

Georgia: One Year After the August War

Testimony of
Ambassador Alexander Vershbow
Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Subcommittee for Europe
August 4, 2009

Introduction

Chairwoman Shaheen, Senator DeMint, members of the subcommittee, thank you for calling this important hearing, which offers us a chance to reflect on Georgia, Russia and U.S. policy in the Eurasia region one year after the August war. Russia's invasion of Georgia was a critical event that has profound implications for U.S. policy in the region. I would like to start by thanking the Committee and others in Congress for their generous support for Georgia over the past year.

This anniversary is both tragic and hopeful, as it presents an opportunity to look back on a difficult time, yet shows that, one year on, Georgia has emerged thanks to help from the United States and the international community. Our assistance has been conducted in partnership with the European Union, NATO and the international community, and it is paired with a "reset" of U.S.-Russia relations and deepened support to Georgia and our regional partners. As we approach the one-year anniversary of the conflict and have passed the first six months of the new Administration, the Obama administration has shown, both in word and action, that U.S. support for Georgia remains steadfast and that we are on the right course with our policy in the region.

Situation on the Ground

One year after the conflict, the security situation in Georgia remains a cause for concern as violence persists and the international community is limited in its ability to prevent conflict and monitor the situation on the ground since the expiration of the mandates of the OSCE and UNOMIG. Moscow continues to strengthen its control over the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. As my colleague noted, thousands of Russian combat troops and security forces with modern equipment are entrenched in Georgian sovereign territory, and Russia continues to build infrastructure, logistics and military bases in both regions. Despite their recognition by Russia and Nicaragua, the separatist regions have become even more isolated, as the international community has refused Russia's call to recognize their independence.

We will continue to work with our international partners to oppose wider recognition of the separatist regimes. We appreciate the European Union's diplomatic role in Georgia and the Geneva process, and we fully support the EU Monitoring Mission – the only international monitors that will remain in place in the months ahead. The Department of Defense will continue to support our State Department colleagues as we maintain international unity in calling on Russia to implement the cease-fire agreements of August 12 and September 8, which obligate Russia to withdraw its military forces to their pre-war positions. With our partners, we have also called on Russian forces that occupy these Georgian regions to uphold the rule of law and ensure respect for human rights, and to allow unhindered humanitarian access to South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Georgian forces have cooperated with the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), as the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Internal Affairs signed a unilateral agreement under which Georgia reports to the EU monitors all movements of its security forces near the administrative boundaries and allows unannounced inspections of Georgian military facilities. This was an important step, and an indicator of Georgia's intent to remain transparent and committed to promoting stability in the separatist regions. The EUMM has been able to investigate and dispel claims of Georgian military build-ups and deployments to the administrative boundaries, although their full capabilities to investigate all parties' claims are limited due to their lack of access to Russian-controlled areas of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

As my colleague mentioned, we regret deeply the end of the OSCE and UN missions in Georgia and the lack of access to the separatist regions. Russia's blocking of consensus at the OSCE on a status-neutral proposal to extend the mandate of the OSCE Mission in Georgia and its vetoing of a UN Security Council resolution extending the mandate of UNOMIG were unfortunate. Russia's refusal to allow these valuable missions to continue, unless they were given new mandates that recognized as legitimate the separatist regimes, is inconsistent with the spirit of Russia's commitments signed after the conflict. We again call on Russia to implement the Sarkozy-Medvedev cease-fire arrangements and introduce an international presence that provides a modicum of transparency and monitoring that can help secure the region. Just this past weekend, tension again escalated, further highlighting the need for international monitoring on both sides of the administrative boundary, as well as the need to use existing mechanisms and open, transparent communication to defuse tension.

U.S. Policy

United States policy rests on the continued support of Georgia's territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty; rejecting any notion of spheres of influence in the region; and promoting peace and stability. We stand by the principle that sovereign states have the right to make their own decisions, and choose their own partnerships and alliances. We will not recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. Most

importantly, we will continue to stand by and deepen our support to Georgia and its people. This support does not come blindly however, and we will calibrate our assistance to respect the needs of the Georgian people, to strengthen regional security, and to support democratic and economic reforms in Georgia.

Despite concerns from some quarters, U.S. efforts to reset relations with Russia will not come at the expense of Georgia. President Obama stressed this point on his recent trip to Moscow, when he said: “The pursuit of power is no longer a zero-sum game.” We can strive to improve our bilateral relations with Russia while remaining steadfast in our support for Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Vice President also noted during his recent visit to Georgia that there is no military option for reintegration of the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We have urged Georgia to exhibit strategic restraint, to do everything possible to avoid another conflict, and to vigorously pursue political and economic reforms that can make reintegration into Georgia attractive to the people of the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

We believe that stable democracies on Russia’s borders contribute not only to Europe’s security, but to Russia’s as well. In that vein, we stand by our commitment to continue our strong support for Building Partner Capacity and establishing strong security cooperation programs with our partners in the region. These will not suffer due to the “reset” in relations with Russia. Good relations with Russia and cooperation with its neighbors are not mutually exclusive.

