



## The Caucasus: Frozen Conflicts and Closed Borders

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Statement before the House Foreign Affairs Committee

Washington, DC

June 18, 2008

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*As prepared for delivery*

Chairman Berman, Ranking Member Ros-Lehtinen, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the situation in the South Caucasus region of Europe.

Let me begin with a characterization of the overall historical context. In 1989, a wave of democracy began sweeping eastward from its origins in Central Europe. Starting that year, the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe threw off the failed systems of the past and invested their hopes and energies in a future of democratic, free market societies well-integrated with the transatlantic community. The results were so astonishing and successful that it is hard today to recall the divided Europe of less than a generation past. Europe in its narrower definition, with the partial exception of the Balkans, is now united and integrated through either membership or close association with the European Union or NATO, or both. The question remains, however, about the reach of this wave of freedom and democracy. Will it, and can it, extend to the easternmost reaches of Wider Europe?

The issue of whether the region between the Black Sea and the Caspian, the south Caucasus, can in fact join Europe and its institutions is being contested as we speak.

The policy of the United States in this region is unambiguous: we want to help the nations of this region travel along the same path toward freedom, democracy and market-based economies that so many of their neighbors to the West have traveled. We believe that the ultimate place of these nations – which are, after all, a part of Wider Europe – ought to depend on their own choice and their own success, or lack of success, in meeting the standards of democracy, the rule of law, and responsible foreign and regional policies that the transatlantic community has established. We do not believe that any outside power – neither Russia nor any other – should have a sphere of influence over these countries; no outside power should be able to threaten, pressure, or block the sovereign choice of these nations to join with the institutions of Europe and the transatlantic family if they so choose and we so choose.

Georgia has made a choice to join NATO. The United States and the nations of NATO welcome this choice, and Georgia's neighbors should respect it. Azerbaijan has chosen to develop its relations with NATO at a slower pace, and we respect its choice. Armenia's situation is different, due to its history and currently complicated relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey, and we respect its choice as well.

To be sure, these nations and Russia need to have good neighborly relations, based on a regard for one another's interests and just basic geographic proximity, but also based on respect for the sovereignty of the nations of the South Caucasus, and, in particular, their right to find their own way in the world. The United States does not see itself in some 19<sup>th</sup> century contest with Russia for "influence," much less a sphere of influence in this region or any region. This is not zero-sum. All countries – the countries of the South Caucasus, Russia, and the transatlantic community – would benefit from a set of benign relations among all the players, great and small, in the South Caucasus. To be blunt: the United States does not seek to exclude Russia from this region. That would be neither wise nor possible.

In looking at the region as a whole, our strategic interests are focused on several issues: the advance of freedom and democracy; security, including counterterrorism and peaceful resolution of separatist conflicts; and energy. Our first strategic interest I have already described—the spread of freedom and democracy beyond the Black Sea and toward the Caspian. Each of the Caucasus countries has made important strides in this area, but each has further to go before we can say it has irrevocably chosen this path.

On the second interest, we are working with each of these governments to find peaceful ways of dealing with the separatist conflicts of Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia that stem from the breakup of the Soviet Union. We are also cooperating with each government in the global fight against terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear and biological.

On the third issue, we believe it is in the interests of the Euro-Atlantic community that Caspian gas and oil resources reach European and global markets expeditiously, free from monopolistic pressures and geographic chokepoints.

Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia are ancient nations, but they are still new as nation states. They are navigating a double transition: they must throw off the failed communist institutions of the past and build new ones to replace them, including in many cases entirely new systems – such as modern banking and financial systems to support their newly free economies – where none existed before. The legacy of Soviet communist institutions and poor governance is a burden; as are the historical issues of ethnic strife that were exacerbated by the Soviet experience. On top of this, these countries are building new identities as modern, sovereign nation-states.

Despite sharing some common challenges, each of these three countries has taken its own path in addressing these challenges, and the picture on the ground in each country is mixed.

I would like to discuss these three states in turn, both the challenges they face, and our efforts to support them.

