

## CHAPTER TWO

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### **SHAKING UP THE SYSTEM: GEORGIA AND THE WAR ON TERROR**

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Since the late 1990s, Georgia's foreign relations have been as tumultuous as its politics. After consolidating power in Russia's shadow, Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze began seeking ways to balance against Russian influence in the Caucasus, restore Georgia's territorial integrity, and erect strong central state institutions. The promise of a newly pro-Western and successful Georgia captured the attention of the United States and its European allies.

By the fall of 2001, however, it was evident that Shevardnadze was not going to be able to fulfill his ambitions or his promises. Beset by weak domestic leadership and the persistence of politics for personal gain, Georgia was unable to cope with new Russian pressures—linked to the arrival of Chechen militants on Georgian territory—or satisfy the expectations of its potential Western partners. Georgia instead appeared headed toward the fate of a failed state with little hope of becoming much more than a Russian dependency.

The September 11 attacks offered Georgia a rare opportunity to reverse course. First, the war on terror gave Georgia the chance to deepen its strategic partnership with the United States. Georgia hastened to pledge “full cooperation” in the war on terror, including overflight rights for coalition forces en route to Central Asia, in exchange receiving a prominent package of counterterrorism assistance. At the same time, Georgia was compelled to start taking its state-building endeavors more seriously by establishing control over the lawless Pankisi Gorge occupied by Chechen and foreign militants. Together, these developments suggested that Georgia might be able to start defending itself more effectively against Russian pressures and even launch the country toward NATO membership—for Georgia, the ultimate balancer against Russia and a

potential tool for restoring lost territories. In the war on terror, Georgia was a classic bandwagoner: granting the United States what it wanted while promoting its own strategic goals.

The Georgian government never anticipated, however, that bandwagoning with the United States would entail greater obligations than merely establishing control over the Pankisi Gorge. After September 11, the Georgian government's domestic legitimacy and effectiveness of rule continued to decline. As Georgia prepared for November 2003 parliamentary elections, the ruling party had become a shell of its former self, with state officials and parliamentary representatives departing en masse to form new opposition parties. Georgia's competence as a state—and as a reliable partner of the West—was on the line. In the end, Shevardnadze refused to bow to the pressure for change stemming from his own people and the United States. Instead, he futilely threw in his lot with those who preferred the existing dysfunctional system of rule.

After the November 2003 "Rose Revolution," the administration of President Mikheil Saakashvili adopted an ambitious state-building strategy seeking to bandwagon onto both U.S. and Russian power. In 2004, the government did not entirely master this agenda. It remained, however, in a better position to succeed than the government that originally led Georgia into the post-September 11 world.

This chapter first details Georgian grand strategy at the end of the 1990s. It then discusses the "new" threat to Georgia posed by the resurgence of the Russian-Chechen war in 1999 and Georgia's limited response to that threat. The next sections explain how events after September 11 compelled Georgia to take the tasks of state building more seriously and—with American assistance—provided it with an opportunity to balance against Russian power. The penultimate section discusses Georgia's subsequent support of the United States in the war on Iraq and why that support did not translate into further U.S. support for the faltering Georgian government. The chapter concludes by considering how the November 2003 "Rose Revolution" put Georgia back on track but by no means guaranteed its future success.

### **BALANCING HEGEMONY, RESTORING INTEGRITY, KEEPING TOGETHER**

By 1999, Georgian grand strategy centered on three goals. The first was to balance against Russian hegemony. Georgians defined their prime security threat as a Russian effort to establish Georgia as a neocolonial

dependency, with military, economic, and foreign policies tailored to suit Russian needs and desires. Battered by civil war and separatist conflict, Georgia joined the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1993 and subsequently signed an agreement with Russia (never ratified by parliament) that permitted Moscow to retain four Soviet-era military bases in Georgia for 25 years.

In 1999, however, Shevardnadze made moves to strategically distance his country from Russia. Together with Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, Georgia refused to renew membership in the CIS Collective Security Treaty. It also retracted its invitation to host Russian military bases. Russia agreed to withdraw from two of the bases—near Tbilisi and in the breakaway region of Abkhazia—but delayed a commitment to withdraw from two others near the Turkish border.

Georgia also began to more actively pursue security and energy relationships with the United States and its European allies. Although Georgian leaders called for Georgia's integration into NATO as soon as the USSR fell apart, they became serious about this appeal only eight years later, after Georgia withdrew from the CIS Collective Security Treaty. Georgia supported U.S. policy on the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan energy corridor by which Caspian oil and gas was to transit directly through the South Caucasus (the gas pipeline, in particular, promised to lessen Georgia's dependence on Russian energy supplies). The Georgians also sold a majority share of their main energy company Telasi to a U.S. firm in a bid to provide at least the capital city of Tbilisi with a steady supply of electricity as well as further reduce Georgia's reliance on Russian energy sources.

In addition to balancing against Russian hegemony, a second component of Georgian grand strategy was to restore the country's territorial integrity. Georgia lost de facto control over two formerly autonomous territories, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, during and shortly after its struggle for independence from the Soviet Union. The war over Abkhazia resulted in the departure of virtually the entire Georgian community of the region—nearly half Abkhazia's population. The recovery of the lost territories, especially Abkhazia, was a goal the Shevardnadze government stressed almost as much as establishing a bulwark against Russian hegemony. These goals were, moreover, linked: Georgians blamed Russia for supporting separatism in the breakaway regions and allowing them to remain apart from Georgia.

The third component of Georgian grand strategy was to keep the

rest of the country together. Shevardnadze was careful not to alienate Aslan Abashidze, the feudal-like head of autonomous Ajara, home to one of the Russian bases. He also appointed presidential representatives to all the country's regions and incorporated the leadership structures of Georgia's ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani communities into an overall system of patronage rule.

Although Georgia's strategic goals may not have been that contentious, by 1999 President Shevardnadze's rule had become highly controversial domestically. Shevardnadze was no dictator: he allowed his people political and civil freedoms. But if Georgia was a democracy, it was only with a generous understanding of the term. Elections were routinely marred by violations significant enough to affect outcomes. Legislative and judicial bodies had no real power.

Most important, Shevardnadze had done little to pull the country out of economic stagnation. Despite the achievement of stability and the appointment of a number of reform-minded officials, Georgia continued to operate by the rules of a heavily corrupt clan system in which government posts were used for personal gain. Most Georgians remained impoverished, even lacking elementary supplies of gas and electricity. By the end of the 1990s, Shevardnadze's government had lost whatever popular legitimacy it may have had.

Initially, none of this was a significant barrier to cultivating relations with the West. In 1999, Georgia was the first South Caucasus state to join the Council of Europe. The next year, it became a member of the World Trade Organization. Under Shevardnadze's rule, Georgia was also a heavy recipient of American aid—more than \$1 billion in U.S. assistance. Dwelling on Shevardnadze's role in ending the Cold War—as well as on the stability, civil society, and new generation of pro-Western politicians he promoted—foreign supporters of Georgia remained hopeful that the country would yet flourish.

