

GEORGIA'S RAILWAY TO NATO PASSES THROUGH TURKEY

The Turkish-Georgian border is now the fulcrum of an East-West highway of immense geopolitical importance to the West that must now be reinforced with security ties. Georgia in NATO would be one of the most significant steps. It would stabilize Georgia and enhance security throughout the region. Therefore, it is in NATO's interest to have Georgia as an ally. Indeed, Georgia already behaves as an ally in NATO operations. And Georgia has already accomplished impressive reforms. NATO's further expectations should be wrapped into a Membership Action Plan for Georgia during 2008—and Turkey should take the lead in explaining why.

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Breakthroughs in Energy Diversification and Transportation

On November 21 in the Georgian town of Marabda, the presidents of Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan inaugurated construction of the Kars-Tbilisi-Baku railway that by 2010—coupled with the Marmaray Tunnel beneath the Bosphorus—will enable rail travel between Edinburgh and Shanghai.¹ The Turkish-Georgian border—Cold War extension of the Iron Curtain—is now the fulcrum of an East-West highway of immense geopolitical importance to the West. Consequently, the steel rails must be reinforced with stability and security ties of equal strength. Bringing Georgia into NATO as soon as possible would be one of the most significant steps we could take in this regard.

Georgia was part of the Greco-Roman trading system, but these days it has achieved more notoriety for the oil and gas pipelines that lead from the landlocked Caspian Sea, through Turkey, to markets in Western Europe.

In the spring of 2006, a BP-led consortium celebrated the first oil to travel through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Pipeline to Turkey's Mediterranean coast, quietly oozing onto a westbound tanker.

Georgia—fulcrum of the BTC Pipeline, gateway to the Caspian, and democratic anchor on the Black Sea's eastern shore—is a key to the kind of regional stability needed to underpin a broad east-west corridor that hastens commerce in much more than just oil. Of course, the BTC Pipeline's scale—1,776 kilometers and a million barrels per day capacity—sets it in a class by itself. But its real significance is geopolitical.

The BTC pipeline bypasses Russia and Iran, affording Western access to Caspian Sea and Central Asian energy and offering a choice of customers to the landlocked producing states. It also bypasses the very congested Turkish Straits, a key Turkish interest.

The BTC Pipeline augments the much smaller Western Route Export Pipeline that has been transporting so-called “early oil” from Baku to Supsa, near the Georgian port of Poti, since 1998. And rail cars continue to transport Caspian oil to Batumi, insuring its role as an international oil port.

Parallel to BTC, natural gas flows from the Caspian Sea's Shah Deniz field through the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) to the Turkish city of Erzurum. There it merges with the Turkish gas distribution system, bound for Turkish and other European consumers through the Southern Europe Gas Ring.

¹ For information on impending transportation breakthroughs that receive little western attention see IaMetreveli, “Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Rail Construction Launched,” *The Georgian Times*, (November 26, 2007), available at <http://www.geotimes.ge/index.php?m=home&newsid=7954>, hereafter cited as Metreveli; and Jeff Wise, “Turkey Building the World's Deepest Immersed Tube Tunnel,” *Popular Mechanics* (June 2007), available at http://www.popularmechanics.com/science/extreme_machines/4217338.html?series=23.

On 18 November, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Greek counterpart Kostas Karamanlis met on a bridge spanning the Meriç River that divides their countries to inaugurate the ring's next segment. A 285 kilometer pipeline will carry Caspian Sea gas from Karacabey in western Turkey to Komotini in northeastern Greece.

In 2008, construction will begin on the *Poseidon* Greece-Italy pipeline. By 2011, it will carry Caspian gas from Igoumenitsa to Otranto. If the European Union's Turkey to Austria *Nabucco* pipeline is realized, it could be supplied by gas from SCP or from new parallel pipelines.² "The Silk Road will also become an energy route linking east and west through Turkey," said Erdoğan at the Meriç River Bridge.³ Together, all these energy conduits will form the critical mass required to promote and sustain a broad east-west commercial corridor. In this regard, The Kars-Tbilisi-Baku railroad stands out as a multi-purpose carrier, promising not only temporary construction jobs and transit fees, but commercial development along its route and beyond.

"It has the strong power to change history," said Turkish President Abdullah Gül at the Marabda ceremony.⁴

Whether by road or rail, through the Turkish Straits to Naples or via the Danube and Rhine Rivers to Rotterdam, we now have the prospect of firmly linking Asia and the Caspian to a North Atlantic trading system that extends from Batumi and Ceyhan in the east to Houston in the west.⁵ And with commerce come people, so the east-west corridor will also become a pathway for ideas, perhaps the most important prospect of all.