### **AZERBAIJAN**

We have welcomed our progress with Azerbaijan in recent years on issues of security cooperation and diversification of energy supplies and pipelines, and have good, productive relations with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

We value Azerbaijan's troop contributions – 150 soldiers in Iraq and 45 in Afghanistan; President Aliyev's recent promise to double the troop level in Afghanistan would put Azerbaijan's troop strength up around 90. Azerbaijan also contributed to NATO's peacekeeping force in Kosovo, with a platoon embedded with a Turkish unit, up until Kosovo declared its independence. We appreciate Azerbaijan's steady offer of unlimited, free overflight and landing rights for our supply network for Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom. This cooperation has proceeded in parallel with advances in Azerbaijan's relations with NATO. Azerbaijan has now adopted its second Individual Partnership Action Plan, demonstrating to NATO and the United States its commitment to reforming its armed services and cooperation with the transatlantic alliance. Azerbaijan has also taken decisive steps to combat terrorism by rounding up terrorist networks in Azerbaijan.

In the area of energy, Azerbaijan is emerging as one of Europe's critical, near-term alternative sources of natural gas. Azerbaijani gas can open the way for a new

network of pipelines that will help the market, rather than a monopoly, determine the price and availability of a critical commodity. As Azerbaijan has developed a strong role as an energy source, it is also maintaining constructive relations with Russia and its neighbors on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, and with Georgia.

Azerbaijan has had the world's fastest growing economy for three consecutive years. This growth is being driven by energy resources, which present both a tremendous opportunity but also a challenge for the government. The government deserves credit for stabilizing the economy after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Its challenge now is to manage the enormous influx of energy wealth without distorting or corrupting the economy and political system.

The government has stated its intention to avoid what some call "the energy trap" and its State Oil Fund has helped it tackle the macroeconomic challenge of managing windfall energy revenues. The Azerbaijani government has taken the first steps to improve the business environment by implementing a "one-stop shop" for registration of new businesses. But the business and investment climate in Azerbaijan continues to be difficult, and much still remains to be done to attract foreign investment outside of the energy sector. We have urged the government to do more to limit and reverse widespread corruption.

Progress in both economic and political reform will be necessary to advance our shared objectives. Democracy has been part of Azerbaijan's tradition. In its brief period of independence after the Russian Revolution, Azerbaijan established a democratic constitution, and Azerbaijan has an opportunity to build on that proud tradition as its next Presidential election approaches this October.

Yet the United States has been concerned for some time about a relative lag in democratic reforms in Azerbaijan, including respect for fundamental freedoms. We remain particularly concerned about the state of media freedoms there. Although five journalists were released by presidential pardon in December 2007, which we welcomed, three still remain in prison. The jailed include editors of the leading independent and opposition newspapers. In addition, the government has failed to seriously investigate numerous cases of violence against journalists. Perhaps as a result, much of the domestic electronic media exercises self-censorship by failing, for example, to cover the activities of opposition parties. We are working with Azerbaijan to improve journalists' professional and ethical standards. During my last visit to Baku, I met with young journalism students studying in an independent institution. I was impressed by their patriotism and simultaneous commitment to democracy. The government should nurture and support independent journalists and, as it does, it will have our support.

We are also troubled by continuing restrictions on freedom of assembly. Civil society and opposition groups are often relegated to holding public rallies and demonstrations in remote locations often inaccessible by public transport. We note that Parliament recently passed a new law on public assembly with some welcome features. Implementation of the law will be key.

We hope that Azerbaijan will use the presidential election in October – not only election day and the vote count but also, importantly, the conduct of the campaign – to demonstrate substantial democratic progress. One important factor in measuring the conduct of 'free and transparent' elections is domestic elections monitoring, and unfortunately, Azerbaijani courts recently deregistered and annulled Azerbaijan's largest independent domestic election-monitoring NGO. The United States would like to see this NGO's registration restored. While it is important that Azerbaijan permit a full and unfettered election observation by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, in fulfillment of its OSCE commitments, the determination by the OSCE and other international observation missions on the conduct of the elections could be hindered by the lack of a domestic election monitoring effort.

One of Azerbaijan's greatest challenges is to find a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. The United States, in its role as co-Chair of the Minsk Group alongside our French and Russian colleagues, continues to actively pursue a diplomatic resolution of this problem. While we support Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, Nagorno-Karabakh's final status must be determined through negotiations and a spirit of compromise that respects international legal and political principles. An important step forward was taken by President Aliyev and Armenian President Sargsian when they met for the first time in St. Petersburg on June 6 to discuss the resolution of the conflict, after which they met with the Minsk Group Co-Chairs. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to working within the Minsk process and expressed their readiness to continue discussions on the "Basic Principles," a document developed under the auspices of the Minsk Group that lays out the basic framework for a lasting, peaceful settlement.