The Georgian government was, of course, glad to divert the attention of foreign supporters away from internal misrule to the threat from Russia, the country's separatist problems, and the "stability" Shevardnadze had restored to the formerly war-torn state without resorting to authoritarian rule. By the end of the decade, however, it had become highly doubtful that Shevardnadze was going to be able to cultivate an image of partnership and success if he continued to squander the assistance of his potential Western allies and was unable to fundamentally transform the nature of his fragmented, corrupt state.<sup>1</sup>

## PANKISI: THE GATHERING STORM

The resurgence of the Russian-Chechen conflict in the autumn of 1999 posed a severe challenge to the precariously positioned Georgia. In the months that followed the Russian Army's reentry into Chechnya, an estimated several hundred Chechen fighters made their way across the Caucasus, together with several thousand refugees, to seek refuge in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge, home of Chechen kin that had settled there in the nineteenth century.

Consequently, Georgia experienced a barrage of verbal assault from Moscow. Disregarding their own responsibility for letting armed fighters cross the border, Russian authorities accused Georgia of harboring "international terrorists" who "regularly hold negotiations with their foreign patrons and supporters." Expressing hope that the Georgians would "step off [this] dangerous path," the Russians demanded that they either apprehend the militants or let Russian troops in to do the job for them.<sup>2</sup> The Georgian highlands also became the target of an occasional Russian missile, raising the specter that Moscow would eventually engage in a more thorough effort to reestablish control over Georgia.

If Georgia were to cave to Russian demands, however, the country's strategic goals would have been shattered. With control over the Pankisi Gorge tenuous as it was, Shevardnadze was reluctant to alienate the local population through an armed effort to capture militants. Even if he had been willing to take the risk, Georgian officials insist that their armed forces—long neglected and suffering exceedingly low morale—would not have been able to succeed in apprehending battle-hardened Chechen militants.<sup>3</sup>

That said, the Georgians were also unwilling to let Russian troops go after the militants. This would have enabled Russia to prominently display its military power inside the country, just as Georgia had departed the CIS collective security zone and was trying to distance itself more from the Russian sphere of influence. It would also have meant granting Russia the implicit right to use lethal force—against militants or, worse, refugees and Pankisi residents who could get caught in the crossfire. Allowing this, Georgia would have directly contributed to yet another violent regional conflict on its soil.<sup>4</sup>

## BEFORE SEPTEMBER 11: A MISSING STRATEGY

Confronting a problem they resented having to deal with and did not believe they *could* deal with in any way that accommodated their strate-

gic goals, the Georgians did nothing. Their opening tactic was simply to counter Russia's propaganda campaign with one of their own. For months, state officials contended that they were "in control of the situation as never before." Georgian officials denied they were "letting Chechen fighters through" and insisted they were fully capable of guarding Georgia's northern border.<sup>5</sup>

Mounting evidence that Chechen gunmen were sheltering in the Pankisi Gorge, however, soon compelled the government to tone down its denials. In April 2000, the Georgian government began denying the number of militants the Russians alleged were in Pankisi, not their presence altogether. After Georgian forces encircled tens of fighters that had crossed the border, Shevardnadze gave up all pretenses: "There really is a group of the so-called fighters [in Pankisi]," he said. Although he sought to moderate this statement by noting that among them were Kists (i.e., Georgian citizens, not Russian), he conceded he could not "rule out the possibility of ethnic Chechen citizens of Russia, that is the so-called Chechen fighters, hiding in the Pankisi [G]orge." A few months before September 11, Shevardnadze again acknowledged that Chechen militants were in Georgia, although he claimed that "[t]he total number of these persons is not larger than 200 to 300."<sup>6</sup>

These admissions did not mean the Georgians were prepared to accommodate Russian demands. After Shevardnadze first acknowledged the presence of Chechen militants, the government reiterated it would "under no circumstances" allow "Russian armed units [to] be involved in any operations on Georgian territory."<sup>7</sup> In March 2001, Shevardnadze pointedly derided the Russians' claims that foreign mercenaries and "terrorists" had joined the Chechen militants in Pankisi.<sup>8</sup> The Georgians also rejected Russia's claim that Ruslan Gelaev, one of the Chechen militants' leading field commanders, was in Georgia.

Besides increasing the military pressure from Russia and raising the specter of internal conflict, the situation in Pankisi had an additional negative effect: it sent the government's domestic legitimacy crashing to new lows. Exemplifying one of the sorrier aspects of the Georgian state, some officials began taking criminal advantage of the government's reluctance to impose order in the Pankisi Gorge. Employees of the Interior and Security Ministries were widely accused of involvement in a string of Pankisi-based kidnappings of locals and foreigners as well as the drug trade passing through the area.<sup>9</sup> In December 2000, Georgian villagers picketed roads into Pankisi, threatening to take matters into their own

hands if the authorities did not crackdown on criminal elements in the gorge, an act repeated the summer of 2001 when “defense volunteers” protested that their relatives had been kidnapped and that the government had “done nothing to eradicate camps of the Chechen fighters and foreign mercenaries.”<sup>10</sup>

Eventually, this criminal complicity threatened to shade into a bizarre national security partnership. In August 2001, a group of armed Chechens—rumored to be led by Ruslan Gelaev himself—made their way across Georgian territory unimpeded and, joined by Georgian guerrilla fighters, appeared to be preparing to fight their way into Abkhazia. Although no conflict erupted, Shevardnadze eventually issued the mysterious admission that “an attempt to invade Abkhazia” had been “halted by our troops.”<sup>11</sup> By so blatantly allowing the militants to cross Georgia, Shevardnadze (or others in his entourage) greatly risked weakening Georgia’s position vis-à-vis Russia.

By September 11, Georgia’s grand strategy was largely bankrupt. The Georgian leadership had acknowledged a militant presence in the Pankisi Gorge but was doing very little to deflect Russian pressure. Worse, it had permitted Pankisi to become a haven for criminals, providing them with official associates and patrons. Finally, it had permitted militants to go adventuring across the country to the border with Abkhazia.

This was certainly a novel approach for achieving Georgian state security. In 1999, when the Russians first began to accuse Georgia of harboring terrorists, Shevardnadze announced that Georgia would be “knocking very hard on the door” of NATO—the Georgians’ favored guarantor of security and internal order—within five years.<sup>12</sup> By 2001, Shevardnadze certainly was not presiding over a state that stood a chance of entering NATO or acquiring any other guarantees of national security so soon.