Seen in this way, the agreement to develop Caspian Sea hydrocarbon resources will indeed turn out to be, as Azerbaijan's late President Heidar Aliyev dubbed it at the 1994 signing ceremony, "the deal of the century!" Turkey is transforming itself not just into a European energy hub but into the nexus of east-west communication. This historic opportunity requires Turkey to be a leader in building a solid foundation of security and stability from the Black Sea to the Caspian.

Georgia in NATO

Georgia in NATO is not, of course, the only brick required to build this foundation. However, it is an important one because it would stabilize Georgia itself and enhance security in the Eastern Black Sea and Southwest Caucasus. Still, for too many westerners, Georgia is a far away country that could involve them in quarrels between people of whom they know nothing.

Of course, NATO is not a club or another diplomatic forum. It is a military alliance whose linchpin is Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which says that an attack upon one of us shall

² For the most recent vicissitudes of *Nabucco* see Khadija Ismayilova, "The Future of Nabucco Pipeline Up in the Air," *Eurasianet.org*, (December 5, 2007), available at <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav120507.shtml>.

³ Anthee Carassava, "Greece and Turkey Open Gas Pipeline," *New York Times*, (November 19, 2007), available at http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/19/world/europe/19greece.html?_r=1&n=Top/News/World/Countries%20and%20Territories/Turkey&oref=slogin.

⁴ Metreveli op.cit.

⁵ I am indebted for this point to Lan Bentsen, Executive Vice President of Frontera Resources.

be considered an attack upon us all. With this solemn commitment, the West Europeans are bound to each other, to North America, Turkey and now to Eastern Europe.

Article 5 was invoked for the first time in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 *al Qaeda* attacks on New York and Washington. Just as millions of young American men and women served in Europe during the Cold War, servicemen and women from eleven countries deployed to Oklahoma City, from where NATO aircraft patrolled American skies. The NATO commitment proved every bit as strong as it was throughout the Cold War, so extending it to a new ally must be considered carefully.

The Article 5 commitment cements the alliance and, therefore, cannot be hedged. “NATO does not know A-grade and B-grade allies,” said Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, “NATO only knows allies.”⁶ That is why Belgian F-16 fighter aircraft landed at Siauliai Air Base, 200 kilometers northwest of Vilnius, on March 29, 2004, the very day the Baltic countries acceded to the North Atlantic Treaty. It was not a provocative act. Rather, it was a precise gesture to underscore Scheffer’s point about what it means to be a NATO ally.

“In 2009, I would like to see more countries in NATO,” the alliance’s Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told the prestigious Munich Security Conference on February 10, 2007. The Atlantic alliance should, he continued, “come close to honoring the ambitions” of Georgia.⁷ There was no promise of membership, but it was a clear recognition that, particularly since the November 23, 2003 Rose Revolution, Georgia has taken giant strides toward NATO membership—it is the country’s number one priority.

Geopolitics

It is easy to see why Georgia would want the 26 NATO allies. But why would the current NATO countries want to make such a weighty commitment to Georgia? The answer is because it is in NATO’s interest to have Georgia as an ally.

Looking east, Georgia’s geographical position would afford NATO reach toward the Caspian Sea and Central Asia beyond, outflanking potential trouble spots. This kind of reach is crucial not only for military operations, but also for combating trafficking in drugs, people and arms of who knows what sort. As a NATO ally, Georgia could receive all the technical assistance it needs to become a full player in these efforts. Time-sensitive information would flow more easily among allies. The net effects would be NATO security projection and safer streets in Rome and Milan.

Looking west, Black Sea security is now firmly on the NATO agenda. This reflects the alliance’s post Cold War reorientation toward south and east, so-called “out-of-area” operations such as Kosovo and Afghanistan, and alliance enlargement. Bulgaria and Romania joined NATO in 2004. Then, in 2005, the United States signed an agreement with Romania for rotational use of

⁶ See David J. Smith, “2006 Should be Georgia’s Year for NATO,” *24 Saati*, (January 10, 2006), available at http://www.gfsis.org/gsac/eng/publications/articles/DS_5.pdf.

⁷ The February 10, 2007 speech of NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer to the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy is available at http://www.gfsis.org/gsac/eng/publications/43rd_Munich_Conference_on_Security_Policy.pdf.

its Kogalniceanu, Babadağ, Cincu and Smardan bases. Last year, a similar agreement was concluded with Bulgaria for use of Bezmer and Graf Ignatievo Airfields and the Novo Selo Training Area.

Bulgaria and Romania should now become NATO windows on a stable lake, not its fortresses on a sea of instability. Turkey, on the Black Sea's southern shore, should be part of the Euro-Atlantic mainstream, not its last outpost in a troubled world. Now that the road to Sarp, Turkey's easternmost Black Sea town, is no longer a dead end, extending the alliance's hand further east to Georgia makes sense. Georgia offers a unique geo-strategic position on the eastern shore of the Black Sea. Sensors emplaced in Georgia, use of its air and seaports, and cooperation with its small but capable Coast Guard would be strong complements to NATO air and sea surveillance.

