The Vice President’s Trip to Ukraine and Georgia

Vice President Joe Biden arrived in Tblisi, the capital of Georgia, on July 22, his second stop on a trip that included a visit to Ukraine. Biden’s visit to both former Soviet republics was seen by some observers as a way to offset Georgian and Ukrainian concerns following President Barack Obama’s visit to Moscow earlier in the month.

A Reuters news report observed that in an effort to secure Russian cooperation on issues such as arms control and the war in Afghanistan, Obama stated that he wants to "reset" relations with Moscow. However, noted the report, Biden assured Georgian leaders that the "reset" policy would not come at the expense of the Ukraine and Georgia.

Upon arriving in Tblisi, Biden told the Georgians at a dinner hosted by President Mikheil Saakashvili that he had come "to send an unequivocal, clear, simple message to all who will listen and those who even don’t want to listen: that America stands with you at this moment and will continue to stand with you."

"The shackles of the 20th century have been shed," continued Biden. "It’s our collective responsibility to make sure that they are not once again put upon you or any other freedom-loving people."

VOA News noted that at the banquet hosted by the Georgian president, Biden said that many people are looking to see whether Georgia can, in his words, plant the roots of democracy very deep, to complete the work of their "Rose Revolution" nearly six years ago — the nonviolent uprising that led to Saakashvili’s election as president.

Tensions in the region were heightened last August when separatists in the provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia revolted against Georgian authority and seceded from the country. Russia recognized both breakaway republics and sent in troops to assist them. Saakashvili referred to Russian troops still stationed in nearby South Ossetia when he stated from the presidential palace: "Let us all remember, we are building democracy right now at gunpoint. The occupier’s artillery is pointed on this new dome, this palace, this city right now as we speak, just 25 miles from here."

Biden addressed the Russian presence in the breakaway provinces in his talk to Georgia’s parliament when he said: "We call upon Russia to honor its international commitment, clearly specified in the 12 April ceasefire agreement, including the withdrawal of all forces to their pre-conflict positions and ultimately out of your territorial area."

He also said that Washington would not recognize the seceding provinces: "We will not recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states and we urge the world not to recognize them as

independent states."

Leaders of Georgian opposition political parties also met with Vice President Biden on July 23. VOA News reported that the leaders have staged three months of nonstop protests in Tbilisi against President Saakashvili, demanding his resignation. They accuse him of authoritarian practices, and they blame him for Georgia's disastrous war with Russia last year.

The official U.S. government-sponsored news agency also quoted former Georgian parliamentary speaker and opposition presidential candidate Nino Burjanadze, who wrote in Britain's *Guardian* newspaper on July 22, saying Georgia's hopes of joining NATO and the European Union are stalled, in part because of Saakashvili's "appalling human-rights record." She urged Biden to tell the Georgian leader "that future U.S. economic aid is dependent on an end to his increasingly authoritarian, corrupt and undemocratic rule."

Tblisi-based *Civil Georgia* quoted MP Giorgi Targamadze, leader of the opposition Christian-Democratic Movement (CDM), who said after meeting with Biden: "I can say generally that it was stressed at the meeting that the United States does not personify its policy; it supports the development of democratic institutions and believes that Georgia is a leader in the region in terms of democratic development. Therefore, our responsibility to our people and future, as well as to the entire region has doubled."

The paper also quoted Irakli Alasania, leader of Alliance for Georgia, who said: "We have frankly discussed internal problems and generally security issues. We have received a concrete pledge from the U.S. Administration and Vice President that the development of democratic reforms in Georgia will be a major determinant in the Georgian-U.S. relations in future. These relations will be aimed at preventing external threats but basically our bilateral strategic cooperation will be based on what kind of progress Georgia achieves in terms of implementation of democratic reforms."

When *Civil Georgia* asked whether the terms of possible early elections were discussed during the meeting, Alasania responded: "It is up to Georgian people and society to set the terms. It was emphasized that the United States will never interfere in solving internal issues, such as a political calendar."

While most of the concerns of Georgian opposition leaders focus on domestic matters such as "democratic reforms," the matter of most concern to Americans is the nation's ongoing quest to become a member of NATO. BBC News reported that in a speech to members of Georgia's parliament, Biden addressed Georgian fears that the United States might curtail its support for the nation's application for NATO membership in favor of improved relations with Russia, telling the MPS: "We will stand with you."

The addition of Georgia, the Ukraine, and other former Eastern Bloc nations into NATO only increases the potential for U.S. involvement in future NATO-led wars. Remember that our current war in Afghanistan is a NATO operation. Former President Bush announced in a May 31 speech in Krakow, Poland: "This is a time for all of us to unite in defense of liberty and to step up to the shared duties of free nations. NATO must show resolve and foresight to act beyond Europe, and it has begun to do so. NATO has agreed to lead security forces in Afghanistan and to support our Polish allies in Iraq. A strong NATO alliance, with a broad vision of its role, will serve our security and the cause of peace."

As *The New American* magazine's editor, Gary Benoit wrote in "Obama's Support for NATO," published online on April 5:

> Obama takes this position despite the fact that Article 5 of the North American Treaty, as applied

> to our own country, unconstitutionally trumps the congressional power to declare war whenever one or more of 27 other NATO members is attacked. Moreover, every new member of NATO would create an additional possibility for the United States being dragged into a war. Georgia, for example, is expected to join NATO in the future. If Georgia were already a member of NATO during its war with Russia last year, the United States, along with all other NATO members, would have been expected to come to its aid.

If NATO ever did serve a legitimate purpose (which, originally, was to defend Western Europe against attack by the Soviet Union) that purpose surely has long since evaporated. Instead of adding new members to this increasingly entangling alliance, it should be disbanded.

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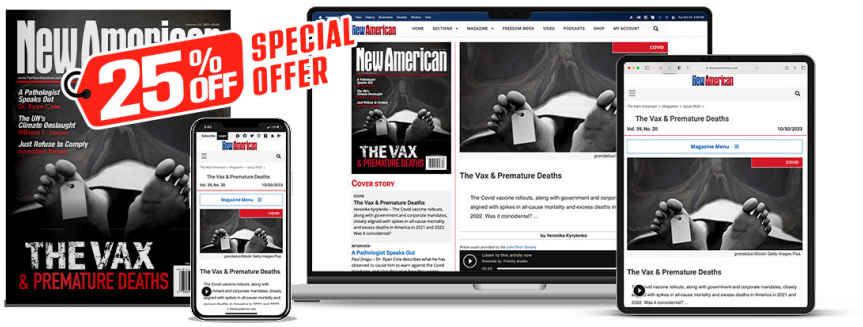

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