### TOWARD A SECURE STATE: THE WAR ON TERROR

The September 11 attacks on New York and Washington had the local consequence of forcing Georgians to adopt a more coherent approach to its national security. In the new global environment, and with the United States rallying support for its war on terror, Georgia could not afford to tolerate the militants’ presence any longer. Russia had gained considerable artillery to use in its coercive fight against Georgia, including the threat of direct attack—following the example of the United

States in Afghanistan—if the Georgian “host state” did not agree to evict its “terrorist” guests.

Three days after the Al Qaeda attacks on the United States, Russian politician Boris Nemtsov remarked that “Russia will have to resort to military action” if the Georgian authorities do not surrender the “terrorists” on their soil. A few days later, the Russian Federal Security Service announced that the prime suspects in the 1999 apartment-building bombings in Moscow, which had killed more than 200 people, were sheltering in the Pankisi Gorge and that they had links to foreign terrorists. The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a note demanding that Georgia immediately extradite suspected terrorists and “take tough measures against the bandits [who are] planning fresh acts of terrorism.... It is time for Georgia in deed and not in word to join the common front of civilized states in eliminating the threat of international terrorism.”<sup>13</sup> Such rhetoric from the Russians suggested a qualitatively new level of threat.

At the start of December 2001, a former foreign policy adviser to the president, Archil Gegeshidze, revealed just how September 11 had altered the context of the Russian threat. Before September 11, Gegeshidze suggested, Georgia might have been able to count on the United States to help support Georgia against Russian advances. Now, however, “major” U.S. foreign policy shifts had “made traditional national goals subordinate to combating international terrorism.” The implication was clear: if Georgia did not clean out the Pankisi Gorge, the United States was not going to be able to offer Georgia very much protection. Russia would be given “a free hand” in its dealings with Georgia.<sup>14</sup>

### A STRATEGY TAKES SHAPE

Immediately after September 11, the Georgian government acknowledged the shift in context that the attacks on the United States had precipitated. At first, Georgia seemed to have no choice but to succumb to Russian demands—in other words, bandwagon, not balance against, Russian power. An unusually accommodating Foreign Ministry declared that “[g]iven the tragic events in the U.S.” as well as recent terrorist acts in Chechnya, “the Georgian side understands the increased sensitivity of Russian colleagues to the problems of terrorism.” Shevardnadze declared a willingness to discuss plans with Russia for a “joint fight” against terrorism “at the top government level, to say nothing of the level of

special services...the ethnic or the social origin of the terrorists notwithstanding." The president subsequently acknowledged "dangerous trends which propagate terrorism in Georgia."<sup>15</sup>

These words were matched by deeds. A few weeks after September 11, there was a second act to the August "Abkhazian affair": Chechen fighters crudely invaded Abkhazia only to be repulsed by local troops. Several commentators in the Russian media, normally skeptical of Shevardnadze's sincerity, held that this failed attack reflected a government effort not to capture Abkhazia but to move the militants out of Georgia.<sup>16</sup> At the end of September, relatives of Ruslan Gelaev's associates indicated that Shevardnadze had recently told Gelaev it was time that he and his men left Georgia. Later, two Dagestanis who said they had been in Pankisi with Gelaev affirmed that Georgian authorities had resolved to remove Gelaev after September 11, since "he posed problems for both Shevardnadze and foreign states."<sup>17</sup>

At the end of October, an indirectly related scandal freed the government to consider more open methods to resolve the Pankisi problem. Security forces raided the offices of a popular independent television station, Rustavi-2, known for its reporting on state corruption. The raid provoked large demonstrations calling for the government's resignation; the crisis was resolved only when the security and interior ministers resigned.<sup>18</sup> Presumably, Shevardnadze did not orchestrate the entire affair to have an excuse to remove these ministers who were major obstacles to getting anything done in the Pankisi Gorge.<sup>19</sup> Given the new context, however, it is not surprising that Shevardnadze let them go without a fight.

As if in confirmation of these ministers' opposition to resolving the Pankisi problem, new revelations came to light. Days before his forced resignation, then interior minister Kakha Targamadze was still insisting that Gelaev was not in Georgia. After his removal, Shevardnadze soon announced that Gelaev had been in Georgia, though he claimed no knowledge of his current location.<sup>20</sup> After further protests in January 2002 involving the relatives of a kidnapped monk and members of the Soviet-Afghan War Veterans Union, the new security and interior ministers revealed that some 600 "criminals" were in Pankisi and announced the start of an "anticrime" operation to "free hostages, remove firearms, and eliminate drug trafficking."<sup>21</sup> Although it is unclear what the mission actually accomplished, the declaration was at least a step forward in dealing with the Pankisi problem. Security Minister Valery Khaburdzania admitted that several dozen Chechen fighters had been crossing

the Russian-Georgian frontier regularly and that “Gelaev and his group are hardly infrequent visitors to Pankisi.”<sup>22</sup>

### **THE “VIRTUAL OPERATION”: GTEP AND THE RESOLUTION OF PANKISI**

In addition to increasing the need to clear out the Pankisi Gorge, the war on terror ultimately provided the Georgians with a new occasion to do so, and in a way that would enable them to balance against Russian influence. This opportunity came in the form of a \$64 million U.S. military assistance program called the Georgian Train and Equip Program (GTEP), announced in February 2002.

GTEP was the product of a number of U.S. interests. A strong program of military assistance to Georgia—a potential ally in a strategic, energy-rich region—had been developing since 1998, including the training of border and coast guards and a grant of ten used combat helicopters. After September 11, a ramping up of that program made sense. With Russian pressure against Georgia stronger than ever before, Georgia had pledged firm support for the war on terror. As the United States could establish at least some connection between the militants in the Pankisi Gorge and global terrorist networks (see below),<sup>23</sup> it thus had an interest in helping Georgia clean up its act. Although it may not have been prepared to directly go after militants in the Pankisi Gorge, it was at least interested in providing cover for the Georgians to take care of the problem themselves and, in so doing, provide a buffer against Russian threats.