The benefits to the alliance would be a clear picture of Black Sea air and maritime traffic, timely information, forward protection for Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, and enhanced capability to react when necessary. Again, these would be a boon not only to military operations, but also to the fight against contraband and terrorism.

Boosting counter-terrorist activity in the Black Sea region would be important because, as our Turkish colleagues point out, the area is rife with PKK activity. And a concerted counter-terrorist effort in the South Caucasus will be essential to truncate the terrorist link between the Middle East and the North Caucasus, a region which is fast spinning out of control.

Unfortunately, the problems with the PKK and of Caucasus security are poorly understood among most NATO allies. Consequently, an ancillary benefit to Turkey of bringing Georgia into NATO would be to add another ally that fully understands these matters.

Georgia's Military Contributions

With regard to the military obligations that alliance membership would impose, Georgia already behaves as an ally with major contributions to NATO operations. A company plus a platoon of Georgian peacekeepers serve under Turkish command in Kosovo. Georgia also contributed to the surge in NATO troops required for the 2004 presidential election in Afghanistan and recently announced that about 100 to 200 Georgian soldiers will soon deploy in the Mazar-i-Sharif area.

Further, though Iraq is not a NATO operation, and Ankara and Washington have disagreed over this conflict, Georgia's contribution of 2,000 soldiers to the coalition demonstrates that it is willing and able to participate in collective security operations. These Georgian soldiers now serve in Baghdad, Baquba and Wasit Province, along the Iranian border.

Turkey was quick to grasp the importance of a security relationship with Georgia. Anyone familiar with the Georgian Armed Forces has seen the discrete little plaques marking the many buildings refurbished with Turkish help. Of particular importance is the upgrade of Marneuli military airport to NATO standards. Turkey supports the Georgian National Defense Academy and has trained the Kojori Special Forces Brigade. Nearly 1,000 Georgian military personnel have attended courses in Turkey.

Turkey provides pre-deployment training to the Georgian soldiers bound for KFOR, NATO's force in Kosovo. In theater, Georgia's military contingent is part of the Multi-national Task Force-South, which is now under Turkish command.

Reforms at Home

Of course, NATO membership also requires real progress on challenging reforms at home. Although there is much yet to do, much has been accomplished because of the November 2003 *Rose Revolution*. Foremost is the *Rose Revolution* itself, in which the Georgian people peacefully showed that they share NATO's democratic values. Free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections followed in January 2004.

There is room here for only a few examples of the strides forward made since then. The tax system has been reformed and commercial licensing procedures streamlined to the point that the Heritage Foundation's *Index of Economic Freedom 2007* rates Georgia's economy as 35th most free in the world.⁸ This is behind the United States and the United Kingdom, but ahead of Turkey and Greece. Similarly, the World Bank report *Doing Business* ranked Georgia as the top global reformer last year and fifth this year. The same report ranks Georgia 18th in "ease of doing business," again behind the US and the UK, but ahead of Turkey and Greece.⁹

In the national security sector, Georgia has published its unequivocally western oriented *National Security Concept*.¹⁰ It has abolished the Soviet style Interior Army, and firmly subordinated the National Guard as the reserve training and mobilization arm of the Georgian Armed Forces (GAF).

The Minister of Defense is a civilian. The civilian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is distinct from the military staff. The Soviet-style General Staff is being transformed into a western-style Joint Staff. A Land Forces Headquarters is distinct from the Joint Staff. The American Army and Marines have trained three GAF brigades and a number of other units and staff organizations.

The MoD has published the *National Military Strategy*.¹¹ The NATO-required *Strategic Defense Review* that projects Georgian defense planning out to the year 2015 was recently completed. Meanwhile, a team of Dutch experts is advising on MoD financial management reform and British specialists are helping to implement civilian and military personnel management systems.

In sum, Georgia in NATO is in the interest of every current member and Georgia has done very well on the necessary reforms—but not yet well enough, NATO says clearly.

⁸ The Heritage Foundation in cooperation with the *Wall Street Journal*, *Index of Economic Freedom 2007*, available at <http://www.heritage.org/index/>.

⁹ The World Bank Group, *Doing Business*, available at <http://www.doingbusiness.org/>.

¹⁰ *National Security Concept of Georgia* available at

http://www.gfsis.org/gsac/eng/resources/National_Security_Concept_Georgia.pdf.

¹¹ *National Military Strategy of Georgia* available at <http://www.gfsis.org/gsac/eng/resources/NMS.pdf>.

