

border, and Washington's response was impotent. The response of NATO and the European Union reflected the same reality. For all the verbal bluster of those organizations, the Europeans, cognizant of their dependence on Russia for energy supplies (among other considerations), do not want a hostile relationship with Moscow.

The Georgia episode underscores the limits of Washington's deterrence capabilities, and it should send a warning about a dangerous defect in U.S. foreign policy. The reality is that the United States can do little to protect vulnerable client states in Russia's neighborhood—unless Washington is willing to risk a military confrontation with nuclear implications. That remains true even for clients such as the Baltic states, which are formal members of NATO.

At the same time, Russia must be careful not to overplay its hand. That possibility arose in late August when Moscow sought an endorsement from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—the association of Russia, China, and the Central Asian republics—for military intervention in Georgia and the subsequent recognition of independence for South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Much to the dismay of Russian officials, the SCO refused to give its imprimatur. Indeed, the SCO statement expressed the importance of respecting the territorial integrity of countries. That should not have come as a surprise to Moscow. Several of the Central Asian countries have their own secessionist problems and do not wish to see the Kosovo and South Ossetia precedents spread. Even more important, China vehemently opposes secessionism, given its problems with Tibet, Xinjiang, and Taiwan. The SCO summit was a test of will between Moscow and Beijing—and Russia lost.

That result illustrates the limits of Moscow's power. Russia may be capable of establishing a modest sphere of influ-

ence along its perimeter, but it does not have the strength to reconstitute the Soviet empire—much less pose an expansionist threat to the heart of Europe as the USSR did during the Cold War. American opinion leaders need to curb their alarmism. Moscow's conduct in Georgia may have been brutal, but it is not out of the norm for a great power to discipline an upstart small neighbor. There is no credible evidence that Moscow has massive expansionist impulses. And even if it did, Russia lacks the power to achieve such goals. Russia is not the Soviet Union, and it certainly

is not the equivalent of Nazi Germany. U.S. policymakers need to take a deep breath, accept that Russia has returned to the ranks of major powers, and realize that Washington can no longer ignore, much less trample on, core Russian interests. The sooner they make that course correction, the better. ■

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Bloom Off the Rose

Georgian “democracy” owes more to Josef Stalin than Thomas Jefferson.

By John Laughland

IT WAS WHEN WE LIFTED UP the filthy bedcovers that we saw the full extent of the gangrene. Half the man's leg was eaten away, and he screamed in agony. The women around him wailed too. There was no heating except for a puny electric cooking ring, which glowed dimly in the half-light. There was also no hope: neither this man nor any of his fellow refugees who were housed (if that is the right word) in a derelict building somewhere in the Georgian countryside had seen a doctor for months. Their food deliveries were sporadic. He would die within a matter of weeks.

This was Georgia in 1999, the year the country joined the Council of Europe, the continent's main human-rights body. To become a member, countries have to demonstrate that they have democratic governments and the rule of law. Geor-

gia has plenty of these things on paper, but the trappings of Western progress are almost entirely absent. Ordinary Georgians live without electricity or heating for most of the day, in conditions of unimaginable poverty. Yet the country counts as pro-Western because it has been the focus for Western expansionism ever since the end of the Soviet Union, supported to the hilt by Republicans and Democrats alike.

The wretches who were dying for lack of medical treatment were Georgians who had fled the separatist region of Abkhazia during the first war fought there in 1992. Because of its geopolitical importance as a Black Sea state on Russia's border and because it is a transit country for the pipeline bringing Caspian crude to the West, Georgia had by then received countless millions in aid for these refugees and for democ-

racy-building and civil-society projects. But the aid had been stolen and the refugees were left to rot.

