

Testimony of Ian Kelly
Nominee to be Ambassador to Georgia
May 20, 2015
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am deeply honored to appear before you as President Obama's nominee to serve as Ambassador to Georgia. It is a particular privilege for me to have a second opportunity to be considered by this committee, and serve the American people in this way. If confirmed, I pledge to devote all my efforts to advancing U.S. interests and promoting the security of the American people. For all thirty years of my government service, my wife Francesca has been by my side, and I am pleased to introduce her to you today.

Nearly forty years ago, after spending several months studying in the USSR, I visited Tbilisi, and was immediately struck by the vitality and independent spirit of the Georgian people. A few years later, the Georgian people were in the forefront of the movement to free the captive nations of the Soviet Union. We supported their desire for independence then, and we continue to support it today.

The United States stands firm in its commitment to Georgia's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence. We condemn the ongoing occupation of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions by Russian forces. Furthermore, Russia's so-called "treaties" of alliance with the de facto authorities Abkhazia and South Ossetia have absolutely no legitimacy.

An important principle is at stake here – the right of all sovereign nations to choose their own alliances and associations. The United States and our allies support Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, including NATO membership and EU integration. No third party has the right to veto those aspirations. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Georgian government and my Embassy colleagues in realizing these aspirations. I will also urge all Georgians who believe in their country's Euro-Atlantic goals to unite in supporting them and moving their country forward.

On its road toward Euro-Atlantic integration, Georgia has made substantial progress toward becoming a fully democratic state. Its 2012 and 2013 elections resulted in the first constitutional changes of government in post-Soviet Georgia.

While progress has been real and substantial, more work needs to be done for Georgia to realize its goal of an environment fully conducive to political pluralism. We will work with all parties in Georgia to help ensure the next parliamentary elections are the freest and fairest in Georgia's history. The U.S. has been a partner in this effort, with a robust assistance program to help Georgia strengthen accountable government, and consolidate its democratic institutions.

If Georgia's quest to integrate with the West is to succeed, it is critical that it improve the climate for trade and investment. This is an area where the government and the opposition should be able to come together. Georgia needs to take advantage of the great opportunity that its Association Agreement with the European Union represents – particularly increased trade between Georgia and Europe through the Agreement's Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. The United States appreciates Georgia's growing role as a regional business, trade and logistics hub, and its contributions to the revitalization of East-West trade routes along the New Silk Road, connecting European and Asian markets. If confirmed, I will support Georgia's focus on the future, particularly economic development, to create jobs and contribute to the long term stability of the country and the region.

Mr. Chairman, there is a lot of work to do, and if the Senate confirms my nomination, I look forward to rolling up my sleeves and getting down to it, advancing the mutual interests of the American and Georgian peoples. Thank you, and I welcome your questions.