

**CENTER FOR  
STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (CSIS)**

**STATESMEN'S FORUM**

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**SPEAKER:  
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ANDREW KUTCHINS: Welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. I'm Andrew Kutchins, the director of the Russian and Eurasia Program here, and we're delighted to be holding this Statesmen's Forum this afternoon with Eka Tkeshelashvili, a truly remarkable person who is currently the national security advisor to the president of Georgia. She has also held a number of positions – remarkable positions in the Georgian government since the Rose Revolution a little more than five years ago, including the minister of justice, prosecutor general, minister of foreign affairs, and also the minister of the – or the head of the appeals court. She did her undergraduate law degree at Tbilisi State University and then did an LLM as a Muskie fellow here at Notre Dame University, South Bend, Indiana.

And we're really privileged to have you here this afternoon. And bring us up to date on what is happening in Georgia. Obviously, with the war in August, Georgia was on the front of the headlines in the United States and around the world. Our attention has been somewhat diverted, I supposed, by the presidential campaign here and then also the financial crisis, but I still believe that the war that took place between Russia and Georgia last summer was probably the most serious security-related event in Eurasia perhaps in the last 20 years. So we're delighted to have you here today, and bring us up to date as to what is happening and what are your plans with the discussions with the new Obama administration?

(Applause.)

EKA TKESHELASHVILI: Thank you very much for the kind introduction, and then I'm extremely delighted to be here. And thank you for your interest and your dedication to the cause of hearing the latest update about the situation in Georgia. I'll briefly touch some of the updates of the situation so that we have more time for questions and answers period of time, and then with that I think it's more interesting to see what are the issues that are of interest to you and then what are the issues that I can bring to you as information. But if an update may be the purpose of the visit why I'm here, it's the time when we're starting the new working relationship with the new administration.

I'm not here to see whether or not Georgia falls within the sphere of strategic interest of the U.S. or whether or not there is any question that strategic partnership will be continued with Georgia in the same pace and the same content-based relationship that we've had with the U.S. because on that we've heard quite concrete statements from the representatives of the new administration. And then, frankly, while being present myself at the meeting that we've had, our president with the Vice President Joe Biden recently at Munich, it's been quite clear how well understood the situation with relation to Georgia is in the administration, how firm the support is of the new administration for the cause of a strong, independent, democratic Georgia that can never be made any tradeoffs that can somehow damage either the relationship that we've had so far or the future of Georgia as an independent and strong country.

And here again, what is important to mention is that no matter how frequently we appear on the news – and then in many ways whenever we appear as a small country on the news screen, so to say, something should be happening there, so it's not a good factor that one can tell what is happening. We're still a very small country in a very, very important and at the same time complicated neighborhood. And then still, after quite some time from independence from the Soviet Union, we're struggling in many ways the same struggle: a struggle for independence and then real sovereignty. And in that sense, somehow it appears so that the biggest neighbor that we have still is not in a position easily to accept the fact that Georgia is actually already an independent country which has its own freedom of choices that can be made freely by the nation in Georgia and then that needs to be respected.

But having said that, where do we stand now? Obviously we were in August a complicated situation in many ways, and then by that one could have thought that – especially in the situation in which globally we have seen, and that we are still in the process, when every nation struggles to come up with solutions to their economic problems, what would have made a double effect negatively on the situation in Georgia and then obviously it had its own impact over the situation. But then at the same time, we've seen that economy, however difficult the situation could have been, proved to be resilient, but then at the same time struggling to overcome the impact of insecurity that the war had left. And then the fact that Russia still stays largely on the territory of my country, occupying 20 percent of the territory, is still not a fact that helps a lot in terms of putting that country on the radar screen of economic development.

So why I'm mentioning that – to identify how much internal development of our country is the key priority for us now, to put every effort that is needed, that it takes to make sure that we hold our economy tight and then we manage to put our country back on track. As a small country, having a good investment environment, growing economically, and then providing better and better life for the citizens of our country. So that's number one priority for us, to concentrate efforts in this direction.

When we're speaking of economy and internal development, that's not only economy in that sense but then that's the further development of our country in terms of its way to mature democracy. We can expand on that in the questions and answers period as well. I'm sure there will be interest on that, but then to identify several components of that.

We are not in a position to have an opinion that we've accomplished everything that was needed there for a democratic transformation of our country so that we can be self-contained and then take it easy and then enjoy life in that sense, knowing that, I mean, we already established this mature democracy. We've had an extremely difficult task when Rose Revolution happened, and I see some of the known faces here who know how the life developed after that and how difficult the task was. And then people who have been engaged in helping us to do our job better in that sense. But it was a very difficult time, completely dysfunctional state, completely corrupt state institutions, and everything had to be done from this crutch basically in all dimensions, and then to do it very quickly so that we could have felt that the state is somehow being seen as an established state in a way internally.

