

New World Order Playground. Georgia 2005

US approved "democracy" in the wake of "the Rose Revolution"

By [Chad Nagle](#)

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

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Specter of Premiers Past

Perhaps the recently ousted prime minister of the ex-Soviet republic of Ukraine—gas-industry oligarch and “Orange Revolution” leader Yulia Timoshenko—should feel fortunate. At least she is still alive. The prime ministers of two other Western-backed “revolutionary” regimes, Serbia and Georgia, were less lucky. Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, long a Washington favorite, was killed by a sniper’s bullet in March 2003. A local mafia-paramilitary leader (a former ally of Djindjic’s who had helped overthrow the Yugoslav government in October 2000) was charged with the crime as Serbia was plunged deeper into chaos and corruption.¹

The death of Zurab Zhvania, prime minister of the ex-Soviet republic of Georgia, in February 3rd, 2005, remains a mystery. The official version—poisoning by faulty gas heater—was adopted by FBI investigators within two weeks of the killing² but has never seemed credible to those familiar with Georgia’s post-Soviet experience of gangland slayings, crime, and other manifestations of social decay. Zhvania’s death was followed closely by others in Georgia: a functionary of the Premier’s apparat, Georgi Khelashvili, supposedly shot himself the day after his chief’s demise,³ and the head of Zhvania’s research staff was later found dead as well.⁴ As of yet only theories exist, but it may be worthwhile to ponder a few.

An article in the *Moskovskii Komsomolets* newspaper this month speculates that figures allied with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili may have had a hand in the premier’s death.⁵ Russian journalist Marina Perevozkina quotes as one source Gia Khurashvili, a Georgian economist. Prior to the fatal incident, Mr. Khurashvili had published an article in *Resonans* newspaper expressing opposition to the privatization and sale of Georgia’s main gas pipeline. Then, ten days before the prime minister’s body was found, he was attacked, he claims, and his editor-in-chief—citing pressure from “security service” figures he refused to name—issued him a warning. The late premier’s position on the pipeline issue, Khurashvili believed, linked the attack on himself with the murder of Zhvania. Zhvania’s brother, Georgi, also told Perevozkina that not long before February 3rd he received a warning that someone was preparing to kill his sibling, and that the names mentioned matched those that came to light in the course of subsequent investigation.⁶

War and Peace

A classmate of Zurab Zhvania in the biology faculty of Tbilisi State University, MP Khatuna Gogorishvili, remembers that in the days just before his death the prime minister was in a constant good mood. He was finally doing what he had always dreamed of: directing Georgian reforms. But on the night of February 1st, according to the recollections of his

wife, Zhvania came home in a depressed state. “Power ministry functionaries” (*siloviki* in Russian) were pressuring him. Georgian Defense Minister Irakli Okruashvili—the leading “hawk” in Georgia’s government and a close friend of Saakashvili—had directed military operations in 2004 against South Ossetia (a region that had broken away in a secessionist war in the early 1990s), bringing Georgia to the brink of full-scale armed conflict. During this time, Zhvania was conducting all-night negotiations by phone with Saakashvili and the twenty-something Okruashvili, pleading with them not to follow the war path.⁷ Zhvania viewed war with South Ossetia as dangerously adventurist, and Okruashvili—perhaps—viewed Zhvania an obstacle to be removed.

Shortly after the “Rose Revolution,” in early December 2003, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had made an unprecedented appearance in Georgia for a press conference—flanked by Saakashvili and Zhvania—to call on Russia to remove its military bases from Georgia. Russia has two bases in Georgia proper—in Alkhalkalaki near the Armenian border, and in Batumi, near the Turkish border. But the main concentrations of Russian military power are in the *de facto* independent republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which seceded by force more than ten years ago. Rumsfeld talked about NATO and Georgia’s future in the West.⁸ While Okruashvili and Saakashvili were keen to fulfill the desires of the Pentagon, Zhvania counseled caution.

This is not to suggest that Zhvania was removed on orders from official Washington. As Perevozkina writes, the Americans had never hidden their preference for Zhvania as Georgia’s head of state. According to Georgian ex-intelligence chief Avtandil Ioseliani, the Americans had referred openly to Zhvania as “our guy.” In fact, one condition Washington placed on Georgia’s receipt of financial aid was retention of Zhvania in the post of prime minister. While Zhvania already enjoyed a substantial base of support in the United States,⁹ all Saakashvili had—his friends said—were “two or three bureaucrats and Ms. Zeyno Baran of the Nixon Center.”¹⁰ But for various reasons, Zhvania was not a viable candidate for president. His Armenian lineage was a liability in a country in which anti-Russian chauvinists and nationalists have generally enjoyed Western backing.

