioned that this produces beneficial competition in procurement which is closely monitored by Parliament. Relatedly, the creation of the Army Development Fund was

highly criticized early on, but this was a temporary fund, necessary only for the transition period due to a lack of funds. Kudava made clear that this fund was now closed, and all money for defense spending is now closely monitored by Parliament. Rurua added that the military budget is very transparent, and all necessary information is accessible to the public and media. Amb. Sikharulidze noted some steps taken to ensure a reduction of corruption, including the removal of suspect individuals from the system and the clear separation of the procurement process from the enforcement of regulations.

On whether Georgia was taking appropriate steps to boost its economic performance, and thereby increase its attractiveness as a NATO partner, Amb. Sikharulidze pointed out that Georgia is working to simplify the tax code system and ease various regulations making it easier to start small businesses. Cuts in customs taxes are planned in the next few years. Georgia enjoyed GDP growth of nine percent in 2005 and the same is expected this year. Rurua indicated that NATO membership would increase investment incentives for foreign investors.

Regarding Georgia's efforts to reintegrate troops who have been on peacekeeping missions abroad, Kudava responded that those who go abroad are professional soldiers and have been in their units at least one year. They undergo intense training before they are deployed, and so are well prepared to be sent overseas. He mentioned that there are indeed programs for reintegration of troops to Georgian society, but that not many need them. He also made the point that, when anonymously surveyed, the most common response from troops as to why they wanted to serve abroad was to defend freedom and stability.

Responding to a question regarding Georgian support for Russian membership in the World Trade Organization, Rurua noted that Georgia has political leverage that it is prepared to use on the issue of Russia's WTO accession if Russia steps up negative activity in any of the conflict areas or on energy issues.

Regarding Georgian approaches to the conflicts, Manjgaladze noted that a peace plan is being developed by the OSCE for South Ossetia based on a step-by-step approach and that, if successful, such an approach might become the basis for a resolution in Abkhazia as well. While the Ossetians have not yet accepted the plan, Manjgaladze suggested that this is a temporary setback and expressed hope that the sides would soon be able to move into a period of implementation rather than negotiation. He also stated that the peace plan includes provisions stipulating the necessity for monitoring the Roki Tunnel, on the Russian-South Ossetian border. Georgians do not insist on exclusive control of the tunnel, but have proposed an OSCE mission, with participation by Georgia and Russia, to control the contraband and weaponry that pass through the tunnel. He believes that such cooperation would be a good tool for conflict resolution.

Regarding energy pipelines, Amb. Sikharulidze said that the development of alternative energy routes is one of the biggest contributions Georgia can make to Euro-Atlantic energy security needs.

Summarized by Miranda Der Ohanian