So while doing that and while being, most of us, freshmen basically in the state institutions, coming from NGOs, from human rights background, and then, you know, not being really engaged too much in the governmental field, we made our own mistakes, definitely, and then we are in a position to well assess with self-criticism what went right and what went wrong, and in that sense criticism and assessment that we hear from international organizations, from our partners, is extremely helpful and we are fully open to that. So the so-called new wave of democratization that the president had announced while being here at the General Assembly in New York was exactly about that. So we take a moment, see where we are now, and then after having good assessment, to know how we need to move forward so that we move in a direction of mature democracy while already having the fundamentals that we established through several years of hard work.

There are several fields in which obviously key priorities are lying for us, as much as we see the current situation. That's a continuation of reforms in the field of judiciary so that we see the judiciary develops in such a way that it's strong, respected and independent fully. And in that sense internal development of the judiciary is extremely important, so the judiciary itself takes the leading role but at the same time there are further steps that the government needs to be undertaking so that we assist that process well enough. And in that sense, introduction of jury trial will be an extremely important element of the criminal justice field in Georgia. It will not be an easy task.

It will be a quite challenging task because we have a system which is based on the continental law and tradition, which means that we have never had a tradition of having a jury in our criminal system, but at the same time we're well prepared for that change in our system. So the public well understands what is the role that juries are playing in the criminal system. That will make them part of the decision-making process, and in that sense will make decision-making process more transparent and inclusive of the public itself. It will be followed by an act in which judges will be appointed for life period of time, so that if any judge has any consciousness about being appointed for a fixed period of time they will be eliminated as a factor.

Our new school of justice is in a good shape of being developed further and further. It's a very short history that this institution has, and we put a great trust in creating an institution of the type which will prepare new judges in such a way that we will have not only good lawyers being appointed as judges, but then being then well equipped with the skills that are necessary for being a good judge and having full control of the courtroom, basically.

So that's with regard to the judiciary in a nutshell, and then the system of legal aid is under a good way of development as well, which will be a good component of the new system of criminal justice, in our understanding.

Then another field would be definitely media freedom. And here again there is some part of the job that can be and should be made by the government, but then another part of it needs to be done by the professionals in the field as well so that they raise the speed of development of the media freedoms themselves and contribute to the process. We already have some encouraging dynamics in such a way in which – live talk shows on political themes, you know,

spreading on all major TV channels, in which free and public debate on all issues of interest to the public is happening. At the same time we've changed some of the management structures in terms of the public broadcasting television in which the board now includes in its membership the opposition member as well as much as the agency who issues licenses for the media outlets in Georgia has the opposition member in its composition.

So that's in terms of the management structure changes, but at the same time that's the process in which further actions need to be undertaken in such a way that through inclusive process of debates and considerations we find the formulas in which way we can better assist the process to flourish better. So I count very much, and we count very much from the side of the government, on NGO communities in such a way so that we have independent assessment of the situation and then advisors that can be developed in such a way that we have the open debate, and then see how we can further develop that.

Political pluralism is something, again, which is not a one-way street, obviously. We are trying to make sure that with the new pieces of legislation, opposition has better and better possibilities of being engaged in the decision-making process, no matter how small the composition can be, and they exist in parliament or outside of the parliament, the motivation to be engaged in cooperation. What we're trying to achieve is to be open to in-depth cooperation with the opposition so that on any field, on any subject in which there will be readiness and willingness to debate, to cooperate, and then, you know, to find the common solutions, we would be ready for that.

I know that there are speculations and talks and then expectations, what could be coming up in April, and then, I mean, what is the current situation politically in Georgia? One that I can tell you with firm assurance from the side of the government is that we are having a positive view, sincerely, that the diversification of political life in Georgia is happening. Obviously our government cannot be pleased with the factor that opposition might be seeking is just resignation of the government rather than what great variety of cooperation that can be sought – maybe fierce opposition on some of the issues but cooperation on some other issues.

But at the same time we firmly believe that this all will settle down in a way so that there will be normal political debates and dialogue and that this time will come quite soon because the greatest trust that we can put into the processes while trusting that the public wants stable development of the country – and then in that sense, every direction in which political parties can be seen as well understanding the needs of society and then being keen on developing the agendas along those lines will bring political life in a more normal way of cooperation or debates between the different political parties in that sense.

What do we do on our side as of now? We are calm. We are ready for dialogue, for cooperation. We engage on some of the issues in cooperation with some of the parties. And then we are planning with calm minds on having or lessons learned from the last year, perhaps how we will need to be behaving ourselves if there will be demonstrations, no matter how large they can be, because demonstrations and public protests again are part of the normal democratic life for different countries, and then we've seen that coming up in Europe on a number of occasions and in different countries, and that's how life develops, basically.

So that's in terms of some updates of the political life and, again, I'm quite keen to be open to any questions that you might be having on that. But a little bit of information about the security would be interesting to bring up as an issue in front of you.

We're still in a situation in which security remains to be very fragile, for a number of reasons. A ceasefire agreement that had been reached with Russia through U.S. close engagement and negotiation is largely not respected as of now, I would say almost completely not respected. The mere fact that perhaps a result out of this agreement is that the actual fighting is not ongoing as of now, but then other than that, no single clause of the agreement is being respected by the Russian side. No withdrawal of Russian forces to the degree that is envisaged under the ceasefire agreement had ever happened. And I think I've mentioned at the beginning that Russia has as of now roughly 12,000 soldiers on the ground, pretty much the same amount of manpower that Russia had during the wartime itself, that no willingness to contribute to the access of international organizations, monitoring organizations to the occupied zones – something that, again, is part of the ceasefire agreement that there should be openness on that.

