

GEORGIA UPDATE

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- US Deputy Secretary of State Steinberg Visits Georgia
- Police Arrest Three More Suspects of Russian-backed Gang Linked to 2010 Bombings
- Georgian Parliamentarian: Ethnic Cleansing Invalidates Census in Abkhazia
- Georgia Commemorates Inaugural “Soviet Occupation Day”



President Obama last week extended a warm welcome to Georgia's new ambassador in Washington, Temuri Yakobashvili, and his family. "I look forward to working with you to advance our common agenda and deepen the strong and abiding friendship of our countries," Obama said last Wednesday. The President also underscored the importance of Georgia-US relations and reiterated America's steadfast support for Georgia's territorial integrity. "Cooperation between Georgia and the US is based on shared values and common interests, and is enshrined in the US-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership," he said. The US supports Georgia's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity," he said. Yakobashvili previously served as deputy PM and state minister for reintegration.

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"Cooperation between Georgia and the US is based on shared values and common interests, and is enshrined in the US-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership. These include the advancement and promotion of democracy, respect for the rule of law and human rights, economic freedom and prosperity; security cooperation to promote global stability and curb the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and the pursuit of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The US supports Georgia's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity."

"Georgia has made significant strides in democratic and economic reforms since the historic Rose Revolution of 2003. The United States looks forward to working with Georgia to further strengthen democratic institutions and support the implementation of reforms."

◆ President Obama welcoming Georgian ambassador to the US, Temur Yakobashvili

"Today we have a state, state institutions, citizens realize their responsibility before the state, and the state fulfills its major commitments towards its citizens. That's our major achievement, which makes it impossible to reverse history and to repeat February 25, 1921."

◆ President Saakashvili speaking on Soviet Occupation Day

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Mar. 1-2: Georgian FM Vashadze visits Egypt

Mar. 3-4: Next round of Geneva peace talks

Mar. 15-17: Parliament Speaker Bakradze in Israel

Mar. 25-27: State Minister for Reintegration Tkeshelashvili attends Brussels Forum 2011

Apr. 15-20: Parliament Speaker Bakradze attends IPU meeting in Panama

TOP STORIES

IMF Forecasts Higher Growth Rate for Georgia in 2011; Tax Revenues Jump 11 Percent

The IMF last week forecast a higher growth rate for Georgia this year, as the country's economy continues to rebound from the global financial crisis and Russia's 2008 invasion. "We have revised our GDP growth forecast to 5.5 percent from 4.5 percent, as the last quarter of 2010 was strong in all parameters," the IMF's David Garner said, adding that an improved payment balance and better indicators in the banking sector helped boost Georgia's economic recovery. The IMF also predicted Georgia would attract \$700 million in foreign direct investment this year, \$100 million more than 2010, and that inflation would fall to 8 percent by year's end. "Like many countries in the world, consumer price inflation unexpectedly rose in Georgia from mid-2010 and reached 12 percent in January 2011...almost entirely due to higher international food and energy prices," Garner said. "If there will be no external shocks in the second half of 2011, we expect that prices will stabilize and the inflation rate will be a single-digit figure by December." Meanwhile Georgia's finance ministry last week reported revenue from income and custom taxes jumped by 11 percent since 2009, contributing \$2.8 billion to Georgia's state budget for 2011.

[TREND NEWS AGENCY: IMF Raises Georgia's GDP Growth Forecast](#)

Georgian Soldier Killed, Two Wounded in Afghanistan

Georgia's armed forces last week suffered another casualty in Afghanistan, bringing the number of Georgian fatalities to six since joining the NATO-led mission in November 2009. Corporal Giorgi Avaliani died in a fatal land mine blast while serving the 32nd Battalion; two other soldiers, Cpls. Nikoloz Deisadze and Ednra Abuladze, were also wounded in the same explosion. The soldiers were supporting the International Security Assistance Force's peacekeeping mission in the notoriously volatile Helmand province in southern Afghanistan. News of the fatality comes as Georgia prepares to deploy in coming weeks a team of 11 artillery instructors to train Afghan troops. With a contingent of over 950 troops in the country, Georgia is the largest contributor of forces per capita to NATO's Afghanistan mission.

[AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Georgian Soldier killed in Afghanistan](#)

US Deputy Secretary of State Steinberg Visits Georgia

US Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg visited Georgia last week, saying his trip undercores the "importance of the strategic partnership between Georgia and the US." Steinberg, accompanied by US Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon, met with President Saakashvili, National Security Council Secretary Giga Bokeria, and Deputy FM Sergi Kapanadze to discuss bilateral issues and regional security. During their one-day visit in Tbilisi, the US diplomats also met with civil society representatives and Georgia's public defender, Giorgi Tugushi, to discuss human rights and Georgia's progress on media, judicial, and democratic reform.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: US Deputy Secretary of State's Visit](#)

Police Arrest Three More Suspects of Russian-backed Gang Linked to 2009/10 Bombings

Georgian police have detained Merab Kolbaia, a Georgian citizen who goes by the nickname "Kocho," as a key suspect in a series of bombings that took place in Georgia last fall. Along with another suspect, Mukhran Tskhadaia, Kolbaia was in hiding in the Russian-occupied Georgian territory of Abkhazia. Last December, Georgia asked Russian authorities to hand over Kolbaia and Tskhadaia, but never received a response. Two more Georgians implicated in the bombings, David Kekutia and Mamuka Shonia, also were detained on Feb. 17. The series of five bombings took place between September and November 2010, targeting the US embassy, railway lines and stations, and the Labor Party headquarters in Tbilisi. Last December, six Georgian citizens suspected of carrying out the bombings were arrested. The evidence gathered in the case points to a clear connection between the suspects and an active-duty major in the Russian army, Evgeni Borisov, who appears to have directed and financed the attacks.

[REUTERS: Georgian Police Find Bombs Outside TV Station](#)



The Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theater's ballet troupe performed last week in Taiwan under the direction of world renowned Georgian prima ballerina Nino Ananiashvili. The program included two classical ballet masterpieces, "Giselle" and "Swan Lake." The troupe will hold nine performances during its current world tour, and will return to Georgia in mid-March.

Georgian Parliamentarian: Ethnic Cleansing Invalidates Census in Abkhazia

A senior Georgian lawmaker denounced as illegitimate the census currently being conducted in Russian-occupied Abkhazia, saying the ethnic cleansing of Georgians by Russian occupiers and proxies in the region invalidates the population survey. Deputy parliamentary chairman Paata Davitaia called the census "illegal," and an attempt by Russia to legitimize the ethnic cleansing of Georgians in the region: "300,000 ethnic Georgian have been ousted," he said, referring to the Russian-backed regime's refusal to allow ethnic Georgians, displaced by ethnic cleansing in the 1990s and during Russia's 2008 invasion, the right to return to their homes in Abkhazia. The last census, conducted in 2003, put Abkhazia's population at 214,000; however, election data acquired by Brussels-based think-tank International Crisis Group suggests the population was at least 40,000-60,000 less at the time.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Abkhazia Launches Population Census](#)

Georgia Commemorates Inaugural "Soviet Occupation Day"

Georgia last week marked its first "Soviet Occupation Day," a commemoration of the Red Army invasion and subsequent occupation in 1921. Some 80,000 Georgians were killed by the Soviet authorities, and a further 400,000 judged to be enemies of the state were deported. President Saakashvili, to students at the Museum of Occupation, drew parallels between the Soviet occupation of Georgia and Russia's 2008 invasion and control of Georgia's territories: "Significant parts of Georgia are still occupied," he said. "The same empire, which carried out February 25 of 1921, is dreaming about abolishing Georgia's sovereignty. The only difference is that at that time, this empire was being born and now it is dying," he said. The President also applauded the progress Georgia has made in becoming an established, democratic state, free of Soviet oppressors. "Today we have a state, state institutions, citizens realize their responsibility before the state, and the state fulfills its major commitments towards its citizens. That's our major achievement, which makes it impossible to reverse history and to repeat February 25, 1921," Saakashvili said. To mark the inaugural Soviet Occupation Day, Georgian authorities opened a memorial to the short-lived "First Republic," and launched a student essay competition about the similarities between the two wars. "It's the most tragic day in recent history," PM Gilauri said at a memorial ceremony in Tbilisi.

[AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Georgia Commemorates "Soviet Occupation Day"](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

WASHINGTON POST: No more Western hugs for Russia's rulers

"Contrary to the wishful thinking many in Russia and abroad expressed when Medvedev took office...his presidency has demonstrated no signs that his pro-democracy rhetoric might turn into real action," write Mikhail Kasyanov, Vladimir Milov, Boris Nemtsov, and Vladimir Ryzhkov, leader of Russia's People's Freedom Party. "In fact, the opposite is true. This period was marked by increasingly restricted and falsified elections; war against Georgia; eased constraints on the use of armed forces abroad...police lawlessness and corruption; and continued oppression of political opponents and dissent.... As leaders of the united Russian democratic opposition, we urge the West to stop undermining our cause and compromising the very principles Western society is based upon."

