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VISIONS OF THE CAUCASUS

When I prepared for this presentation, I assumed that the bulk of the conversation would deal with concrete issues of security sector reform. I could then, in looking at the future, step back and discuss the evolving political, economic, and social context in which security sector reform proceeds or does not proceed. However, the preceding papers mainly deal with the strategic, political and economic context. In contrast little was said about security sector reform.

And then there are the events in Tbilisi. When you write a paper about the future, you have a particular view of the present. Velvet revolution or not, the events in Tbilisi have potentially altered significantly the situation on which my paper is based. And not only in Georgia. So, my remarks here under will draw in part from the paper previously prepared, but also from our discussion at the meeting and the ongoing regional events.

I understand that the organizers might have preferred us to focus on specific issues such as how the security sector is organized in the different states of the southern Caucasus, how it is controlled, what its legislative basis is, the development of ties with multilateral institutions such as NATO in the security sector, and how these ties have affected the security sector, and so on. It is not surprising to me that, on the whole, speakers preferred to deal with broader political and geopolitical issues. Security sector reform does not proceed in isolation. It is part of a broader process of transition towards law-governed, transparent, and accountable governance. Security sector reform cannot proceed independently from these wider processes.

So, in beginning, what do we think security sector reform is? We seem to have agreed that it involves transition to professional and democratically controlled armed forces. I would add that it involves a transition to a position where these forces are not only controlled by the

democratic will, but are governed by the law. This is an often overlooked but important dimension, since, as we have seen in this region (e.g. Zviad Gamsakhurdia) democratically elected governments can misuse the security sector. There needs to be a constraint beyond the will of the people and that constraint is embodied in constitutional provisions and legislation governing the use of the armed forces and police.

An important further point here is that professionalism, democratic control, and the rule of law do not necessarily go together. One of the real dangers in incomplete security sector reform is that you may get professionalism without the democracy and rule of law dimensions. This danger is evident as show the concerns raised about GTEP[287]-trained forces in Georgia.

To take an example from another region, the problem is equally evident in the concerns expressed in Kyrgyzstan over the recently mounted OSCE police assistance programme. In part, this programme was a response to the events in Aksy, where Interior Ministry troops fired on a peaceful crowd of opposition forces, killing six men. The programme is a broad one, involving support for the MVD[288] Academy, community policing, the investigative branches of the MVD, but also in riot control. All of this sounds good on the face of it, but one might ask whether we are just rendering an oppressive state apparatus more efficient in its oppression. In other words, there is a real danger of negative unintended consequences from assistance in security sector reform.

I think we have also agreed that security sector reform should be broad rather than narrow. It needs to go beyond the military to the police and to "third forces" (e.g. MoI troops), and to border control. It involves change not only in the forces themselves, but the development of more effective mechanisms for parliamentary oversight. It goes beyond the legislature to the judiciary in the fostering of courts that are capable of and committed to constraining power and protecting rights.

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[287] Georgia Train and Equip program (http://web.sanet.ge/usembassy/gtep.htm).
[288] Russian for Ministry of Interior (MoI).

This wider vision of security sector reform suggests the need for a broad array of institutional partners and a need to think carefully about the division of labour among them. One such potential division would have NATO and NATO members taking the lead with the military, the OSCE and/or the EU in addressing the challenges of reform of the MoI police and gendarmerie, and the Council of Europe tackling capacity-building in the courts.

In any complex division of labour between states and partly cooperating, partly competing organizations, there are dangers of overlap and turf wars. This raises real prospects for waste and confusion, mixed signals and the potential to play one external actor off against another. One sees this, to some extent, in the rush to assist Central Asian states with border control and the control of narcotics trafficking, where the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the OSCE, the EU, and various states (e.g. the US) are heavily engaged. Complex assistance processes of this type require close and effective coordination, something which, hitherto, has been lacking.

Finally, I think at least some of us agree that security sector reform must be comprehensive, not selective. That is to say, we need to face the problem of the unrecognized territories. It makes sense to include these entities in broader reform processes, for a number of obvious reasons. For example, transition in the border control and customs services in Georgia is of limited use only, if focused on the government side alone, since much of the northern border is controlled by forces loyal to the Abkhaz and Southern Ossetian *de facto* authorities. Likewise, if the return of the displaced to Gali is to be successful, it must be accompanied by human rights training of local police and other security forces serving the authorities of Abkhazia. This is a real problem, since national authorities are understandably sensitive to international engagement with secessionist entities, since such engagement may have a legitimizing effect.[289] Secessionist authorities are generally enthusiastic about such contacts for the same reason, although I suspect

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[289] In this regard, it is pertinent to note that the Georgian government has allowed greater scope for multilateral engagement with the *de facto* authorities in Abkhazia than the Azerbaijani government has with those in Nagorno-Karabakh.

that they would quickly become uncomfortable with the implications of deep engagement by multilateral organizations in their security sector.