And then, again, in terms of the peace talks that are happening in Geneva, a late meeting already showed that Russia starts to somehow make an attempt how to withdraw from the negotiations. At the latest meeting in February, Russia said basically that after June they don't see the purpose why the meeting should take place anyways, which would be damaging to the dynamics of the peace talks and negotiations. Our approach is that at least in April, a second – I mean next round of negotiations should be happening.

So what does this mean to the security for us as a nation on the ground? As I've said, 20 percent of our territory is still occupied. We don't see as of now any signs from the Russian Federation that they are in a position to withdraw their forces. They have 12,000 soldiers on the ground, which is, again, the same amount that they have had in terms of the manpower during the war, and equipment is out there ready, available for action, if any, in the future, which means that on the district called Akhlagori in the South Ossetian region, which is 20 miles away from the capital, artillery that is placed there is quite easily reachable to the capital, from the technical point of view.

So all these components taken together is not something that can be a calming factor, definitely, for us, knowing how – you know, what is the pattern of behavior from the Russian Federation and then knowing that the main purposes that Russia had while invading Georgia, we're not really sure of. I mean, the government has not changed. We are still West-oriented. We're developing our path to Europe. And then, in that sense, no monopoly of our West-East Corridor is still guaranteed to Russia because while Georgia remains independent in that way from Russia, options are still open, and that's something that is the main worrying factor for Russia.

I'm not really in a position to give you full assessment how we see the situation, as Russia itself developing in such a way that how much we see it is a worrying factor, but then the way – how the situation deteriorates economically in Russia is a worrying factor for us as well because it's difficult to say whether or not there will be any attempt to find solutions outside of

Russia so that any victory that can be delivered outside can be well embraced by the public then inside, so that by that solidifying internal power in Russia – so something that this there in our minds as a thought, but then nothing can be decisively said on that. We will maybe have read the article by Pavel Felgenhauer, by other experts, but at the same time we do believe that if – and then in the same way, as we've seen up to now, international communities' engagement will be firm enough. Russia will have an understanding that any further adventure will be too much – will have too much of a political price entailed to that so that there will be thinking given to the thought of doing anything else in Georgia in that sense.

So, apart from political engagement with Russia that can serve that purpose, international monitoring commissions have a huge impact on the ground. It is extremely important that we retain international presence on the ground. What we did from our side is that we've made ourselves fully transparent to the EU monitoring commission. They have 200 monitors now on the ground. We've signed a unilateral memorandum of understanding with them, obliging ourselves that all our military facilities – bases, movement, manpower – they are fully transparent to monitors, so that by that and by that type of transparency and cooperation, to decrease the possibility of raising false allegations against Georgia by the Russian side, and that by that, decrease the intensity, if any, of the situation.

So these days it's much more difficult for Russia to say that, for example, Georgia is assembling forces somewhere near South Ossetia or Abkhazia region because EU monitors are basically quite open, saying that I'm sorry but when we've been there we've seen and there is nothing happening. So in that sense we believe that if this continues in this way, at least from our side we will be strong enough in putting up credible information, verified at all times to Russia that if they have any pretexts it's a false one, so that they will not be as eager as previously to use that as the real pretext base for real actions.

But still, the fact that the occupied zones themselves are fully non-transparent is a worrying factor because there is nothing that can serve as a preventive mechanism inside of the occupied zones. And then beyond the security regions of that, that complicates the situation for people who reside there because, unfortunately, in the South Ossetian region the territory is completely cleaned from the Georgian population. It's a complete ethnic cleansing that has happened there during the last war, but in Abkhazia there is some portion, remnant, small one but still there, of Georgian population that resides in Gali Region, so that for them it is extremely important that the U.N. mission stays there, that from time to time international monitors are coming in and allowed to get access so that they have some sense of not real security maybe as a hard security, but then still a sense that they place transparency of that, the part that they will not dare to do too much of a pressure on them.

So we engaged the negotiations, close negotiations, but then a very important one will be in June on the U.N. missions mandate, and it is extremely important that we have a clear view of how the negotiations should proceed in such a way that we actually manage to maintain the missions, to maintain international engagement, but then at the same time not endangering the sense of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity because what Russia is trying to achieve, as of now, is to use these organizations indirectly for making the case of separateness of this region as a more valid one. For example, by saying that the only option for those organizations

to stay in, like OSC or U.N., is that if there are separate missions in the state of Abkhazia or in the state of South Ossetia that can be opened there – something that can be called as a blackmail rather than a constructive dialogue from the Russian side as of now. But we are optimistic that if time is well used before June we will be able to find the compromise solution, so we were quite keen in getting engaged in the constructive dialogue in that sense.