GTEP was justified precisely on the premise that militants in the Pankisi Gorge had links to Al Qaeda. On February 11, 2002—the fifth-month anniversary of the Al Qaeda attacks—U.S. charge d’affairs in Georgia, Philip Remler, remarked in a local media interview that several dozen “mujahideen” from Afghanistan were in the Pankisi Gorge and that the United States was prepared to assist Georgia in establishing anti-terrorist units.<sup>24</sup> Later that month, the U.S. State Department indicated that the United States was prepared to “assist Georgia in developing the capability to control its own borders, and to conduct limited counter-insurgency operations against terrorist elements.” In his March 2002 speech on the sixth-month anniversary of September 11, President Bush cited Georgia as the third recipient of U.S. antiterror assistance, after Yemen and the Philippines, and noted that “terrorists working closely with Al Qaeda operate in the Pankisi Gorge.”<sup>25</sup>

With the announcement of GTEP, Georgians' depiction of the Pankisi problem underwent a radical shift. Two days before Remler made his comments about the mujahadeen, Khaburdzania noted that the government had arrested two "Arabs," accusing them of trying "to form an illegal armed unit in the Pankisi Gorge with the aim of carrying out sabotage and terrorist acts in Russia." He also revealed that foreigners were distributing money in the region to spread Wahhabism and construct mosques. Some days later, Khaburdzania admitted that "suspicious people" of many different nationalities could be in Pankisi, noting that five Afghans and seven Iranians—illegal migrants seeking to reach Europe—were recently arrested.<sup>26</sup>

The government's disclosures did not stop there. In March, a week after returning from discussions in the United States and on the same day the defense minister reported that U.S. military instructors would be arriving in Georgia, Khaburdzania reported that some individuals in the Pankisi Gorge had been "previously connected" with Al Qaeda. In May, as these instructors were arriving in Georgia, he declared there were "some one hundred Arabs" in Pankisi, many of whom had fought in Chechnya but also some who were posing as "representatives of humanitarian and religious organizations, or masquerading as teachers."<sup>27</sup> The next day he raised the official count of militants in the gorge to three times the Georgians' pre-September 11 estimate—800 Chechen fighters plus 100 foreign mercenaries, "mainly ethnic Arabs."<sup>28</sup>

The Georgians were reluctant, however, to push the Al Qaeda connection too far. In April, Defense Minister Davit Tevdzadze indicated that the American suggestion of an Al Qaeda connection "[had come] as something of a surprise." At the end of that month, Khaburdzania offered a similarly hesitant position, noting that there are some in Pankisi "who are connected, maybe not directly, but indirectly with terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda." Khaburdzania explicitly denied that mujahideen had come to Georgia from Afghanistan after September 11. In May, Tevdzadze told an American audience that "personally, it is very difficult to believe" that fighters from Afghanistan had recently fled to Georgia.<sup>29</sup>

These inconsistencies were not failures of Georgian strategy but rather indicative of Georgia's interest in U.S. military assistance. The Georgians never perceived a clear and present danger of Al Qaeda-linked terrorism against their country. However, they understood that they now had to clean out the gorge and that GTEP provided them with a way to do so without bending to Russian pressure. Furthermore, it es-

tablished a bulwark against further Russian advances. Alexander Rondeli, the head of a government-linked policy foundation, best expressed the peculiarity of the twin pressure and opportunity the United States was providing. On the one hand, Rondeli admitted, “Georgia is in the limelight and has to perform better.” At the same time, “the day I heard the Americans were coming I was the happiest man on earth.”<sup>30</sup>

The American offer was especially fortunate because it provided the Georgians a way to solve the Pankisi problem without a single shot being fired. GTEP did not transform Georgia’s beleaguered armed forces into a lethal antiterrorist machine overnight. What it did was signal to the militants that the Georgians were at last serious about denying them shelter. Before September 11, the Georgians had no hope of credibly sending this signal, given the state of the armed forces, Georgia’s desire to avoid conflict with the militants, and state officials’ own criminal interests. Now, as partners in the war on terror, Georgians could make a convincing case that their hands were tied, that they had U.S. military support, and that the militants were going to have to leave the gorge or risk conflict.<sup>31</sup>

Georgia clearly used GTEP to send this signal. At the start of March, the deputy defense minister noted that “a small group of rebels have [already] left Pankisi” in light of the announcement that the United States was sending troops to Georgia. In a May press conference in the United States, Defense Minister Tevzadze asserted that “the situation in Pankisi dramatically improved [after] the...train-and-equip program was loudly announced.” Shevardnadze himself declared that the authorities were “trying to suggest” to the fighters “that they make their way out of here as quickly as possible because the noose is gradually tightening . . . We still want to part with them in a friendly way, and I believe that we will be able to do it.” He was careful to note that “Russia has a special interest in [the militants], and so does the USA.”<sup>32</sup>

Although the first stage of this “virtual operation” in Pankisi involved the eviction of foreign mercenaries alone, Georgia later pressured the Chechen militants to leave as well. These efforts coincided with the start of actual GTEP training and were prodded by the United States.<sup>33</sup> As the initial stage of training—a 70-day course for 200 officers—was taking place in the summer of 2002, Georgian officials began to report an exodus of Chechen fighters. In mid-July, the police chief responsible for the Pankisi Gorge reported that there were only 300 fighters left in Pankisi, that some two-dozen fighters had departed for the border a few days

before, and that “several more groups” were planning to leave for Chechnya. Later that month, Shevardnadze declared that the Chechen fighters understood that “this is their last summer in Georgia and that they will have to leave Georgian territory by the fall.”<sup>34</sup> Shortly after, the head of the Russian border guard confirmed that up to 60 fighters had recently crossed the border and, though at least 200 fighters were left in Pankisi, that most of these were planning to cross over soon.<sup>35</sup>

In late August 2002, the Georgian government engaged in heavily publicized operations to demonstrate Georgia’s reassertion of control over the Pankisi Gorge. To make sure the gorge was reasonably free of militants beforehand, officials publicly discussed the impending operation in advance and conveyed messages to the remaining militants that it was time for them to depart.<sup>36</sup> During the operation, 1,000 Interior Ministry troops were dispatched to the gorge. The Defense Ministry held pre-announced exercises south of Pankisi, with the participation of some 1,500 troops. Only after this operation did the first of five sessions of actual GTEP field training begin.

### BALANCING AGAINST THE “NEW” RUSSIAN THREAT

GTEP enabled Georgia to undermine Russia’s main coercive pressure against them. At the same time, it provided the Georgians with appropriate cover to avoid Russia’s wrath. Russian officials expressed great frustration that Georgia was sending militants back to Russia rather than allowing Russian troops to go in after them. As a Kremlin spokesman declared that Moscow was “tired” of the Georgians’ “flat-out lies,” Russian aircraft bombed (unofficially) the Georgian side of the border days after Russian troops clashed with a group of fighters returning from Georgia, and again a few days later when survivors from that battle tried to cross back into Georgia.<sup>37</sup> The Russian defense minister indicated that the only way to solve the problem was to deploy Russian special forces in Georgia, while the chair of the Russian parliament’s international affairs committee insisted that Russia had the right “to conduct targeted retaliatory actions against rebel bases outside its borders.”<sup>38</sup> On August 23, as Georgia prepared its clean-up operation in the Pankisi Gorge, Russia again bombed Georgian territory, this time killing one.