Welcome to the country that the West holds up as a beacon of freedom, especially after the recent conflict between the Russian and Georgian armies over the other separatist region of South Ossetia. After the First World War, the Russian empire having collapsed into civil war, the great British geopolitician and strategist Sir Halford Mackinder traveled to Georgia as British High Commissioner to Southern Russia on behalf of the foreign secretary, Lord Curzon. He forced the White Russian commander, General Denikin, to promise Georgia and its neighbors independence because the British wanted to control the Baku-Batumi railway bringing oil from the Caspian to the Black Sea. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the West reacted in exactly the same way toward the Caucasus, and for the same reasons: Mackinder's American disciples have been focused on Georgia for years as a strategic forward point against Russia and because it is the main transit country for the Western-built Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline.

Yet Georgia is not only the country that gave the world Stalin and his most violent henchmen, notably Lavrenti Beria and Grigory Ordzhonikidze. It is a country whose current first lady proclaimed that her husband was a worthy inheritor of those brutes. In 2004, Sandra Roeloffs, the Dutch wife of pro-American president Mikheil Saakashvili, told a newspaper in her home country, "Georgia has produced strong leaders: Stalin, Beria, Gamsakhurdia [the post-Soviet leader], even Shevardnadze before he became addicted to power. They looked further than Georgia alone. My husband does the same. He fits in the tradition. This country needs a strong hand. It is extremely important

that respect for authority returns. I think my husband is the right person to frighten people."

Georgia certainly has a reputation for brutality. Following Russia's descent into anarchy under Boris Yeltsin during the 1990s, Russian mafia godfathers typically used thugs from the Caucasus for their protection rackets and as business partners. "Georgian" and "Caucasian" now have the same resonance for people in Russia as "Sicilian" used to have for Europeans and Americans—the very epitome of violent clannishness and ruthless gangsterism. Indeed, the West's cultivation of mafia states like Georgia and Kosovo recalls the alliance the Americans concluded during the Second World War with organized crime in Sicily in order to fight Mussolini. The look cultivated by most Georgian men—five o'clock shadow and a black leather jacket—does little to correct the caricature.

The country's political history in the 17 years since the collapse of the USSR has been almost exclusively violent. The Georgian nationalist Zviad Gamsakhurdia was overthrown in 1992 after a civil war with the two separatist regions. He was replaced by James Baker's old friend Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Soviet foreign minister and long-time Communist Party boss in Georgia, who returned to his native land after the collapse of the USSR to take up his old job. Shevardnadze was showered with praise by Western leaders, Left and Right alike, up until the moment when he was overthrown in the Western-orchestrated "Rose Revolution" at the end of 2003, after which he was denounced as a corrupt dictator.

More Western praise was immediately lavished on the new tough man in Tbilisi when he was confirmed in office after winning over 95 percent of the vote in the presidential election, a tally of which Saddam Hussein would have

been proud. This applause came in spite of the fact that Saakashvili obviously had a penchant for violence. On Jan. 12, 2004, shortly after the Rose Revolution but before he officially became president, Saakashvili said that he had given orders to the police to open fire on any prisoners who started disturbances. He also said, "We shall liquidate all bandits, as a class." Later that year, in August, he announced that he had given orders to his navy to shoot at all ships that violated Georgia's territorial waters, including cruise ships carrying tourists to Abkhazia. (The Black Sea is a popular holiday destination for Russians.)

As soon as he seized power, Saakashvili's regime unleashed an orgy of arrests of officials. In the name of that old Communist chestnut, an "anti-corruption campaign," hundreds were rounded up. For months, Georgians were treated daily to live broadcasts of ministers, officials, and judges being bundled into police cars in the middle of the night. No doubt some Georgians relished the sight of the mighty falling, but many probably feared that one day they might get the 3 a.m. knock on the door themselves.

This was all lapped up by Saakashvili's cheerleaders in the Western media. The Georgian president has indeed achieved extraordinary success in presenting his fiefdom as a Jeffersonian paradise. This is partly due to Georgia's use of operatives in Washington, such as John McCain's foreign-policy adviser Randy Scheunemann, and a PR firm in Brussels. But more importantly, it is the result of a virulent form of Western self-delusion. Faced with seemingly intractable domestic problems, in which different political actors have to be balanced, Western states like to indulge in occasional but dangerous flights of foreign-policy escapism. We imagine that we can free subject peoples with our bombs. The image of a victim nation has now become an easy psychological trigger that can be applied

indiscriminately to Bosnian Muslims, Iraqis, and now Georgians. These unknown peoples and nations are but a blank screen on which we project our fantasies. Our image of them says much more about us than it does about reality.