I'm afraid that I've spoken too much and too long, so I will start to get boring because of that, so I'll stop at that. So I'm open to any questions that you might have. And, yes, thank you for attention.

MR. KUTCHINS: Madame Tkeshelashvili, it's not possible that you could bore this audience. Thank you very much for your terrific opening remarks. Do you want to stand up there or do you want to sit down at the table?

MS. TKESHELASHVILI: I'll sit over there.

MR. KUTCHINS: Whatever your preference is.

Before we go to the floor I would just like to take an opportunity to recognize another visiting dignitary here in the audience, and that is the undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from Turkey, Ambassador Chevahoz (ph), who is here at CSIS today, meeting with a number of us, and welcome to you and your delegation. Thanks for being here.

All right, let's open the floor. And I see that the illustrious Andrei Yladionov (ph) has his hand up in the back of the room. Andre? Please just put up your hand and I'll kind of start a list up here, okay?

Q: Okay, thank you. First of all, thank you very much, Madame Secretary, for clear and honest remarks. I have two questions, a little bit related to each other. The first one, we can come back to the August 7<sup>th</sup>, this day. If we can – we will hear the issue of telephone conversations that you or your colleagues did have this day with your international foreign partners, what kind of message did you bring to them? What kind of responses did you get from them just before the final decision? And the second question – and also if you can mention, whom did you and your colleagues talk to on this day among foreign leaders and foreign partners?

And the other question is concerning the final decision. It is not a very big secret that there is a big debate – have been and still is going on here as well as in the world – over the last few months, especially since the revelation of Mr. Ryan Grist in some Western media – the mood has changed dramatically against Georgian decision, and it's not a very big secret that many people in the West, including the United States, including in this room do concede the decision on August 7<sup>th</sup> by the Georgian government, to put it mildly, as not a very smart one. It's not the only opinions that we have, but this is rather widely spread. How could you convince the American audience that the decisions that Georgian authorities have taken was really the best out of very worst options?

MS. TKESHELASHVILI: Well, thank you for your questions. In terms of the August 7 and then – to have a clear understanding of August 7 one has to look a bit into the recent history to August 7, and I will not go deep into that, but then to have an understanding of the dynamics because that is very important to have an understanding of what went – how the situation evolved on August 7<sup>th</sup>.

The situation started to be quite tense – and I'm not speaking here about the several years again in which some preparatory actions were conducted by the Russian side and then history of the conflict per se, but then to several months ahead of the August 7<sup>th</sup> I would say. So right after not only Kosovo but then Bucharest again, some very concrete actions were undertaken by the Russian side. I'm speaking here about the concrete order that had been issued by then-President Putin saying – I mean, establishing direct legal ties with both regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, not really recognizing fully them as independent states, but then in essence doing the same business that states are doing in between themselves, and then doing that legally in a way. And it's been a very provocative act and then this has been something that definitely did not go unnoticed from the Georgian side or for international community as well.

Then it followed with concrete actions in many ways. It's been the concrete actions in which the legal ties were actually being implemented and established with both of the regions. And then we've had militarization of the regions, paratroopers that came in, and then railway troops supposedly, you know, for repair of the railway in Abkhazia, and then a substantial amount of manpower coming in, in South Ossetia as well.

So why I bring up this context? I mean, while all this was happening we were not sitting idle and then seeing what can we do or arming ourselves so that we could have, you know, responsive action if something would have happened from the Russian side. We were extremely active on international front to make sure that we would have found some solutions to the case so that intention would have decreased in such a way that we would know the situation would evolve in a peaceful way, and there would have been some result-oriented peace process established on the ground.

And it was not the only direction that we've taken at the time. We've tried to reach out to Russia as well, and that we've never put our eye and focused on international community only, but then we've tried to establish direct ties with Russia as well so that we would find solutions. What we did is that it is – I mean, you remember well the time when the new president had been elected in Russia, so that we've tried to make sure that we would have a meeting between our presidents on the sidelines of a multilateral event that was happening in St. Petersburg, and the meeting then happened. And then we've had a very good, positive feeling about the meeting, that personally there was some good connection established because President Medvedev himself proposed to have a bilateral meeting sometime early summer maybe, so that we would have discussed in more detail the problems and then what could be the solutions that could have been found. And then we've been very optimistic on that and very glad that it was happening.

So what we did, again, we've put on paper some of the ideas for a peaceful solution to the problems, in a way, as a start up of the new dialogue, new peace process at the time, something that was not that easy to present to our own public, because what we were proposing at that time

was a new solution, withdrawing slightly Russian forces in Abkhazia around – I don't know how much details would be useful here because I don't know if anybody knows these details, but something that could have resembled to Georgian to partition of Abkhazia so that Russian forces would have withdrawn to the middle of Abkhazia more or less. There would have been an international peacekeeping force established in that part, but then Russia being part of it and then Russia playing the leading role in peace negotiations as well, so that it would have been a compromised solution but then something in which, at least in part of the territory, start-up of return of the people would have happened.