With its newly elevated partnership with the United States, however, the Georgians received support against Russian coercion. The first bombing in July resulted in a State Department declaration that the United States “strongly supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity

of Georgia” and “would...be seriously concerned to learn of any violations of that sovereignty.” After the third, fatal attack, Secretary of State Colin Powell called the Russian foreign minister to express his concerns, and the State Department publicly urged Russia to “cooperate with Georgia” and allow it to “deal with the question of international terrorists and Chechen fighters” on its own. The White House issued its own statement that “the U.S. regrets this loss of life and deplores the violation of Georgia’s sovereignty.”<sup>39</sup>

The U.S commitment to Georgia was tested shortly thereafter. On September 11, 2002, Russian president Vladimir Putin observed the anniversary of the Al Qaeda attacks with a stunning broadside against the Georgians. In a televised speech, Putin declared his objection to the way the Georgians had addressed the problem of the militants by allowing them to head back across the border into Russia. He rejected the claim that the bulk of the militants had left Georgia already, insisting that they had merely “scattered in other regions...along the borders” and were “preparing to perpetrate new crimes.” If Georgia “is unable to create a zone of security” on the Georgian-Russian border and “fails to put an end” to cross-border attacks, Russia reserved the right to invoke Article 51 of the UN Charter, the same article the United States invoked to attack Afghanistan. Consequently, Putin instructed his power ministries to prepare proposals “on the possibility and practicability of delivering strikes” on terrorist bases across the border.<sup>40</sup>

Although preparing to make its case for preemptive war in Iraq when Putin issued his statement, the Bush administration rejected what appeared to be—and was interpreted by many as—an attempt to trade Georgia for Russian support on Iraq. The State Department again stated its “strong exception to statements...threatening unilateral action against Chechen targets on Georgian territory.” President Bush himself indicated that the administration had “made it very clear to the Georgian government that we expected them to rout out the Al Qaeda-type terrorists” but that the Russians had to “give the Georgians a chance to achieve a common objective...and that is to get the Al Qaeda killers and bring them to justice.”<sup>41</sup>

Georgian officials actively disavowed speculation that the United States had forsaken them. Parliamentary chairwoman Nino Burjanadze considered President Bush’s statement to be “very significant” and argued that it confirmed there was no deal. Shevardnadze himself “never doubted that Washington would react firmly and directly...in defense

of Georgia's rights." His national security adviser Tedo Japaridze expressed confidence that Georgia "is the red line that President Putin and his people cannot trespass." Later, Japaridze flew to the United States to hold further talks with administration officials. These talks produced a letter from President Bush affirming U.S. support for Georgia. Shevardnadze's office noted that the letter was particularly important "in light of the unprecedented anti-Georgian campaign unleashed by Russia."<sup>42</sup>

Nonetheless, Georgia hastened to clean out the gorge and outlying environs. A few days after Putin's speech, Japaridze reiterated that "[s]ome members of Al Qaeda and persons affiliated to that organization are staying in the Pankisi Gorge" and that "the most active phase of the anti-terror and anti-crime operation...will start today or tomorrow." When Shevardnadze announced this new phase, he noted that the situation in Pankisi would be resolved in a matter of weeks. To the militants, the president conveyed the message that "resistance is senseless" and, for the first time, warned that "armed clashes cannot be ruled out."<sup>43</sup> The government also agreed to one of Putin's key demands—to extradite a number of militants the Georgians had been holding in custody—and to hand over any new prisoners they captured.

By the end of the month, the saga was basically over. Russian troops clashed with a group of approximately 180 militants that had recently crossed the border, killing some 50 to 60 and hunting down the rest.<sup>44</sup> In January 2003, the Security Ministry acknowledged that some militants might still be in Pankisi but noted that authorities were working to root them out. With this, Georgian officials largely considered the Pankisi problem to be solved.<sup>45</sup>

At the same time, the Georgians found it a propitious time to move forward on their basic goal of NATO membership. Georgia had more or less solved the Pankisi problem and had begun to build a security relationship with the United States. In early August, as the Russians were threatening them with words and bombs, Shevardnadze announced Georgia's intention to draft a program guiding the country into NATO. Parliament passed a resolution approving of this move on September 14, three days after Putin issued his threat. At the November NATO summit in Prague, President Shevardnadze presented Georgia's official request to join the Euro-Atlantic organization. Commenting on the summit a few days later, Shevardnadze declared: "Never before has Georgia had [such a] good...chance to join NATO....[N]ever before...has Georgia had such guarantees of future security [like the ones] we will gain once we join NATO."<sup>46</sup>

## WHAT WENT WRONG: FROM IRAQ TO REGIME CHANGE

As the United States shifted its attention from the war on terror to the war on Iraq, the Georgian government continued offering the Bush administration its firm support. Even before Secretary of State Colin Powell made the case for war to the United Nations, Shevardnadze indicated he approved of the use of military force in Iraq.<sup>47</sup> Subsequently, Georgian officials and politicians affirmed that they would allow the United States to use Georgian military bases if requested. After some debate, the parliament also passed an agreement granting U.S. military and civilian personnel visa-free transit and the right to carry weapons in Georgia. After the fall of Saddam Hussein, Shevardnadze offered to send Georgian specialists to assist in postwar reconstruction, and in August, a contingent of 70 special-purpose forces, medics, and engineers were sent.<sup>48</sup> Defense Minister Tevzadze and U.S. ambassador to Georgia Richard Miles indicated that GTEP-trained personnel might later serve in Iraq (something that came to pass in 2004 after Shevardnadze left power).<sup>49</sup>

Explaining Georgian support for the United States in Iraq, Georgian officials noted, first of all, that it was a consequence of past obligations. “Since 1992,” Shevardnadze declared, “the U.S. has been providing considerable aid to Georgia; in our turn, we must support the [United States].” He also noted that “[n]ot a single country has rendered as much valuable assistance to Georgia as has the United States. I sometimes say that we would not have survived without it.” His foreign minister agreed that the Georgian position was “based exclusively on our commitments as an ally and the people’s attitude towards the United States, which has done a lot for Georgia.”<sup>50</sup>

At the same time, Georgian support was predicated on the hope of keeping the United States engaged and of further deepening the U.S.-Georgian alliance. Shevardnadze noted that “Georgia is a small country and the United States supports Georgia’s many efforts in many fields. Georgia will therefore always support the United States.” He indicated that Georgia’s “position will benefit the country in the future.” After the first Georgian units departed for Iraq, Tevzadze argued that their deployment “confirms Georgia’s reliability as an ally. Its participation in the counterterrorism coalition is not an empty phrase.”<sup>51</sup>

The Georgian government faced little overt opposition to its position on the war in Iraq. The Georgian Orthodox Church spoke out against the government’s position and called for restraint “to prevent the threat of war.” Several members of (mostly marginal) political

movements and parties also expressed criticism of the government's support for military action as well as fear that Georgia would face its own terrorist threat if it were to join the war. Still, one media poll found that residents in Tbilisi were equally divided on the question of Georgian support for the war.<sup>52</sup> A Georgian commentator, writing for the Western press, noted that two antiwar demonstrations in March attracted less than 100 participants. She concluded "the verdict is unanimous: Georgia is wholeheartedly and unconditionally with the United States."<sup>53</sup> Whether or not this was completely true, government support of the U.S. position was at least not a source of public discontent.