As Azerbaijan's income from its rich oil and gas resources rises dramatically, we continue to urge its leadership to use these revenues wisely for both current and future generations. We hope that the Azerbaijani government will avoid the temptation of thinking that renewed fighting is a viable option. In our view, it is not. We have noted our concern with persistent bellicose rhetoric by some Azerbaijani officials. We have urged the government of Azerbaijan to focus on the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute and its resultant benefits for regional integration, which will lead to greater prosperity and stability for the entire Caucasus region.

In sum, Azerbaijan has the opportunity to accelerate its economic and political development, to build on its successes in establishing good relations in its region, and to settle the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute.

## ARMENIA

Armenia can be a great success story, but its recent history has been one of difficulties. The Armenian people have demonstrated extraordinary resilience through their long history of hardship and tragedy. Achieving independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the new republic was also rising from the ruins of a catastrophic earthquake in 1988. That event mobilized aid from around the world, including the first U.S. humanitarian mission in the Soviet Union, and a wave of support from Armenian Diaspora groups.

This effort to rebuild was strained by the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, which led to an energy embargo and closed borders with both Azerbaijan and Turkey, exacerbating the post-independence political and economic stresses.

Despite those hardships, however, the last decade has witnessed an economic turnaround in Armenia, with double-digit GDP growth year upon year coupled with, until recently, low inflation. The Diaspora community around the world continues to extend its hand to Armenia, in both humanitarian and philanthropic giving and direct investment. Through their advocacy and indications of a will to reform, Armenia in 2006 entered into a Millennium Challenge Corporation compact worth \$236 million. I also can't let this opportunity pass without thanking Armenia for a recent doubling of its troop level in Kosovo to 70 and the continuation of the Armenian troop presence in Iraq, which numbers 44.

Yet Armenia faces serious challenges today: geographic isolation, widespread corruption, and recent setbacks to its democratic development. Supporting Armenia's regional integration is a particular priority for the United States.

One major step toward regional integration would be a peaceful, just, and lasting settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. During the past two years, the parties have moved closer than ever to a framework agreement based on a set of Basic Principles developed through intensive negotiations under the auspices of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs.

Achieving normal relations between Armenia and Turkey is another principle concern. As a key part of that effort, the United States supports the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border. The status quo is not helpful to anyone. Fortunately, some progress has been achieved in recent years: there are regular charter flights between Yerevan and Istanbul and other flights to Antalya; bus connections via Georgia are numerous; and trade with Turkey through Georgia is common. Both countries would greatly benefit from increased, direct trade with the other, connecting their electrical grids, and implementing other measures natural to neighbors. The U.S. also supports more cross-border dialogue and cooperation between the people of Armenia and Turkey through research initiatives, conferences, and exchange programs. An example of this cross-border exchange, supported by U.S. assistance funds, was the performance of the Armenian Komitas Quartet in Istanbul last week, and the scheduled performance of the Turkish Bosphorus Quartet in Yerevan today.

Reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey, however, will require dealing with sensitive, painful issues. Turkey needs to come to terms with a dark chapter in its history: the mass killings and forced exile of up to 1.5 million Armenians at the end of the Ottoman Empire. That will not be easy, just as it has not been easy for the United States

to come to terms with dark periods of our own past. For its part, Armenia must be ready to acknowledge the existing border and disavow any claim on the territory of modern Turkey, and respond constructively to any efforts Turkey may make.

In the short term, however, Armenia's greatest challenge is to strengthen its democratic institutions and processes, including respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and regain democratic momentum lost after the significantly flawed presidential election in February and its violent aftermath. There had been some positive signs before the election, such as the invitation of a robust election observation mission from OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), and certain electoral reforms. But our concerns grew during the lead-up to the vote, when international observers noted a biased media environment, with the state media vilifying former President Ter-Petrosian and other key opposition candidates. Media outlets such as Radio Liberty that provided balanced coverage to opposition candidates faced intimidation and harassment, which continues to this day. The pro-opposition TV station, Gala TV, continues to be investigated, ostensibly for tax reasons, in what is widely seen as a government move to silence coverage viewed as unfavorable to the ruling party.

The election itself was marred by credible claims of ballot stuffing, vote buying, intimidation and even beatings of poll workers and proxies, and other irregularities. Recounts were requested, but ODIHR observers noted "shortcomings in the recount process, including discrepancies and mistakes, some of which raise questions over the impartiality of the [electoral commissions] concerned." OSCE observers were also harassed in the period following the election.