And we were quite keen to start negotiating on that, but what we received was a very rigid “no” on every single proposal that we made in terms of what could have been the solutions to the problem in Abkhazia, for example, as start-up of negotiations? And then already we've received the messages that a bilateral meeting would not have happened – there was no time, there was no readiness as of then – and then that all ultimatum is on the Georgian side.

But we've continued quite eagerly on international front. And I don't know if you remember then, there was this new initiative under the leadership of Germany when Steinmeier came in, and then we've had an understanding with good focus and coordination of efforts by France, Germany, U.K. and U.S., a Geneva group of friends of Georgia. Then we would have been able to set a new peace process starting up so that we would negotiate all the problematic issues.

So the meeting was arranged to have been organized at the time in Berlin by the beginning of August and we were ready to go, but what happened at the time was that Germans received an answer that it was a vacation time ultimately and then they were not quite eager to go and then to meet and negotiate the issues. And we speak about the time when the situation was quite tense. Paratroopers were there, railway troops from Russia, and then we've heard all this, you know, allegations, blames – Georgian airspace had been openly violated when the state secretary was in Georgia and Russia invented not – you know, say that it was not them coming in and violating Georgian airspace.

So the situation was very tense, so having an argument it's a vacation time was not something that one could see as a very logical way to go forward when you are eager to find a solution to the problem on the ground.

And the situation from the beginning of August was then already very tense on the ground. We've reached out to Russians. What they've said to us was that the South Ossetians were out of control, basically, by that time and they couldn't do anything with them. And the same thing was delivered in Tskhinvali as well by Russian military man Kulakhmetov, who was in charge with Russian forces on the ground.

So all the relations that I had at the time, through telephone conversations, through meeting with anybody was like a big signal SOS, help us because the situation is getting so worse that engagement is needed because it's getting worse and worse basically every day. So every telephone conversation prior to the summit as well was currently updating – constantly

updating everybody how the situation was developing in such a way so that we could have seen that some engagement could have stopped that, basically.

So the same was on the 7<sup>th</sup>. As much as we've seen that the Russian representative who was sent to negotiate then ultimately on the 7<sup>th</sup> through tripartite meetings between our State Ministry for Reintegration of South Ossetians and then Russian representative, some solution – and when he basically never showed up at the meeting in Tskhinvali saying that his flight was – flight fire, it was already obvious that Russia was not keen at the time to negotiate anything. So updates to all my counterparts were that we've seen it as a very suspicious way of behaving and the situation was getting very bad.

The latest phone calls that I've had at that time was when we've announced a ceasefire and then, in an attempt to explain what that ceasefire meant, it was not something in which we could have had expectation that ceasefire itself would have been sufficient to calm down the situation, because we were not firing at anybody during the ceasefire. When the ceasefire was in place, villages where Georgians were living were bombed by that time. Two villages, Nuli (ph) and Abnebi (ph), were not even in existence anymore by that time, but then we were holding onto the ceasefire still in an attempt to show – and that was my explanation, basically, that same conversation that you referred to – that it was a political gesture, as an ultimate gesture we could have made, that it's a very bad situation, but that we are showing we don't want to fight, and, you know, it was an outcry for help basically, and then a political signal shown to South Ossetians that if they had any doubts, we were there to find – eager to find solutions. But ultimate it proved not to be sufficient, unfortunately so at that time.

So any political signals that we were given at the time were mostly, again, pretty much understanding that the situation was very grave, once again, as always, saying that we should have been, you know, definitely cautious and restrained in a way, but fully understanding how difficult the situation was; no real promises how the situation could have been helped out by that time, but then taking into consideration information that we were bringing – basically, as a short summary, that would be my understanding.

So the same followed in the following days again, and it took quite a little time for Kushner to come in with – (unintelligible) – at the time in an attempt to negotiate the ceasefire, and it took some time to do so, so then Sarkozy himself was engaged. But it's an interesting factor I'll be mentioning today as well, that even after the ceasefire had been established and assigned, ultimately advancement of Russian forces was happening. Akhagori was taken after ceasefire was in effect. So that, again, shows how much clear-cut policy was there, what was the reason for invasion. And then at some point on the 13<sup>th</sup>, basically after the ceasefire had been signed, then all the efforts were therefore negotiated. And then when U.S. administration came out with a statement in which it was clear, you know, that the engagement was there for a peaceful solution, then the advancement of the Russian forces have stopped and then the capital was not overtaken.

But I myself, I remember very well when they – I was home at the time when Sarkozy was in Moscow and then he was saying, you know, what conversations he was having then with Russian officials. They cited him in the newspapers lately: We were all ready in the capital with

our families to be under siege and being bombed because that was the current understanding that we had at the time, people trying to somehow manage that, you know, keys would have been hidden, but other than that being ready for bombardment of the city. That was, you know, something that was not excluded in our minds at the time.

And then in terms of the final decision – and Ryan Grist, that's pretty much interrelated into that. With Ryan Grist it was a very sad story for OSC as an organization. And then we've tried to be fully cooperative with OSC. This person had his own personal issues for which he was taken out from the ground by the organization itself for improper contacts with some of the officials in South Ossetia and with Russian officials, and then the conflict that he was having with his own mission. And, by the way, all reports – spot reports that he cited as if any report was then not sent to Vienna and then headquarters was a complete lie because every spot report was immediately sent to the headquarters and then to member states engaged in the case so that nothing was ever hidden by the organization. It's impossible to happen.