Unfortunately for Shevardnadze, tacit public approval of his foreign policy was not nearly enough to rally the population to his side. The economy remained in the doldrums, corruption flourished at every level, and most Georgians had to struggle to meet even the most basic needs. As Georgia approached the November 2003 parliamentary elections, the ruling party and its allies had little public support. New opposition parties—mostly made up of former government members—were bound to be victorious if free and fair elections were actually held.

More surprisingly, Shevardnadze's support of the United States was also not enough for him to receive the American blessing. Regardless of Georgia's success in cleaning out the Pankisi Gorge and its support for the Iraq war, the Bush administration viewed Shevardnadze's government as hopelessly compromised and believed that only a transfer of power away from the ruling party could enable Georgia to avoid the fate of a failed state.<sup>54</sup> Rather than turn a blind eye to Georgia's potential slide into authoritarianism and decay, the United States resolved to lend its active support to a democratic process that would bring new parties to power and pave the way for presidential elections in 2005 and the "post-Shevardnadze" era.

Indeed, several indicators in 2003 suggested that Georgia had not yet veered from the road to failure it had been on since 1999. In the summer, the Georgians were unable to find a way to purchase a controlling share of the power company the financially strapped American firm AES was now trying to sell. This led to its purchase by the Russian United Energy Systems. This deal was, admittedly, a challenging one for the Georgians to avoid, given AES's own determination to sell, but both Georgian politicians and U.S. officials have indicated the government could have received the foreign aid and assistance needed to retain control of the power company if it had truly tried.<sup>55</sup> Shevardnadze's consent to signing a *secret* 25-year agreement with the Russian company Gazprom to sur-

render control of Georgia's gas distribution network in exchange for subsidized imports was even more indicative of the way Georgia was planning to do business in the future. In October, the global nongovernmental organization Transparency International ranked Georgia as one of the three most corrupt countries in the CIS (Azerbaijan and Tajikistan were the other two), listing only five out of 133 countries in a worse position. Unable to get the Georgians to implement their recommendations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) declared it was suspending assistance to Georgia. The United States also announced a reduction in foreign aid. Georgian support for the United States in Iraq—appreciated but hardly critical—was not going to be enough to maintain U.S. support for the Georgian administration. Shevardnadze would have to demonstrate a commitment to his own political end.

Not surprisingly, Shevardnadze failed to deliver. Feeling a sense of betrayal from the United States, Shevardnadze permitted himself to be swayed by a segment of the ruling elite that was determined to thwart the elections and was apparently not opposed to the transformation of Georgia into a Russian dependency if it meant personal gain. Shevardnadze also continued to be overly cautious of the possibility of further territorial disintegration. He accommodated the efforts of his nominal (and pro-Russian) ally, Ajarian leader Aslan Abashidze, to thwart both a preelection compromise with the opposition regarding the composition of the Central Election Commission (the so-called Baker Plan, which former U.S. secretary of state James Baker helped broker) and, in the end, an honest vote count in November.<sup>56</sup> Believing that the opposition would not be able to sustain mass demonstrations and that the United States would ultimately give fraudulent elections a pass, Shevardnadze stood firm. However, government efforts to bargain their way out of the crisis failed, and members of Shevardnadze's government shed their support. The opposition refused to give the newly elected legislature a chance to convene and stormed the parliament building. Declining to risk either bloodshed or the disobedience of security organs, Shevardnadze resigned. The "Rose Revolution" had occurred.

### AFTER SHEVARDNADZE: A WAY FORWARD?

The "Rose Revolution" did not alter Georgia's three fundamental security goals. Georgia still seeks to balance against Russian hegemony. It still

seeks to restore territorial integrity, and it still wishes to construct a strong central state.

Regime change in Georgia, however, enabled the country to develop a more coherent strategy for achieving these goals. First of all, it gave Georgia a second chance at integration with the West. Both the United States and the European Union promised firm engagement to Georgia, pledging increased levels of aid. In March, Georgia was a late addition to a list of 16 countries eligible for increased levels of development assistance via the newly established U.S. Millennium Challenge Account. Although the Department of Defense's Train and Equip Program concluded in April, U.S. and Georgian officials agreed to establish a new Sustainment and Stability Operations Program (SSOP) in 2005 to provide training for Georgian troops to serve in peacekeeping missions abroad. Motivated by the "Rose Revolution," the European Union added Georgia (and its two South Caucasus neighbors) to its European Neighborhood Policy, which previously included only Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus from CIS states, and established a Rule of Law Mission in Georgia, the first of its kind. The consent of France to permit its active-duty ambassador to Georgia Salome Zourabichvili—herself of Georgian origin—to serve as Georgia's foreign minister was another striking sign of European support. Finally, in October, NATO approved Georgia's Individual Partnership Action Plan, increasing prospects for NATO membership. Accordingly, Georgia engaged in a number of necessary military reforms—appointing a civilian as defense minister, increasing defense expenditures, reducing the military's size, and merging the Soviet-era "internal troops" with the conventional army.

As for the war on terror, Georgia substantially increased its coalition role. In April 2004, Georgia replaced its 70 peacekeepers in Iraq with 159 GTEP-trained troops. It replaced these troops with another 300 in November and pledged to deploy 550 more soldiers in 2005 to provide security for the United Nations mission in Baghdad. Georgian peacekeepers also served a 100-day deployment in Afghanistan in the fall. Back home, Georgia's new government sought to become far more effective in modernizing the country's defense and security forces and establishing control over state borders. At the start of his term, President Mikheil Saakashvili asserted that the Pankisi Gorge was clean of Chechen fighters and that the "new" Georgia would not permit militants to enter the country or extremists to set down roots.

Regime change in Georgia also initially promised to lead to a trans-

formation in Georgian-Russian relations. While affirming Georgia's goal of NATO membership, Saakashvili made it clear that establishing close economic and security relations with Russia was a top priority. Although asserting that Russian military bases had to be withdrawn from Georgia, Georgia did not push for an immediate agreement on withdrawal, agreed to establish coordinated patrols on the Russian-Georgian border to prevent infiltration of Chechen militants, and proposed to set up a joint counterterrorism center. Georgia also sought to encourage Russian investment, hosting a Russian business conference in May 2004 and appointing the Russian-based tycoon Kakha Bendukidze as minister of economy. When the Georgian government forced the leader of autonomous Ajara, the pro-Russian Aslan Abashidze, to resign in May, Moscow facilitated his departure. By the start of the summer, Saakashvili's efforts to reconcile with Russia appeared to be bearing fruit.