It is worth noting that we have not yet discussed the question of what we mean by security when speaking about security sector reform. This vision of security sector reform presumes a particular approach to security itself. That is to say, security is not about, or not only about, the security of the state. It is also about securing the rights of people, as individuals or as members of communities.

This brings me back to the general context of security sector reform. Much of the discussion thus far has accepted that success in security sector reform depends on success in the transition towards political democracy, the liberal economy, and the rule of law. So where are we with these transitions? I would like to comment on five dimensions.

My first comment concerns the region's conflicts. As you all know, the active conflicts in the southern Caucasus came to an end in 1992-4. However, in none of these cases has it been possible to conclude durable political settlements. Nor do such settlements appear imminent. Having followed these processes since their beginning, I think I can say that there is no obvious sign of progress in any of them. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, one hears increasing calls for a resumption of the conflict, given the failure of the Minsk process so far. Security sector reform requires a low sense of threat, since such processes can be profoundly disruptive. People who consider themselves vulnerable tend to avoid disruptive change that may increase their vulnerability. The protraction of negotiations on political settlement reveals a profound political and social distrust between the parties, a profound sense of insecurity. The implications are obvious: it is difficult to succeed in the construction of democratic law-governed polities when substantial parts of your country are outside your jurisdiction and are contesting your sovereignty. And it is difficult to proceed with substantial security sector reform when your state faces a seemingly permanent challenge to its territoriality. Full scale security sector reform may require the peace that, so far, has eluded us.

Second, there is the broader issue of democratic governance. The notion of democratic control over the security sector presumes a broader movement towards democracy. Looking at it from the outside, I confess that I do not see unambiguous movement in this direction. Some of you may be familiar with the annual Freedom House evaluations of political change in former communist states[290]. In about 1998, the title of their annual reports changed from nations in transition to nations in transit. The editor of the reports explained the change by noting that, whereas transition presumed progress (movement towards something better), transit conveyed the idea of movement without obvious direction. He felt that in many states there was evidence of certain stagnation in the movement towards the democratic ideal that Freedom House espoused. Although I have some problems with the general approach of Freedom House analyses, I think this is right with regard to the Southern Caucasus. There is no reason to recite the conclusions of various OSCE reports on elections in the Caucasus since 1992 to establish the point. It is clear in the process and the aftermath of the recent presidential election in Azerbaijan and parliamentary elections in Georgia.

I note, however, that in focusing on elections and on the politico-bureaucratic process within governments, one may be missing broader social trends. One issue here is whether a broad social movement for the democratization of politics, the gradual development of a real civil society, is evolving. To the extent that people are gradually growing impatient with, and unwilling to accept, the status quo, broad social pressure for political change may develop.

Such societal trends may be evident in the events in Tbilisi in November 2003. Gia Nodia, Director of the Institute for Peace, Development and Democracy, recently noted that the good news concerning Tbilisi was that the uprising was produced by a broad coalition of social forces and not just the two opposition political movements. "It was a genuine expression of democratic spirit and what is really important is that it showed that civil society has really matured and developed here over the

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[290]   http://www.freedomhouse.org/

past ten years."[291] He may be right. The other impressive development was, oddly, the failure of the security forces to respond to the people's challenge to the government that had stolen their rights. It may suggest that the police and military see themselves as having primary responsibility to the people. If this is true, then the ground is moving underneath our feet, and in a good direction. We shall see.

The third contextual issue worthy of consideration is that of corruption and the rule of law. In the 2003 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index[292], Georgia and Azerbaijan are tied with Angola, Cameroon, and Tajikistan at the ranking of 124 out of 131. Armenia comes in at 78, tied with Iran, Lebanon, Mali, and Palestine. This is not good news. Its implications pertain specifically to the security sector, but also more broadly to governance and development as a whole. Reform of the security sector is impeded when security officials find it necessary, or choose to engage in corrupt practices. Corruption in the security sector is a profound impediment to the establishment of the rule of law. It discourages people from trusting and respecting judicial and law enforcement institutions. Absent such trust, it is very difficult for those institutions to do their jobs well. More broadly, corruption impedes both domestic and foreign investment on which economic improvement is based. It also makes it very difficult for the region's states to collect the revenues necessary for them to do their jobs. As we have seen in Georgia recently, the perception of systemic corruption may undermine popular support not only for the government of the day, but also the political system itself.

Fourth is the issue of public finance and the budget. As endless IMF reports observe, the governments lack the capacity to effectively extract resources from the population. Taxes are chronically uncollected or under-collected. The result of inefficient revenue collection is inadequate funding of public services and inadequate provision of public services. This has important implications for the popular legitimacy of government and for governance itself. After all, why should people

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[291]   As cited in Thomas de Waal, "What Now for Georgia?" in IWPR, *Georgia Alert* no. 05 (28 November 2003).

[292]   www.transparency.org/surveys/index.html.

associate their purposes with those of the government when the government does nothing, or next to nothing, for them? This in turn contributes to the potential instability of the region as a whole. It also complicates the resolution of the region's frozen conflicts. How can the unrecognized territories be attracted back into the fold when the region's governments are so obviously incapable of providing real services.