Rule of Law and a Membership Action Plan

The *Riga Summit Declaration* of last November lauds Georgia's reforms to date, but also urges it to redouble its efforts at "political, economic and military reforms, including strengthening judicial reform."¹² Note the order and the emphasis of this passage from the Riga declaration. NATO is evidently pleased with the reforms at the Georgian Ministry of Defense which, of course, must now be fully implemented and institutionalized. However, as Georgia moves close to consideration for membership, the alliance places stronger emphasis on political and economic modernization, underscoring its interest in the judiciary.

Since the Riga Summit, NATO officials have called attention to the need for judicial independence; enforcement of ethical behavior among prosecutors, judges and lawyers; and appropriate guidelines for pre-trial detention.

Working on all this, Georgian leaders hope to take the next step toward NATO—a Membership Action Plan (MAP)—at the alliance's Bucharest Summit next April. But truncheons and teargas in Tbilisi on November 7, and the shuttered *Imedi* television station have faded Georgia's prospects. Nonetheless, the objective reasons for NATO to proceed with a MAP for Georgia endure. Georgia was, and is a promising developing democracy.

Consequently, review of November events should not slow the reform process that is propelling Georgia toward NATO. Rather, it should refine—even stiffen—NATO's expectations of Georgia and Georgia's expectations of itself. The constructive path is to wrap all these expectations into a MAP. Tbilisi should expect its MAP to require further reforms in the police, crisis management, democratic media oversight and legal procedures.¹³

As they plan for the Bucharest Summit, westerners must avoid exaggeration and recognize that there was more to the November events in Tbilisi than reached their television screens. Georgian officials must have the courage to move forward, particularly by running a free, fair and democratic election on January 5.

If a MAP for Georgia cannot be achieved at Bucharest, then the summit should resolve to press forward with it as soon as possible during 2008.

Russia

Once Georgia proceeds to work on a NATO MAP, and as Georgia meets concerns over November 2007, the major political obstacle to its NATO Membership will continue to be Russia.

Just after NATO granted Georgia so-called Intensified Dialog status in the autumn of 2006, the Russian Foreign Ministry rejoined, "Our negative attitude toward this is well known." That much

¹² NATO, *Riga Summit Declaration*, (November 29, 2006) available at http://www.gfsis.org/gfac/eng/publications/Riga_Summit_Declaration.pdf.

¹³ See David J. Smith, "A Bump in the Road," *24 Saati*, (December 5, 2007) available at http://www.gfsis.org/gfac/eng/publications/24SaatiBucharest_12_5_07.pdf.

is true, but Moscow has never clearly articulated its concerns. The statement proceeds, “Georgia’s entry into NATO will seriously affect Russian political, military and economic interests.”¹⁴

Western countries are left to guess at Moscow’s reasons, creating an environment in which anxiety grows. Some European countries fret over their perceived dependence on Russian energy. In this, it is as much Turkey’s interest as Georgia’s to explain that, though oil and gas routes through the South Caucasus and Turkey are not directed against any third country, the diversification they provide will insulate Europe against the sort of energy blackmail that the Kremlin tried in January 2006.

As Europe, particularly downstream companies, grows accustomed to using oil and gas transited through Turkey, this anxiety should subside.

But Moscow’s major lever against Georgia—and against Georgia’s accession to NATO—is its support for breakaway regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The protracted conflicts in those Georgian regions will continue to haunt some NATO members as they consider Georgia’s candidacy. There is no denying that these are vexing issues that must be carefully considered in Brussels and national capitals. But careful consideration reveals that these conflicts must be approached with equanimity.

If NATO signals that conflict resolution is a precondition for Georgia’s membership, it will preclude resolution. Instead NATO should press for resolution now because Abkhazia and South Ossetia today are hotbeds of criminality, the effects of which are felt throughout the region and even in the streets of Frankfurt or London. New diplomatic forums are required to address both conflicts, and Turkey, as the major western power in the region, could claim major influence in forging new ways ahead.

Make no mistake—the certainty of Georgia’s impending NATO membership will hasten the day that these conflicts will be resolved.

Looking to 2010: Georgia, NATO and the East-West Corridor

Impending NATO membership and territorial conflict resolution would bring instant benefits to Georgia by removing any tinge of doubt in the minds of potential investors. With a big leap in investment, the government would be able to address social, economic and infrastructure problems more quickly, in turn, accelerating reforms. Essentially, NATO would be a stronger guarantor, though an indirect one, than any financial institution could be.

An economically and socially healthy Georgia, cooperating with its new allies on all aspects of security, would stabilize the Black Sea and provide a solid beachhead for the east-west corridor. In sum, Georgia in NATO is the best way to maximize the potential of that first train engine that will make its way from Kars to Baku in 2010, and Turkey should lead its NATO partners to this realization.

¹⁴ See David J. Smith, “A Step for Georgia and for NATO,” *24 Saati*, (October 4, 2006) available at http://www.gfsis.org/gfac/eng/publications/Smith_24Hrs_100406.pdf.