When peaceful mass protests followed the disputed vote, the United States and others pressed continuously for the government of Armenia to refrain from responding with force. However, on March 1, within hours of formal assurances by the Armenian government that they would avoid a confrontation, police entered the square. Ensuing clashes later in the day between demonstrators and security personnel led to at least 10 deaths and hundreds of injuries. Mr. Ter-Petrosian was taken to his residence by security forces, where he appeared to remain under de facto house arrest for weeks. A State of Emergency (SOE) was declared in Yerevan. Freedom of assembly and basic media freedoms were revoked. Opposition newspapers were forced to stop publishing and news websites were blocked, including Radio Liberty. The government then filled the information void with articles and broadcasts disseminating the government version of events and attacking the opposition. While it was alleged that some protesters were armed before the March 1 crackdown, there have been no convictions to date on such charges.

Mass arrests of opposition activists, especially demonstration organizers, soon followed. Since then, numerous activists have been imprisoned on questionable charges. Some have fled the country while others remain in hiding. Of the cases that have come to court, several defendants have been given harsh sentences for seemingly small offenses.

I contacted now-President Sargsian on March 1 and shortly afterwards asked my colleague, Deputy Assistant Secretary Matthew Bryza, to go to Yerevan, where he met with all sides, including then-President Kocharian, President-elect Sargsian and Mr. Ter-Petrosian. Since then, we have sought to foster dialogue between the parties with the aim of restoring full freedom of speech and assembly and securing the opposition's pledge that protests will be peaceful. We have criticized the government's crackdown and have called for the immediate release of all those who have been detained for political reasons. The CEO of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), Ambassador Danilovich, sent a public letter on March 11 to President Kocharian warning that the election and post-election events threatened Armenia's eligibility for MCC funding absent a demonstrated commitment to democratic practices.

The Armenian government allowed the State of Emergency to expire after 20 days, which allowed re-establishment of most print and on-line media freedoms, though coverage of the political opposition is still limited on television, where almost all stations are loyal to the government. In addition, many of the SOE restrictions were hastily written into law before the SOE expired, giving the government vast latitude to prohibit and prevent demonstrations and rallies. Furthermore, Armenia's tax authorities have begun intimidating investigations of four opposition newspapers. While the military presence on the street has ended, the police presence remains palpable, particularly in Freedom Square, where access is still being denied to opposition activists who participated in post-election protests there. Reports of intimidation and arrests of opposition activists continue.

The United States has called for an independent investigation into the events of March 1 and 2, and prosecution of anyone who used violence on either side. We seek full restoration of all basic freedoms in both law and practice. We seek a national dialogue among the government, opposition, and civil society leaders to chart new electoral reforms and perhaps conclude a "contract for democracy" that will ensure freedom of assembly in exchange for a pledge to protest lawfully and peacefully. We want to see the release of all those who have been arrested for political reasons. And we seek timely, substantive and dramatic steps by the government of Armenia to restore the democratic momentum.

Our efforts to assist Armenia during this crisis have been hampered by the fact that we have not had an ambassador in Yerevan for nearly two years. The position was due to be filled in 2006, but the nomination got caught up in the controversy here at home over what words should be used to describe the atrocities that the Ottoman Empire committed against Armenians in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Whatever language we choose to describe this horrific period, the United States can best help Armenia – and Armenian-American relations – by having an experienced U.S. ambassador at the helm in Yerevan. The setbacks in Armenia's democratic development deeply concern us as long-time friends and partners of the Armenian people, and we need all of our resources to conduct a full dialogue with Armenian officials at the highest levels of government. Armenia's leaders are at a crossroads in their path toward democracy and they have much work to do. We are committed to working with Armenia as it takes these steps, as we hope it will.

## GEORGIA

Before the 2003 Rose Revolution, Georgia was often described as a country near collapse – a "failed state." Since the Rose Revolution, however, Georgia has enjoyed rapid growth and a marked decline in corruption. The World Bank named Georgia "the world's leading economic reformer" in its 2007 "Doing Business" report, and Georgia is now rated by the World Bank as the 18th easiest country in the world in which to do business, placing it ahead of many EU member states. The Georgian government has initiated judicial reform, established fair standards of entrance into universities, and made exemplary progress in combating trafficking in persons.

Georgia's challenge at home is to build strong democratic institutions and processes to match its commitment to economic and commercial reform. Notwithstanding progress on democratization since the Rose Revolution, Georgia has work to do, and the events this past fall marked a setback for democracy in Georgia. Large segments of the Georgian public expressed serious dissatisfaction during protest rallies in September, October, and November. This dissatisfaction stemmed from a combination of continuing poverty and unemployment, a sense the Georgian government had grown disconnected from certain segments of society, and anger over a political system that seemed to be structured to prevent the development of a vibrant opposition.