Defense Cooperation with Georgia

I would like to utilize this opportunity to describe our assistance strategy to Georgia and explain how we are approaching bilateral defense cooperation. This is also an opportunity to clarify both what we are doing and what we have not done. The U.S. has not “rearmed” Georgia as some have claimed. There has been no lethal military assistance to Georgia since the August conflict. No part of the \$1 billion U.S. assistance package went to the Ministry of Defense.

After the conflict, DoD delivered tens of millions of dollars in humanitarian aid to the Georgian people. We are proud that the promise of \$1 billion in assistance to Georgia is being fulfilled. \$100 million in DoD Section 1207 funding for reconstruction assistance to Georgia went to the State Department as part of this \$1 billion package, which focused on resettling Georgian internally displaced persons, rebuilding destroyed homes and infrastructure, and rebuilding Georgia’s police forces.

Since the conflict, DoD has employed a methodical, yet patient, strategic approach to our defense cooperation. After the conflict, U.S. European Command (EUCOM) implemented a comprehensive multi-month assessment of Georgia’s Armed Forces (GAF), which provided us a basis for understanding Georgia’s needs and deficiencies.

We found that the Russian invasion had degraded Georgia's capabilities, infrastructure and equipment. The conflict exposed or highlighted many previously unrecognized or neglected deficiencies in the various required capacities of the Georgian Armed Forces and Ministry of Defense. In practically all areas, GAF defense institutions, strategies, doctrine, and professional military education were found to be seriously lacking. As a result, we are focusing on building defense institutions, assisting defense sector reform, and building the strategic and educational foundations that will facilitate necessary training, education, and rational force structure design and procurement. We are assisting Georgia to move along the path to having modern, western-oriented, NATO-interoperable armed forces capable of territorial defense and coalition contributions.

DoD hosted Bilateral Defense Consultations with Georgia in October 2008 and we look forward to joining our Georgian partners in Tbilisi in the fall of 2009 for the next round of these consultations. Georgia also hosted a Colonels' Working Group in early 2009, which set the parameters for our defense cooperation in the year ahead. These discussions focused on ways to deepen our military cooperation, and included frank exchanges on defense reform, priorities, assistance areas and regional security. The objective of our assistance is to support Georgia's defense reform and modernization along Euro-Atlantic lines. Our focus is currently on doctrine, education and training, and preparation for Georgia's future deployment to Afghanistan. We are taking a phased approach to our military assistance and carefully examining each step to ensure that it would not be counterproductive to our goals of promoting peace and stability in the region.

Like any sovereign state, Georgia has a right to legitimate territorial defense capabilities. Focusing U.S. assistance initially on fundamental intellectual issues like training, doctrine and personnel management, however, is our prioritized approach, and this will serve as a foundation on which Georgia can build for years to come. This effort provides a measured and meaningful way to help a country that has helped us in Iraq and will again be standing together with U.S., NATO and ISAF partner forces in Afghanistan.

Georgia's FY-09 FMF allocation is projected to be \$11 million, and we plan to focus assistance on a Simulations Center, Training and Education, Training Center Modernization, and Development and Defense Advisors. We hope to focus additional FY-10 resources on Defense Advisors, Support to Professional Military Education (PME), Communications, Training and Education, Tactical Vehicle (HMMWV) Maintenance, and Training Center Modernization.

This assistance is geared toward helping Georgia modernize its military. Although critical, we hope to contribute additional U.S. resources focused on modernizing and helping Georgia to reform its Armed Forces. We welcome Congress's support and guidance in this regard. We believe that supporting Georgia's development and its defense institutions is a key part of our support to Georgia.

We have also stressed to the Georgian government that any strategy to take on Russia is counterproductive and is doomed to failure. This will require a long-term approach and strategic restraint on Georgia's part.

Georgian Defense Reform

Notwithstanding our pledge of assistance, Georgia bears responsibility for implementing the necessary reforms. We have stressed clearly and unequivocally that there are no military solutions to the challenge of the separatist regions. Georgia needs to pursue a careful and rational defense modernization plan.

Georgia has accomplished much in the last few years, showing a record of impressive reforms unparalleled in the region. Since the conflict, Georgia has taken on board U.S. advice from the EUCOM Armed Forces Assessment and is working to institutionalize reforms along Euro-Atlantic lines. The Georgian Armed Forces have implemented personnel reforms, modernized their system of professional military education, begun to rewrite their doctrine, and increased their focus on education and training. Georgia has also drafted its Annual National Program for cooperation with NATO, initiated work on its General Defense Plan, and drafted its National Military Strategy. We are assisting Georgia in these efforts and will continue to do so.