Fifth is the neighbourhood. The Southern Caucasus lies between two major regional powers (Russia and Turkey). One could argue that they have a strong mutual interest in stability and growth in the region. However, their capacity to cooperate in promoting this outcome is limited by a lack of trust. They have a history of troubled relations and a legacy of mutual suspicion. They face the temptation to compete in the region in order to achieve unilateral gains or to deny them to the other.

The problem extends to the third major external player – the United States. The expansion of the United States into the region's energy sector, its promotion of east-west pipeline routes that undercut Russia's monopoly on energy transport from the region, and its growing security engagement in the context of the war on terror may not necessarily be reflections of a competitive and anti-Russian geopolitical vision, but they are seen to be so by many in Russia. And people and states generally act on their perceptions. In short, the external context of the region is one of serious potential for great power competition. This has had and may continue to have destabilizing consequences for the Southern Caucasian states themselves.

And one further note here: Iran has rather specific concerns. These have to do with its traditional rivalry with Turkey and consequent discomfort with Turkish influence in Baku. There is also the problem of Iran's own Azeri minority, concentrated in proximity to the border with Azerbaijan, and the unhelpful rhetoric of Azerbaijan's opposition regarding the desirability of reunifying the two Azeri populations. In short, the neighbourhood is rough. And this too complicates the process of security sector reform.

Turning to future visions, the first question to address, given the persistence of frozen conflicts in region, and the potential for new ones, is how many states are likely to be in the region in the long run. I think this is the easiest question to answer. There is no doubt in my mind that, whichever vision of the future turns out to be true, there will be three. The states may be strong, weak, or collapsed. The conflicts may or may not be resolved. The states may or may not be able to defend their territory. But there is no evidence of international willingness to accept and legitimize secession unless the parties agree. And there is no evidence that the parties are likely to agree. I won't comment on whether this is good or bad. It is just the way it is and it doesn't seem likely to change.

But what kind of states in what kind of region? I am reminded here of the debate a few years ago amongst energy investors over which model Azerbaijan was going to follow as the oil began to flow. The three models considered were Norway, Kuwait, and Nigeria: one nice, one a mess, and one somewhere in between. Similarly, for the sake of discussion, three models can be put forward to highlight the spectrum of possibilities for the Southern Caucasus. One is a region of three liberal states in which democratic governance is finally established, the conflicts of the region are resolved, insurgent regions reintegrated on the basis of constitutional arrangements that address their concerns over minority rights and protection. The states would be linked by flourishing structures of regional cooperation in both the economic and security spheres. External powers settle into cooperative rather than competitive patterns of behaviour, and seek to bolster the liberal peace.

The opposite and apocalyptic vision is one of failure of governance in the three states and a general decline into state collapse and civil war. In this instance, economic development will not occur and hopes for a return to prosperity will be quashed. Conflicts proliferate as hitherto quiet regions also challenge the states that have failed to address their needs. And the region will be vulnerable to external intervention by neighbouring powers who either seek to take advantage of instability or who seek to limit the spillovers of chaos. Life will be nasty, brutish, and

short, at least for those who remain. Many of the region's most talented people would be likely to leave.

The third is a continuation of the middle way. States do not collapse, but remain quasi-authoritarian, with weak rule of law, considerable denial of rights, abuse of democratic process, and systemic corruption. Growth proceeds, but slowly and unevenly, benefiting reasonably small elites. The conflicts remain frozen, and the territories outside state control continue to develop their separate political and economic identities. How sustainable this vision is in the longer term is questionable.

Each of these scenarios is possible. And it may be that there is no single regional model, but a mixed version, where some states proceed towards model one, others stick with model two, and still others move backwards. Some of my colleagues believe, for example, that Armenia has some prospect of further development towards liberal democracy and the rule of law, Azerbaijan shows little movement in this direction, but has a state and elite that has the power and resolve to retain its position indefinitely by authoritarian methods, whereas Georgia faces a significant prospect of state collapse. On the other hand, the vibrancy of civil society in Georgia and the perhaps grudging willingness of those in power to let it flower may indicate that Georgia will move most quickly towards Western conceptions of politics.

Where we land on the spectrum of contending visions depends on three major factors. The first is the willingness of political elites to move towards more representative, accountable and effective state and government structures, to share the wealth from growth and to actually provide services valued by their constituents.

The second is the willingness of publics to be patient as change proceeds. The first decade of transition or transit was painful for many, and the hopes for gradual improvement have, for many, been destroyed. Even if the region resumes its movement towards good governance, progress will continue to be slow and painful.

And the third, and least important in my view, concerns outside actors. To what extent will outsiders come to see their interests as mutually reinforcing in the region? To what extent will they be willing or able to abstain from manipulation of the political process there in pursuit of unilateral advantage? And to what extent are they able and willing to deploy resources effectively and strategically to promote liberal and democratic transition.

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