On November 7, Georgia's Ministry of Internal Affairs forcibly dispersed protestors camped out in the vicinity of Parliament and later that day the government imposed a State of Emergency. In several confrontations that day police clashed with protestors elsewhere in Tbilisi. The U.S. government condemned the imposition of a state of emergency, the closure of the independent Imedi television station, and what appeared to be the use of excessive force by the Georgian government against protestors.

President Saakashvili addressed the crisis by taking an unusual step, calling for a snap presidential election on January 5 that shortened his term by a year. The conduct of the presidential election, in which incumbent President Saakashvili narrowly won a first-round victory, was regarded by OSCE and other observers as an improvement over previous elections, but flawed, and thus did not fully restore Georgia's democratic reputation. Georgian leaders and citizens will long argue over whether irregularities skewed the outcome of the election. Our assessment, after careful consideration by our Embassy, was that – absent evidence to the contrary – Mikheil Saakashvili had been legitimately re-elected, but that election irregularities had to be remedied prior to spring parliamentary elections if Georgia were to restore the faith of its voters and the international community in the country's democratic trajectory.

While we have not yet seen the OSCE's final report on the May 21 parliamentary elections, our assessment at this point is that they were a marked improvement over the January balloting. According to the preliminary assessment of international observers, including the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and NATO and the European Parliament, the election in Georgia offered the people an opportunity to choose their representatives from a wide array of choices. Georgian officials made efforts to conduct elections according to OSCE and Council of Europe commitments and standards for democratic elections.

Despite the improvements, international and domestic monitors identified a number of problems during the campaign and balloting. For example, before the elections there were allegations of voter intimidation and a lack of balance in the media, and questions about fair adjudication of complaints. We have urged the Georgian authorities to investigate all allegations of irregularities and to work with all sides to address the challenges and shortcomings identified by international and domestic observers. There are charges of violence against opposition members which we have encouraged the government to investigate expeditiously and to make the results of that investigation public.

The United Opposition has claimed that the elections were outright stolen. While we find this argument unconvincing, the Georgian body politic remains deeply polarized. As a result, Georgian democracy continues to lack a necessary element – a credible and viable opposition – and the United National Movement and the United Opposition share the blame for this shortcoming. Without a viable opposition, an empowered, independent parliament and strong, credible judiciary, and a reform process that respects dissenting voices, democracy will not be consolidated.

To sum up: Georgia's young democracy has made progress, but Georgia needs to make more progress if it is to live up to the high standards that it has set for itself. The United States will help as it can to support democratic reform, urging the Georgian authorities to take seriously their ambition to reach European standards of democracy.

While Georgia's domestic political development has proceeded, Georgia's ability to find regional and international security is at risk. Georgia has expressed its desire to join NATO, part of its overall effort to join the European and transatlantic family. As it has done so, Georgia has been subjected to unremitting and dangerous pressure from Russia, including over the separatist regions of Abkhazia and, to a lesser degree, South Ossetia. Georgian political mistakes in the early 1990s led to conflicts in these regions, and the separatists, with Russian military support, won. The Abkhaz, who comprised only 17 percent of that region's inhabitants before the war, drove out virtually all the ethnic Georgians, about 250,000 people, or nearly half of the pre-war population. The legacy of these wars has been a displaced persons problem that has placed heavy economic, social and political burdens on Georgia, and the unresolved nature of these conflicts is a major inhibitor of stability and security in Georgia.

Moscow has in recent years put economic and political pressure on Georgia: closing their common border; suspending air and ground transport links; and imposing embargoes against exports of Georgian wine, mineral water, and agricultural goods. This year, despite recently lifting some of the economic and transport embargoes, Moscow has intensified political pressure by taking a number of concrete steps toward a de facto official relationship with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where Russian peacekeeping forces have been deployed since the early 1990s – up to 3,000 in Abkhazia, and 500 Russians plus 500 North Ossetians in South Ossetia. In March, Russia announced its unilateral withdrawal from Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) sanctions on Abkhazia, which would allow Russia potentially to provide direct military assistance (though the Russian government has offered assurances that it will continue to adhere to military sanctions). On April 16, then-President Putin issued instructions calling for closer ties between Russian ministries and their Abkhaz and South Ossetian counterparts. Russian investors are known to be buying property in Abkhazia in disregard of Georgian law. Some of these properties may have belonged to displaced persons, making their eventual return even more difficult. Russian banks maintain correspondent relationships with unlicensed and virtually unregulated Abkhaz banks, an open invitation to money launderers.