One prominent BBC reporter, for example, lauded the Georgian officials in leather jackets as “the most photogenic government in the world” and gasped at the dynamism of the new chief prosecutor, Irakli Okruashvili, and at the way ordinary citizens were invited to register denunciations on the “corruption hotline.” This was true “people power” in action, he enthused—evidently unaware of the Stalinist resonance of what he was describing.

HEAVILY ARMED POLICE WERE DEPLOYED TO **CRUSH THE REVOLT**, AND THE **DEMONSTRATORS WERE SEVERELY BEATEN**. EVEN THOUGH TV SHOTS OF THIS WERE BROADCAST ON CNN, **SAKASHVILI CONTINUED TO BE LAUDED AS A DEMOCRAT**.

Silence, not enthusiasm, was the reaction, however, when the wheel of fortune turned three years later and Okruashvili fell out with Saakashvili and started up his own opposition party. On Sept. 25, 2007, Okruashvili told a press conference, “The style of Saakashvili’s governance, which has gone beyond the limits, has made dishonesty, injustice and oppression a way of life. Everyday repression, demolition of houses and churches, robbery, ‘kulakization,’ and murders, I would stress, murders, have become common practice for the authorities.”

Okruashvili specifically alleged that Saakashvili had told him to get rid of Badri Patarkatsishvili, a Georgian-Jewish millionaire tycoon living in England, “the way it happened to Rafik Hariri.” Patarkatsishvili was a media baron who initially supported Saakashvili’s regime—notably through his TV

channel, which he ran in joint venture with Rupert Murdoch—but who later became disillusioned following the death in suspicious circumstances of the prime minister, Zurab Zhvania in 2005. Okruashvili also suggested that Zhvania had been the victim of a politically motivated murder.

The government’s response to Okruashvili’s press conference and bid for political power was to throw him into the central prison in Tbilisi. By Oct. 8, he had recanted. A videotape of his interrogation was broadcast on TV. Okruashvili, visibly distressed and sinking into long pauses, accused himself of the crimes of extortion and racketeering that had been used to arrest him, exactly

as the defendants at the Moscow show trials in the 1930s did. He denied each of the original accusations he had made on Sept. 25 and claimed that he had made them purely for personal political gain. He had evidently been tortured.

It did not take long for the political situation in the country to spiral out of control. Okruashvili’s arrest caused large demonstrations against the Saakashvili government in early November. Vast numbers of heavily armed police were deployed to crush the revolt, and the demonstrators were severely beaten. Even though TV shots of this were broadcast on CNN, Saakashvili continued to be lauded as a democrat. The regime proclaimed a state of emergency, the government was reshuffled, and new presidential and parliamentary elections were held in January and May, in the latter case on the basis of a hastily rejiggered electoral

law. Even the normally supine Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, whose support for Georgian brutality since 1992 has been wicked, had to admit that both campaigns were marred by widespread intimidation, violence, and ballot-stuffing. Saakashvili was re-elected by 53.5 percent, just enough to ensure that there was no second round. And Badri Patarkatsishvili did indeed die of sudden heart failure on Feb. 12, aged 52, as Okruashvili had predicted, after leaving a meeting with a prominent Russian oligarch living in London and his lawyer, Tony Blair’s former attorney general. (The police initially treated his death as suspicious, but in the end no prosecutions were brought.)