Afghanistan

Georgia has been a key partner in providing transit and overflights to Afghanistan, and has offered to provide more of this support. Georgia has also recently offered additional support to coalition efforts in Afghanistan, and we appreciate Georgia's recent offer to contribute a battalion of forces to ISAF, which will likely deploy with U.S. forces in 2010. The United States supports this offer and is working with Georgia to ensure that its forces can operate alongside U.S., NATO Allies and ISAF partners as we confront the challenges in Afghanistan. This deployment will showcase Georgia's ability to recover from the August conflict and remain a steadfast net contributor to international security. Georgia will also be deploying an infantry company to ISAF with French forces in Afghanistan later this year.

NATO

As Vice President Biden reaffirmed in Tbilisi, we continue to support Georgia's NATO aspirations and the right of all countries to choose their own alliances. Following the August conflict, Allies and Georgia agreed to launch the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) and to have Georgia develop an Annual National Program (ANP) to guide its reform efforts aimed at meeting NATO's membership standards. Georgia has been actively engaged in these processes ever since, including submission of its first ANP to

NATO this spring and participation in a series of NGC meetings with Allies. Georgia hosted two NATO Partnership for Peace exercises in May, which drew broad international participation despite Russia's last-minute efforts to have the exercises cancelled.

NATO has clearly stated that Georgia and Ukraine will become NATO members, though the timing and path have not been determined. NATO has an open door policy and welcomes all aspirants who meet the qualifications for membership and NATO's performance-based standards. Although consensus among Allies is a requirement to admit new members, no nation outside the Alliance has a veto. As an active NATO Partnership for Peace nation that has participated in international operations in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Iraq, Georgia has demonstrated its commitment to regional and global security, but it has substantial work ahead to complete the political, economic and security reforms necessary for Euro-Atlantic integration. The Department of Defense will continue to work with our NATO Allies to support Georgia's reform efforts.

U.S.-Russia Policy

Despite differences over Georgia, our relationship with Russia will continue to be an important focus for this Administration and we have consistently sought to work with Russia on a wide range of areas of mutual interest. Let me take this opportunity to stress that this is not a zero-sum game, and recent advances in U.S.-Russian relations should not be viewed as Georgia's loss. Our reengagement presents new opportunities for cooperation with Moscow to enhance U.S. and European security.

The April meeting of the Presidents in London and the July summit mark what I believe can be a significant turning point in U.S.-Russia relations. The Administration is under no illusion that this will be easy. Nor do we believe that a strategic partnership will simply develop overnight. We do believe that improved relations between the United States and Russia, which had started on a downward trend long before August 2008, can help us meet the range of challenges we face today.

We set an ambitious agenda for the Moscow Summit and made significant progress on a number of important issues. We are optimistic that the agreements that arose from the Summit will assist our efforts broadly, from reducing strategic weapons stockpiles to supporting the war in Afghanistan. There are also some remaining areas of concern. As we move forward, the United States and Russia will need to manage our disagreements in areas such as the sovereignty of countries in the post-Soviet space, obligations under the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty, and Russia's backsliding on democracy and human rights issues. We will continue to clearly and unequivocally raise areas of concern and stick to our interests and principles in discussions with Moscow.

Conclusion

The U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership, signed in January of this year, represents an historic opportunity to deepen U.S.-Georgia relations, and puts us on a solid footing for the future. I had the privilege of co-chairing the Security Working Group of the U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission on June 22 with my colleague, Assistant Secretary Gordon. DoD is committed to implementing the tenets of the U.S.-Georgia Charter, which states that “a strong, independent, sovereign and democratic Georgia, capable of responsible self-defense, contributes to the security and prosperity not only of all Georgians, but of a Europe whole free and at peace.” We also stand by our commitment in the Charter to undertaking a program of enhanced security cooperation aimed at increasing Georgian capabilities and strengthening its candidacy for NATO membership. We will support the efforts of Georgia to provide for its legitimate security and defense needs, including the development of appropriate and NATO-interoperable forces. The Charter will deepen our strong legacy of bilateral cooperation in a wide range of areas, including defense cooperation. The fall meeting of the Security Working Group will serve as a complement to our Annual Bilateral Defense Consultations, which I hope to attend in Tbilisi later this year.

In addition to strengthening Georgia’s democracy, we believe that defense reform will continue to help advance Georgia’s candidacy for membership in European and transatlantic institutions, promote regional stability, and ensure that Georgia remains independent and sovereign over its territory. We will conduct our defense cooperation in a measured, responsible manner in keeping with our support for Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity, our longstanding assistance to Georgian deployments to Allied and international operations, and our desire to advance Georgia’s NATO integration goals.

Bilateral cooperation with Georgia, in all sectors, can help the United States cement the ongoing reforms to which Georgia has committed and fulfill the promise of the Rose Revolution. The first anniversary of the August war is a time for reflection, but most importantly a time for action to support prudent reform and rebuilding of Georgia. We shall remain committed to Georgia’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and look forward to working with our Georgian partners to anchor security and prosperity in the years to come.

Madame Chairwoman, Senator DeMint, members of the Committee, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak before you today, and I welcome the opportunity to respond to your questions.