Besides political pressure, Russia has also increased military pressure. Russian officials and military personnel have been seconded to serve in the separatist governments and armed forces. Two Russian officers were killed last September leading a unit of Abkhaz troops in a firefight with a Georgian unit. Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia are specifically mandated to facilitate the return of refugees, but there has been no net return of Georgians to Abkhazia in over a decade.

On April 20, a Russian fighter shot down a Georgian unmanned aerial vehicle over Georgian airspace in Abkhazia; a UN investigation confirmed that a Russian fighter was responsible. Russia also has increased its military posture in Abkhazia without consultation with the Government of Georgia. In April, without consulting Georgia, Russia sent highly-trained airborne combat troops with howitzers to Abkhazia as part of its peacekeeping force, and in May Russia dispatched construction troops to Abkhazia to repair a railroad link to Russia.

We are very concerned about these actions, which challenge Georgia's territorial integrity and have increased tensions in the separatist regions. They risk igniting a wider conflict and call into question Russia's role as a peacekeeper and facilitator of negotiations between Georgia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia respectively.

The United States has called on Moscow to reverse its unconstructive actions and actively facilitate with us and others a diplomatic process to resolve these conflicts. We could start from the peace plan proposed by President Saakashvili and that Prime Minister Putin has publicly supported. Georgia, for its part, must continue to resist the temptation of a military reaction or unwise political demands, even in the face of repeated provocations. President Saakashvili has wisely offered to negotiate with the Abkhaz leadership wide autonomy for Abkhazia, an offer that has support in many European capitals and from the United States. Europe and the United States are working together to support a peaceful approach to the Abkhaz problem. We continue to steadfastly support Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We want to work with Russia in this effort, and Russia, if it chooses, could play a constructive role in a settlement that took account of both the parties' interests.

The increase of Russian pressure against Georgia comes in the context of Georgia's transatlantic aspirations, particularly its attempt to secure a Membership Action Plan (MAP) from NATO. The United States and most NATO members strongly supported a MAP for both Georgia and Ukraine at the April NATO Summit in Bucharest – and I wish to note appreciation for bipartisan support for this effort from many Members of Congress. Although there was no consensus at Bucharest for a MAP invitation, NATO's leaders stated flatly in the final communiqué from the summit that Georgia and Ukraine will become members. NATO foreign ministers will review Georgia's and Ukraine's MAP applications at their December meeting, and they are empowered to take this decision at that time.

Having accepted the principle of membership for Georgia and Ukraine, the United States believes that NATO should proceed at its next Ministerial meeting next December to offer them MAP. MAP is not NATO membership. But it is a way to help aspiring countries meet NATO's requirements. Georgia has work to do before it is ready for NATO membership. But Georgia has distinguished itself both by the thoroughness of its military reforms and the deployability of its troops as well as by the progress that I noted earlier. Today, Georgia is the third-largest troop contributor in Iraq, with over 2,000 soldiers on the ground in Baghdad and Wasit Province. Georgia has agreed to extend its deployment and will continue to stand with Coalition Forces in Iraq. The Alliance should base its MAP decision on these objective factors – holding Georgia to high standards, and not allowing Russia to exercise a veto over an Alliance decision.

## CONCLUSION

The countries that I have described are diverse both in their histories and in the challenges that they face today. America's policy toward them has been steady, steadfast and supportive. The United States has consistently sought to advance the frontiers of freedom in Europe. This has been a bipartisan policy of the last three presidents. We will continue this policy by working together with Russia and the nations of Europe toward the goal of peaceful resolution of regional conflicts and creating an environment that will allow the countries I have described to join the Euro-Atlantic community if they wish to do so, and if they meet NATO and European Union requirements.

We support an open world, without monopolies, spheres of influence, or great power domination, in all aspects of development, from the energy and economic sectors to political life. With a set of consistent policies designed to support that end, we will pass on to the next administration a solid platform on which to build in this region in the future.

At the beginning, I described how a wave of freedom and democracy swept eastward after the fall of the Berlin Wall. We believe that wave is still on the move, and it will continue to advance as long as we promote the cause of freedom, democracy, and prosperity.

Thank you. I look forward to responding to your questions.

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