It was against this background of rising political instability and plummeting political fortunes that Mikheil Saakashvili launched his midnight onslaught on South Ossetia on Aug. 7. He evidently thought, like the Argentine generals who invaded the Falkland Islands in 1983, that a short war of national liberation would boost his flagging support. He miscalculated. Dick Cheney may have flown to Tbilisi to promise again that Georgia will soon join NATO in spite of the defeat and to commit forces to restoring Georgia’s territorial integrity, but Cheney will be out of a job by next January and so his promises are not worth much. And judging by the swiftness with which political justice is executed in Georgia, Saakashvili—who has probably now caused Georgia to lose her two secessionist regions forever—may soon follow him into early retirement, or worse. ■

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Free World Colossus

In the new Cold War, the U.S. is the revolutionary force.

By Lee Congdon

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S angry reaction to Russia's intervention in South Ossetia was of a piece with its harsh criticism of Vladimir Putin, the popular leader who has brought a measure of order and stability to a country that endured 74 years of communist misrule. The president and his secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, are clearly offended by Putin's scarcely disguised view that democracy in Russia cannot mean what it has come to mean in the United States and Europe. It disturbs them that he exercises a personal authority greater than that which is his by virtue of his offices—that he bears, as a political figure, some resemblance to Charles de Gaulle, never a hero to democrats.

One should note that it was precisely the semi-authoritarianism of the Putin government that enlisted the support of the late Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. "It is not authoritarianism itself that is intolerable," the courageous Russian wrote in his 1973 *Letter to the Soviet Leaders*, "but the ideological lies that are daily foisted upon us." Not authoritarianism, then, but ideological tyranny was the enemy.

Americans, of course, also spurned communist ideology and feared that it might succeed in dominating the world, including the United States. They seemed not to notice that they themselves were in thrall to a political religion; recently, in fact, Yale professor David Gelernter described "Americanism"—that is, American democracy—as the fourth great Western religion. No doubt he cheered when President Bush, in his second inaugural address, declared it to be "the policy of the United States

to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world." In practice, this imperial ambition, for that is what it is, has meant constant meddling in the affairs of governments the U.S. considers to be insufficiently democratic.

There is no doubt, for example, that the National Endowment for Democracy played a significant role in Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution and Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004-05. In 1999, the NED initiated the World Movement for Democracy, "which presupposes the universality of the democratic idea" and the inevitability of "democratic transition," even in a Middle East that lacks democratic traditions. One of the least convincing reasons for waging war on Iraq was to plant the seeds of democracy, with the expectation that they would germinate and grow throughout the region.

Such visions should come as no surprise. America has always prided itself on being the world's last best hope, a shining city upon a hill. But Woodrow Wilson's call for a world made safe for democracy focused and intensified that missionary zeal. Most Americans believe democracy to be the only legitimate form of government and the U.S., as the leading democratic nation, to be duty bound to evangelize the world. American officials are quick to lecture leaders of sovereign states who violate one or another of democracy's commandments, and few of them question their right to impose our system, by military force if necessary, upon those who resist conversion. They

would be puzzled by the question once posed by Edmund Burke: "Is it then a truth so universally acknowledged that a pure democracy is the only tolerable form into which human society can be thrown, that a man is not permitted to hesitate about its merits, without the suspicion of being a friend to tyranny, that is, of being a foe to mankind?"

It is a truth acknowledged by neoconservatives, many of whom have the president's ear. Irving Kristol, the godfather of neoconservatism, has written that "large nations, whose identity is ideological, like the Soviet Union of yesteryear and the United States of today, inevitably have ideological interests in addition to more material concerns. Barring extraordinary events, the United States will always feel obliged to defend, if possible, a democratic nation under attack from nondemocratic forces, external or internal." (The word "internal" here is particularly revealing of an interventionist mentality.) That being so, "democratic" Georgia must, at all costs, be defended against "autocratic" Russia.

It is not without interest that Kristol is an ex-Trotskyite. Like him, most of his followers have a leftist past, and that accounts for the fact that they are attracted to ideological movements. If communism did not save the world, perhaps democracy will. One can see something of the same instinct in the ex-communists who gathered around the old *National Review*. Frank Meyer was a former member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Max Eastman translated several works by Trotsky. James Burnham, another ex-Trotskyite, argued