But then we'd been asked at the time by OSC not to be open about the issues that are related to this person, not to damage the reputation of the organization, which we've been discreet in not identifying because we've had this information. But that unfortunately backfired on us then because after several months since he was taken out from the ground and fired from the organization, basically – not technical fired but then taken out from organization, then he came up with the statements that he came up. And it's interesting to mention that in the U.S., for example, he was assisted by an organization who is not quite expensive as an assistance that can be provided to him. So in a way one can ask himself or herself in a way how a person – if this person was acting alone in putting up the type of information that he was putting up was able to pay for the services that he was paying at the time for the PR organizations of the type he was hiring.

So the final decision is of our own decision – again, the firm belief and then intelligence information again that we've had with intercepts: What was the amount of Russian forces that were already on the ground from the Roki Tunnel; what was the situation on the ground in which Georgian villages were under intense fire? And basically when we speak about these villages we've never had a clear-cut situation in South Ossetia from one side Ossetian villages and one side so-called Georgian villages because even in those villages we've had Georgians and Ossetians living together. It was like a chessboard. So the villages I am referring to, they are not in Tskhinvali, so that basically they were cut off from the rest of the territory so that they've bombed without having no help there.

So it was an ultimate decision that was taken in an attempt to save independence of the country so that we could have managed to do our best to retain the situation in such a way that at least we will defend the citizens that were on the ground. So basically that's all I can – the same argument information that has been said by our side, but beyond that, I mean, the international commission that is being set up by the EU and then independent assessment organizations like Human Rights Watch I think already illuminated some very important issues, for example with false allegations that Russia had about so-called genocide that we were committing, what was the level of damage, and then, you know, casualties on the ground but at the same time clearly identifying what was the level of war crimes that were committed by Russia itself?

So independent assessment and third-party assessments I think will serve better purpose because in a way I find myself in a vicious circle speaking about the same issue with the same facts and with the same assessments but then going – not going nowhere because it's the same arguments which circle themselves. So if any independent third-party assessments will be there on the table, I think that will be more illuminating to the public rather than I'm speaking about that myself maybe.

MR. KUTCHINS: If I could just follow up a little bit on that because at the time you were the minister of foreign affairs. How would you describe your contact with your Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov in August – I mean, sort of up to September – excuse me, August 7<sup>th</sup> and then afterwards?

MS. TKESHELASHVILI: Well, it proved to be extremely difficult for us to establish contact at the time with Lavrov because they've been playing a game in which sometimes they would say that we will speak on the minister's level, then on the deputy minister's level, then again on the minister's level, and this would never appear, so that it took quite some time for actually Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Steinmeier of Germany to convince Lavrov that he personally should have picked up the phone at the time and talked. So it was not easy to knock on that door.

And we've been trying to arrange a phone conversation with presidents so that – during the wartime itself so that we would talk over the, you know, solution, but then we've been answered that Russian president and officials were irritated too much of us so that we are not in a mood to talk. And that was the direct answer that we received because it was through diplomatic channels that we requested the phone conversation. That was the answer that was delivered.

So that was the situation in terms of the negotiations. And when I've had already phone call conversations with him, then he – he only agreed on the phone conversation when our forces were already coming out, when they've been already successful on the ground in terms of the military operation. Prior to that, no. And then we've been trying to have this conversation.

Then basically it was quite clear through these conversations that Lavrov was buying time. He was not up to any real negotiation at the time because when I've been talking to him about the ceasefire and what could have been the mechanics of verifying the ceasefire so that they would have been assured that we're not doing anything and we that they're not doing anything, basically he was disregarding any possibility of international engagement and he was saying to me that, I have my own security people who are on the ground. I only trust their word, so that if they said that you are completely out from the territory and that there are no single Georgian soldier on the ground, then only we will be able to agree on the ceasefire, which was in essence meaning that unless they would decide themselves to make a ceasefire we would never be in a position to prove that we were not present there because we already had no soldiers on the ground because on the 10<sup>th</sup> we had withdrawn our soldiers.

So he was preconditioning ceasefire with the conditions that he would be in full control with because there would be no international mechanism that could have said that actually

Georgians are right; they're not already there. So they already did what they said what they would do; now it's your part not to fire, basically, and stop your activities, and that was something that he was not in a position to agree because he has no mandate on that to negotiate a ceasefire. So in essence he was at that time talking for the sake of saying then to people who pressed him that he was actually talking but at the same time buying more time rather than really negotiating a ceasefire.

MR. KUTCHINS: Thanks. Yes? Please identify yourself, everybody who is –

Q: My name is Bill Courtney. I was a former U.S. ambassador in Tbilisi. The Russians must be considering whether to invade Georgia and take it all this next summer. It was a popular war domestically in Russia. The international political sanctions have not been that great, and there would be the prospect of controlling all of the Caspian energy flows. What is Georgia's strategy for deterring such action? Are you counting on the prospect of international political and economic sanctions against Russia? Should it do that? Are you counting on international organizations to be particularly influential? Do you have a military strategy to enhance deterrence? What are the various factors in your deterrence strategy?