Unfortunately, Georgia's attempt to restore control over breakaway South Ossetia after its victory in Ajara halted the warming of relations with Russia. Determined not to be sidelined in South Ossetia—and later in Abkhazia—Russia staunchly resisted Georgia's initiation of an “anti-smuggling” operation in the region, frequently consulted with South Ossetia's leadership, threatened intervention, and allowed weapons and armed volunteers from the North Caucasus to cross the border into South Ossetia. A threat by Georgia to open fire on Russian ships seeking to dock in Abkhazia increased Russia's ire. In August, Russian president Vladimir Putin cancelled an official visit to Georgia, postponing development of a new Georgian-Russian treaty. The tragic terrorist attack at a school in Beslan, North Ossetia, the next month prompted Russia to reassert the right to conduct preventive attacks against militant bases abroad, the Pankisi Gorge included. Despite its claims that Chechen fighters were still operating from Georgia, however, Moscow refused to allow the consensus-based Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to renew a successful monitoring mission on the Georgian side of the Georgian-Russian border.

Simultaneously building effective state institutions, restoring territorial integrity, maintaining a trajectory toward Euroatlantic integration, and establishing a productive partnership with Russia remains a tall order for Georgia. By 2005, corruption, disorganization, and personalistic rule continued to put a drag on Georgian state-building reforms, and no breakthrough in conflict resolution efforts was in sight.

Maintaining the attention of the United States and the European Union while cultivating civil relations with Russia also proved more of a challenge than Georgia expected.

Considering where the country was headed from 1999 until 2001, however, the developments that grew out of September 11 assuredly provided a net gain for Georgia. The impetus for post-September 11 reform in Georgia stemmed from an unexpected set of external pressures. Prospects for fundamental change now hinge on a new set of external developments. Whether these involve new NATO and EU commitments to the South Caucasus or a radical rethinking of Russian foreign policy objectives, Georgia will have the best chance to succeed if it knows this success will be rewarded.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For an early observation of Georgia's troubles, see Cory Welt, "Georgia Annual Report 1999: A Return to Eurasia?" *Transitions On-Line*, May 2000 (<http://www.tol.cz>). Also see Charles King, "Potemkin Democracy: Four Myths about Post-Soviet Georgia," *National Interest* 64 (Summer 2001): 93–104.

<sup>2</sup> Interfax (Moscow), December 21, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Valeri Khaburdzania, "Pankisi, Abkhazia and the Problem of International Terrorism," *In the National Interest*, February 5, 2003 (<http://www.inthenationalinterest.com>); interview with a senior Georgian government official, October 17, 2003; interview with a U.S. Defense Department official, October 23, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding this latter threat, see Shevardnadze's comments on Georgian Radio (Tbilisi), December 18, 2000, trans. by BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, December 20, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Georgian Television (Tbilisi), December 29, 1999, trans. BBC, December 31, 1999; Agence France Presse, October 8, 1999; ITAR-TASS, October 25, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Prime News Agency (Tbilisi), April 25, 2000; Georgian Radio, December 18, 2000, trans. BBC, December 20, 2000; Caucasus Press (Tbilisi), June 25, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Interfax, February 20, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> As Shevardnadze put it: "You know that I went to the Pankisi [G]orge and visited all villages there, but could not find a single terrorist." Georgian Television, March 13, 2001, trans. BBC, March 15, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Georgian officials openly acknowledged the drug trade in the region at the time and now admit that former officials were involved in Pankisi-based criminal activity. Revealingly, just weeks after the appointment of new Security and Internal Affairs ministers in the fall of 2001, two Spanish businessmen that had been

taken hostage in a highly publicized kidnapping a year before were “rescued” from Pankisi. When they returned home to Spain, the former hostages explicitly accused former state officials of involvement. On the drug trade, RIA-Novosti, October 24, 2001, and ITAR-TASS, November 30, 2001. On government complicity, ITAR-TASS, December 19, 2001; Jaba Devdariani, “Georgia’s Pankisi Dilemma,” *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, January 25, 2002; Thomas de Waal, “Into the Georgian Quagmire,” *Moscow Times* (Moscow), May 24, 2002; Rustavi-2 TV (Tbilisi), July 21, 2002, trans. BBC, July 22, 2002; interview with senior Georgian government official, November 7, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Prime News Agency, December 3, 2000; Deutsche-Presse Agentur, July 18, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Agence France Presse, August 27, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> *Financial Times*, October 25, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> *Daily Telegraph* (London), September 25, 2001; ITAR-TASS, September 18, 2001; Interfax, September 18, 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Archil Gegeshidze, “Remarks to the AGBC Fourth Annual Conference,” Washington, D.C., December 6, 2001 (<http://www.agbdc.com/Gegeshidze.doc>). This logic was reiterated in interviews with senior Georgian and U.S. government officials, November 7, 2003 and February 13, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> ITAR-TASS, September 19, 2001; Georgian Radio, September 24, 2001; Agence France Presse, September 26, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Three such theories are that Gelaev was made to understand that he had no future in Georgia and thus initiated the fight into Abkhazia on his own; that the Georgian government colluded with the Chechens to move them out of Pankisi and into Abkhazia; and that Shevardnadze duped Gelaev into thinking that the government supported the operation when, instead, he collaborated with the Abkhazians to deliver the militants a decisive blow. *Moscow News*, October 10, 2001; *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* (Moscow), November 10, 2001; *Moscow Times*, November 16, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> ITAR-TASS, September 28, 2001; Glasnost–North Caucasus, April 8, 2002, cited in RFE/RL Caucasus Report, December 4, 2002. Some commentators hold to the interpretation that this affair was an effort to use the militants from Pankisi to seize Abkhazia. See, for example, RFE/RL Caucasus Report, October 12, 22, 2001; de Waal, “Into the Georgian Quagmire”; and Mark Irkali, “Georgia: Welcome to America’s New El Salvador,” *Diacritica.com* (<http://www.diacritica.com/sobaka/2003/salvador.html>), March 12, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> This occurred with a political deal in which the entire government, including parliamentary speaker Zurab Zhvania, resigned (although many ministers were subsequently reappointed to their posts).

<sup>19</sup> In an interview, a senior Georgian government official affirmed that the re-

removal of the interior and security ministers was a consequence of domestic politics, not of international pressure to clean up the Pankisi Gorge. November 7, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> ITAR-TASS, October 24, 2001; Agence France Presse, November 9, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Giorgi Sepashvili, "Pankisi Gorge—A Criminal Enclave," *Civil Georgia*, January 17, 2002 (<http://www.civil.ge>).