www.washingtonpost.com

WEEKLY STANDARD: How not to understand the Russian-Georgian conflict

Georgia wants to join the community of free, prosperous democracies. It has transformed itself from a failed state to a burgeoning, open republic. Russia views open, democratic societies as a threat. They have shown they will mitigate that threat with force and occupation. Yet in the Center for American Progress' estimation, outlined in a 70-plus page report, this reprehensible obstruction of freedom and democracy is legitimate. "Georgia faces a stark choice between two mutually exclusive futures." That's how CAP kicked off its report. That sophomoric assessment is just the opening salvo in a report overflowing with inaccuracies.

www.weeklystandard.com

THE ECONOMIST: Georgian refugees—Return of the Meskhetians

In 2007, the Georgian government passed a law that allows Meskhetians, deported to Central Asia in 1944 by the Soviets and oppressed by the Uzbeks in 1989, to return to their homes in southern Georgia. If all goes well, Georgia may greet the first returnees in fall. The numbers will probably be small, at first. Even so, their return would symbolize official recognition of past injustices. For those who experienced the deportation and their offspring, that is no mean thing.

www.economist.com

BLOOMBERG: Russia's terrorists threaten Olympics

Islamic militants in southern Russia, inspired by uprisings across the Arab world, are changing tactics and attacking targets closer to Sochi in a bid to derail the 2014 Winter Olympics. The killing of Muscovites and bombing of a ski lift at a resort in Kabardino-Balkaria, a region between Chechnya and Sochi, last week is part of "new terror campaign" against Russian rule designed to elicit maximum media coverage, says Grigory Shvedov, chief editor of a Moscow-based news and Caucasus analysis group. "The Winter Olympics is a dream come true for terrorists."

www.bloomberg.com

MOSCOW TIMES: No threat of Egypt scenario in Georgia

Guys like opposition leader Sozar Subari of the newly created Georgian Party forget that the reason President Saakashvili's National Movement Party has consolidated power is because they let him—by pursuing a course of screaming "Down with the king!" instead of actually addressing the needs of their constituents. Saakashvili will finish his term, like it or not, and if the opposition doesn't want him to occupy the post of prime minister, then they are going to have to offer people something more than Egyptian-inspired protests.

www.themoscowtimes.com

REUTERS: Georgia wants probe of post-Soviet leader's death

The Georgian parliament asked prosecutors last week to open a new investigation into Zviad Gamsakhurdia's death after hearing the conclusions of a parliamentary commission. The son of a famous writer, Gamsakhurdia led Georgia to independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, taking power after winning a 1990 parliamentary election in the USSR's first free multi-party vote.

uk.reuters.com

**ARGOPHILIA: Linking Europe to Asia—Georgia's military highway**

The Georgian Military Highway runs north through the Caucasus from Tbilisi to the border of Russia, and has served as an important link between Asia and Europe since 1799. For the traveler, the highway is significant because it winds past some of the most awe-inspiring landscapes and attractions in the world, exposing visitors to dramatic views and architectural gems. As a major link in the so-called "Silk Road," this main artery between Georgia and Russia is also something of an astonishing engineering achievement. While traveling on the highway is not a trek for the faint of heart, the journey is one of those unforgettable adventures that happen so rarely. Nature, age-old architecture, breathtaking panoramic views, and a little piece of the ancient world: that's what you'll take away from this extraordinary place on our world.

www.argophilia.com

THE TELEGRAPH: Moscow's purchase of French warships causes panic from Washington to Tokyo

As Russia pushes ahead with its biggest rearmament program since the fall of the Soviet Union, its decision to buy two amphibious Mistral-class assault ships from France is causing alarm from Washington to Tokyo. Those fears have been fanned by the head of the Russian navy, Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky, who was quoted as saying that the ship would have allowed Russia to crush the Georgian army much more quickly than it did in 2008 during the countries' five-day war. "Everything that we did in the space of 26 hours at the time, this ship will do within 40 minutes," he said.

www.telegraph.co.uk

THE DARTMOUTH: Dartmouth College to offer Georgian this spring

As part of a research project aimed at improving the methodology of teaching Georgian to non-native speakers, Ramaz Kurdadze, chair of the modern Georgian department at Tbilisi State University in Tbilisi, will offer Georgian language instruction at Dartmouth College this spring term. Kurdadze said he hopes to use his experience at the College to improve the classes he leads at Tbilisi State, where he primarily teaches Georgian to US Embassy workers who participate in intensive language-study programs at the start of their deployment.

thedartmouth.com

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Georgian lawmaker scales Andes peaks in protest climb

A Georgian lawmaker has scaled Aconcagua and Ojos del Salado, two of the tallest mountains on the S. American continent, in a high-altitude protest against the presence of Russian forces in his country. On each Andes peak, MP Gia Tortladze left Georgian flags and leaflets denouncing the Russian occupation of parts of his country after Russia's 2008 war invasion. "I want to deliver a political message: Russia's illegal occupation of Georgia must end," he said.

www.france24.com