MS. TKESHELASHVILI: Well, it's a combination of factors that we have as components in our vision in that sense. And, first of all, I completely agree with you, and I've said that in my own introduction, that we don't really feel on the safe side. It's very hard to tell if they will undertake anything, but then it's the factors that we see on the ground – I'm not really excluding that possibility either. And then internal situation in Russia is something that is a worrying factor as well, for sure.

And when we say about the energy corridor and then transport corridors, it's interesting that it's become more vivid how much even beyond the Caucasus and then Caspian Sea Basin. But then even with regard to Afghanistan and then alternative routes to Afghanistan again, Russia is already playing that game because if Georgia is not there as an open option, basically, then again alternative routes that can be arranged through Afghanistan if not Iran because already too much cooperative in that sense, and then it's only Russia then that is part of the puzzle basically. So then in that sense even that type of footing is pretty much under the leverage of Russia if Russia manages to establish that type of full monopoly over the region and Caucasus and then including starting from Georgia and then spreading on the others.

So what we do as a strategy? First of all we are well concentrated and coordinated on our part so that we have full information, well coordinated policies set up so that we are calm and then we know what we are doing, and by doing that, being fully open and transparent and cooperative to international monitoring missions on the ground. And that's what we can do on our side. We are concentrated on internal development, on putting back on track our country as a country, then being fully cooperative with international missions, and then trying to be constructive and engaged in international talks. So in that sense that's the part that we can do alone ourselves, but at the same time, by only doing that one cannot guarantee that it's sufficient enough of a deterrence to Russia in that sense.

So engagement of the international community is definitely needed. We are not of the opinion that sanctions are the proper way of going forward in terms of sanctioning Russia as a country – of Russia in that sense, but then with the bigger context of engagement with Russia, there have to be clarity, how we approach the issue with relation of Russia's relations with its immediate neighbors in a way, so that by engaging with Russia we try to make sure that Russia becomes a predictable partner rather than a country which seeks its dominance on every issue that it's engaged with rather than being a partner, and a credible one in that sense as well.

So we don't see a problem or a danger, a threat that there is an understanding and need that Russia needs to be engaged as a partner. That's exactly what can help the situation – you know, an attempt to find solutions to problematic issues. So while having said that, Russia needs to be given a clear understanding – not ultimatums but a clear understanding with clear messaging that this is the expectation: constructive behavior of Russia, and then in that sense it can never be understood that if Russia does anything to further the aims that it might have had with regard to Georgia, that can be tolerated and there will be too much of a political price attached to that. So this needs to be understood by Russia so that it thinks twice seriously before doing anything further maybe.

MR. KUTCHINS: If I could just follow up on that question and answer – and we were talking about this before the session. It would seem to me that if Russia did want to – I mean, the easiest opportunity for Russia to go to Tbilisi and to take all of Georgia was in August of 2008 and they made the decision not to. And why do you think that was the decision that was made?

MS. TKESHELASHVILI: I think this is, again, a combination of transatlantic effort, I would say. In the beginning of the process Europe took a leading and a very hard part of the process on itself. And then you'll remember how the French president had been engaged in the process, that it was not an easy negotiating process in any ways. But at the same time, as I've said, having a ceasefire agreement, still the advancement of Russian forces was happening on the ground. So it all stopped on the 13<sup>th</sup> when, again, the statement by the President Bush at that time came out, so that only then did advancement of troops have stopped. Withdrawal started much later but then it was advancement of the troops had stopped. And it was very close to the capital by that time. It was always – (inaudible) – in miles, but then in kilometers it would have been like 25 or so basically around that time.

So that was one factor, a combination of efforts in my understanding. When Russia saw that it was Europe, which was reinforced again by U.S. – (inaudible) – of this transatlantic effort was the key factor to see that it was an overarching political price that would have been paid by Russia. And then we've had, you know, some physical components of that as well: humanitarian action but still – (inaudible) – U.S. military ships came in and, you know, we've had many – (inaudible) – deliveries by U.S. Army as well.

So there was a combination of efforts, but I do believe firmly that there was another angle into that as well which was more related to Georgia public itself because what Russia did basically is they tried to partially play it smart in a way so that the territories that they were advancing and occupying in Western Georgia, for example, they were not treating people

themselves at those places badly, as if, you know, if they would come they would have nice occupiers that would – (inaudible) – sometimes, or liberators or whatever. So in that sense they had a hope that when they would come there would not have been outraged public resistance at the end of the day so that public would, you know, somehow indirectly get an acceptance itself with the idea that, you know, this happened as a fait accompli.