<sup>22</sup> Interfax, February 6, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> *Washington Post*, February 27, 2002; interview with a U.S. Defense Department official, October 23, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> *Akhali versia* (Tbilisi), February 11, 2002, cited in RFE/RL Newsline, February 14, 2002; *Guardian* (London), February 15, 2002; *New York Times*, February 28, 2002.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Department of State Daily Press Briefing, February 27, 2002; "President Bush's Remarks at the White House Ceremony to Honor Victims of the September 11 Terrorist Attacks," March 11, 2002 ([usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/sixmonths/bushremarks.htm](http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/sixmonths/bushremarks.htm)); "Georgia 'Train and Equip' Program Begins," April 29, 2002 ([http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Apr2002/b04292002\\_bt217-02.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Apr2002/b04292002_bt217-02.html)).

<sup>26</sup> ITAR-TASS, February 9, 2002; Prime News Agency, February 15, 2002.

<sup>27</sup> ITAR-TASS, March 21, 2002, May 20, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Georgian Television, May 21, 2002, trans. BBC, May 21, 2002. Khaburdzania later indicated that Chechen Wahhabis in Pankisi had been receiving financial assistance from abroad, including one instance of a \$600,000 bank transfer prior to September 11. This money, he said, was partially for refugee aid and partially to support the fighters. He also noted that some foreigners had maintained contact with Al Qaeda officials. A Security Ministry spokesman noted that one Chechen field commander had been "receiving funds directly from Al Qaeda." Caucasus Press, August 16, 2002; RIA Oreanda (Moscow), December 31, 2002; Giorgi Sepashvili, "Security Ministry Unveils Classified Details on Pankisi," *Civil Georgia*, January 20, 2003 (<http://www.civil.ge>).

<sup>29</sup> *Time*, April 1, 2002; *Washington Post*, April 28, 2002; "Media Availability with Rumsfeld and Georgian Defense Minister," May 7, 2002 ([http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2002/t05072002\\_t0507ma.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2002/t05072002_t0507ma.html)).

The Georgian reluctance to embrace the Al Qaeda connection has led a number of observers to question the sincerity of the U.S. "war on terror" justification for the train and equip program. See Gary Leupp, "'Train and Equip' for What? Georgia and the 'War on Terrorism,'" *Counterpunch*, May 29, 2002 (<http://www.counterpunch.org/leupp0529.html>); Christopher Deliso, "A Georgian Gaffe and the War on Terror," *Antiwar.com*, June 18, 2002 (<http://www.antiwar.com/orig/deliso45.html>); Mark Irkali, "Guess Who Stole the Silverware? Invisible Terrorists and Disappearing Bombs," *Diacritica.com*, June 23, 2002 (<http://www.diacritica.com/2002/06/23/guess-who-stole-the-silverware-invisible-terrorists-and-disappearing-bombs>).

[www.diacritica.com/sobaka/archive/](http://www.diacritica.com/sobaka/archive/) diary0623.html); and Mark Irkali, "Georgia: Welcome to America's New El Salvador."

<sup>30</sup> *Washington Post*, April 28, 2002; *Boston Globe*, March 19, 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Such logic has been confirmed by senior Georgian government officials in interviews, October 17, 2003 and November 7, 2003. Also see the account by Security Minister Valeri Khaburdzania in "Pankisi, Abkhazia and the Problem of International Terrorism."

<sup>32</sup> Khaburdzania also noted later that month that Georgian authorities are "working to ensure that these armed persons lay down their arms or leave the territory of Georgia." Associated Press, March 7, 2002; "Media Availability with Rumsfeld and Georgian Defense Minister," May 7, 2002; Georgian TV, May 22, 2002; ITAR-TASS, May 20, 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with senior U.S. government official, February 13, 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Interfax, July 16, 2002; Prime News Agency, July 31, 2002; Agence France Presse, August 1, 2002.

<sup>35</sup> ITAR-TASS, August 2, 2002.

<sup>36</sup> Interviews with a senior Georgian government official, October 17, 2003, and U.S. Defense Department official, October 23, 2003. Also Khaburdzania, "Pankisi, Abkhazia and the Problem of International Terrorism"; TASS, August 23, 2002; *Moscow Times*, August 26, 2002; Agence France Presse, August 28, 2002.

<sup>37</sup> Agence France Presse, July 29, 2002.

<sup>38</sup> *New York Times*, August 15, 2002; Interfax, July 30, 2002.

<sup>39</sup> U.S. Department of State Daily Press Briefings, July 31, 2002, and August 28, 2002; "Statement by the Press Secretary," August 24, 2002 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/08/20020824-2.html>); *New York Times*, August 15, 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, September 12, 2002.

<sup>41</sup> *New York Times*, September 13, 2002; "Remarks by the President and Prime Minister Berlusconi of Italy," September 14, 2002 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020914-2.html>).

<sup>42</sup> RIA *Oreanda*, September 13, 2002; Agence France Presse, September 13, 2002; *Washington Post*, September 14, 2002; Caucasus Press, September 21, 2002.

<sup>43</sup> ITAR-TASS, September 17, 2002; Georgian Radio, September 16, 2002, trans. BBC, September 16, 2002.

<sup>44</sup> Deutsche Press-Agentur, September 27, 2002; Interfax, September 26, 2002.

<sup>45</sup> Sepashvili, "Security Ministry Unveils Classified Details on Pankisi." In June 2003, officials estimated that there were less than 50 militants in the gorge. In August, Georgian media indicated that 40 militants had been detained. By the start of

October 2003, the deputy interior minister reported that there were no militants left in the Pankisi Gorge. See *New York Times*, June 15, 2003; ITAR-TASS, August 25, 2003, October 1, 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Georgian Radio, November 25, 2002.

<sup>47</sup> Interfax, February 3, 2003.

<sup>48</sup> Caucasus Press, August 2, 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Caucasus Press, May 10, 2003; Agence France Presse, May 11, 2003.

<sup>50</sup> ITAR-TASS, February 10, 2003; Georgian Radio, March 24, 2003, trans. BBC, March 24, 2003; Prime News Agency, March 18, 2003.

<sup>51</sup> Natalia Antelava, "No War Blues Here," *Transitions Online*, March 22, 2003; ITAR-TASS, March 17, 2003; *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (Moscow), August 6, 2003.

<sup>52</sup> ITAR-TASS, February 10, 2003, February 13, 2003.

<sup>53</sup> Antelava, "No War Blues Here."

<sup>54</sup> Interview with senior U.S. government official, February 13, 2004.

<sup>55</sup> Rustavi-2 TV (Tbilisi), August 6, 2003, trans. BBC, August 7, 2003; interview with senior U.S. government official, February 13, 2004.

<sup>56</sup> For more on the November 2003 parliamentary elections, see Jean-Christophe Peuch, "Georgia's Parliamentary Elections: Democracy in the Making?" *Caucasus Election Watch*, Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), October 27, 2003 (<http://www.csis.org/ruseura/caucasus/pubs>), and Cory Welt, "Georgia: A Post-Election Crossroads," *Caucasus Election Watch*, CSIS, November 18, 2003.