So what happened – and then Russia had already the experiences of civil wars in Georgia and then public unrest when basically the state was in such a bad shape that everything was possible to happen, and the public was in such a disarray as well, but it was a completely different state that they found at the time, not only the level of institutional development of the state as such – again, I'm not – (inaudible) – that we are an overly developed country, but with public growth of consciousness as well as solid – you know, consolidation. So they've seen, I believe, that Tbilisi as a city would never fall easily, so the people would put up resistance and they would never accept the idea that, you know, Russian soldiers would be again diminishing and extinguishing independence of Georgia in the same way that it happened in 1921, exactly in the same way, because that's what happened when Soviet Russia came into Georgia and then killed the young, independent and democratic Georgia at the time, and then we ended up with 70 years being in the Soviet Union.

So that's what Russia understood at the time, and that will have been a slaughter basically, but they would have destroyed the whole city in a sovereign country, and that would have been too much to bear, even for Russia maybe at the time. So a combination of those two factors I think played a role in it.

MR. KUTCHINS: Thanks. Yes?

Q: Yes, Bill Jones from Executive Intelligence Review. Can you say what is the status of the cooperation now between Georgia and the U.S. military? Obviously there were some concerns that have been expressed since August 7<sup>th</sup> about the help the U.S. was giving Georgia. What is the status now? What do you expect – where do you expect this to go now in the near future in terms of cooperation?

MS. TKESHELASHVILI: Well, Secretary Gates was very clear in his statements in Krakow, not only – I mean, when he had bilateral meeting with our minister of defense here in Washington that we will have a continuation of the strategic partnership in the field of security as well with the U.S. And then a big part of the U.S.-Georgia new strategic partnership charter is about the security issues as well. So we don't, I mean, expect any ruptures of the relationship in any way.

There are two main areas in terms of defense capacities that we will be looking into. It will be a technical component of defense capacities and then air defense system, I mean, is obviously a key priority. We've seen that throughout the war as well. But beyond that it's the training and then development of our own internal capacities in terms of, you know, military academy and that intellectual development of our, you know, security establishment in that sense. So that's clear in the new vision that the Ministry of Defense has put out for 2009.

We are now in the process, under the National Security Council leadership, of drafting a national threats assessment document, and then we're changing very much the methodology of how we're doing that, and we're taking some of the good examples from the U.K. as much as we've seen it helpful. We'll be looking to cooperation with the U.S. along those ways. And then based on that we will be going into the new structural ways of arranging the document on national security review and then, you know, getting our thoughts, on a more conceptual basis, better arranged and organized in that way. So that's pretty much the way of continuation of the relationship.

You know that we've had, in Iraq, our contribution for quite some time: 2,000 soldiers on the ground. We'll be sending our soldiers now in Afghanistan, so that we continuously show that we are a small country, that we might need help in many areas, but then at the same time, in whichever way we can contribute our own contribution we will never shy off with very sensitive and difficult tasks as well. So that's something that is firmly embedded in our political thinking and readiness, so we'll continue on that as well.

MR. KUTCHINS: Okay, we have time for one more question, and I see Sam Cherribi here – Dr. Sam Cherribi.

Q: Sam Cherribi, CSIS. Can you tell us something about the current status of WTO negotiations with the Russians?

MS. TKESHELASHVILI: With WTO, again it's not a political organization per se, but on the issues that are through – the angle of which we are dealing with these issues are very much worsened even because of the high level of occupation that we are experiencing from the Russian forces now because the main arguments that we've had at the time were related with the border issues and then the control of that, and it was ambiguous and difficult when Russia was so-called peacekeeper on the ground, but now it's even more of a clear-cut case that there is an occupation of those territories. And then they've recognized parts of the territories that are, you know, part of Georgia's sovereign state, so that this whole issue has become even more complicated.

So I don't envisage, frankly speaking, how that issue can be solved unless we see that those territories are occupied and then we see that we have a proper, at least common control, with some international engagement, of the borders in such a way so that we will be in a position to be in agreement of going further in terms of the final decisions on that. What we don't obstruct is some talks on an informal level so that some of the issues which are not related to us, therefore that there is a possibility of consultations that can be going in Geneva. So the process is ongoing from another angle, but then after those issues are solved we don't see how much we can be in agreement as a state for Russia's becoming a member of WTO in that sense.

MR. KUTCHINS: Ladies and gentlemen, I'm afraid that our time hath runneth out. Let me say thank you very much –

MS. TKESHELASHVILI: Thank you.

MR. KUTCHINS: – Madame Secretary. You know, when I first learned of the opportunity to meet you and host you here at CSIS I was quite excited. I said, wow, look at your biography. I said, here you are, you know, born in the year in which I graduated from high school, which I will not divulge – (laughter) – and you’ve accomplished all of this so far, and you must be really a remarkable person. And let me just say that you’ve come here today and you’ve demonstrated that indeed you are quite a remarkable person.

MS. TKESHELASHVILI: Oh, thank you.

MR. KUTCHINS: So let me thank you very much, and we wish you the best of luck and look forward to seeing you the next time you come here to Washington or someplace else, hopefully.

MS. TKESHELASHVILI: Thank you very much.

MR. KUTCHINS: Thank you.

MS. TKESHELASHVILI: It’s been very interesting.

(Applause.)

(END)