Mikheil Saakashvili became the beneficiary of Zhvania’s political deficiencies, but the favoritism his premier enjoyed in Washington’s Inner Party surely must have irritated him. In December 2004, Zhvania was invited to America to receive the prestigious W. Averell Harriman Medal of Freedom from the influential National Democratic Institute (NDI), at the initiative of former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. The visit to the USA became a genuine triumph for Zhvania, involving a sumptuous reception with the Washington political elite and rapturous coverage in the American press. The visit reportedly threw Saakashvili into a rage and a reshuffling of government cadres followed, aimed at weakening Zhvania’s influence. Saakashvili’s cronies were placed at the head of all the power structures, and for a while the Americans may have begun toying with the idea of replacing the unpredictable president.¹¹ Georgian Labor Party leader Shalva Natelashvili was invited to America and appeared at the Nixon Center in front of an impressive political line-up. “Up to this moment, the channel to the United States had been closed to us,” stressed Natelashvili.¹²

Other Motives

After the Rose Revolution, a grandiose redistribution of property began. Zurab Zhvania closely and actively controlled the reforms, including a total re-privatization of state assets. His opinion was decisive on all matters. Ex-Economy Minister Kakha Bendukidze links

Zhvania's killing to a discussion, on the eve of the murder, on privatizing the electricity system, while ex-Security Minister Irakli Batiashvili thinks the murder can be connected with the sale of serious objects of state property such as the main gas pipeline, the Chiaturi manganese mining plant, the port of Batumi, and the commercial fleet of Adjara.

Another large-scale project was the construction of a new Tbilisi airport terminal. On the eve of Zhvania's killing an international tender was announced, the winner of which would receive the right to manage the airport for 10 years to recoup investments. On May 16th the winner was announced: a consortium that included "A&J" (US), "GTS" (Luxembourg), and "Çelebi Holding" (Turkey). Perevozkina reports that Zhvania had opposed this consortium, and that Bendukidze, present at the negotiations, described "Çelebi" as "not serious," more like a "shell," without the means to build anything.¹³ On September 6th, a new contract was signed with two other Turkish companies—"Tav" and "Urban"—and the contract with the Çelebi group was annulled.¹⁴ The Çelebi group is currently contesting the decision in the International Chamber of Commerce,¹⁵ but the question remains: how did the "unserious" Çelebi win the tender to begin with?

According to Perevozkina, former functionaries and assistants of Premier Zhvania who attended meetings of the Cabinet say that an uncle of Mikheil Saakashvili, Temur Alasania, had personally lobbied the interests of the Çelebi consortium. Alasania, brother of Saakashvili's mother, Turkic Studies Prof. Giuli Alasania, had brought American businessman Eric Goudis to Premier Zhvania. Goudis, head of A&J, conducted the negotiations in Group's name. One of Goudis's New York properties, Perevozkina reports, houses the women's club of the US Republican Party, to which Laura Bush supposedly stops in from time to time.¹⁶

Alasania, who occupies no official post, is often present at Georgian Security Council meetings, and it is rumored that the security service chiefs cannot decide a single question without him. He worked on the UN Committee for Disarmament and International Security in the 1990s, eventually becoming a senior adviser on the UN Secretariat.¹⁷ According to Perevozkina, Alasania's acquaintances from his days at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MSIIR) include Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Russian Security Council Secretary Igor Ivanov.¹⁸ Ivanov has become a familiar face during western-backed *coups d'état*, jetting in to counsel heads of state to acquiesce to US-financed mobs and step down (October 2000, Belgrade; November 2003, Tbilisi; May 2004, Batumi (Adjara)). Shalva Natelashvili, leader of the Georgian Labor Party, described Alasania to Perevozkina as "a KGB officer working with the American intelligence agencies." Perevozkina's sources allege that Alasania has a house in America and that his sons have US citizenship.¹⁹

When he first came to America in the early 1990s, Saakashvili lived with Uncle Temur, who apparently arranged a job for the future president at the law firm of Patterson, Belknap, Webb & Tyler in New York.²⁰ In December of last year, Alasania and his wife moved to Tbilisi to be close to their nephew. Indeed, Alasania's connections in Moscow, New York and Washington may explain the strange malleability of the Kremlin on issues of vital importance to Russia, including withdrawal of bases from Georgia. The bases are to be withdrawn exactly at the time when Saakashvili is to stand for a second term,²¹ thus boosting his image with the chauvinist-nationalists currently dominating Georgia's political elite. Saakashvili has appointed several of his family members to lucrative posts in government, giving one of his brothers a position as chief adviser on domestic issues to the Baku-Ceyhan Pipeline project, backed by British Petroleum and other oil multinationals.²²

Microcosm of the Inner Party at Work

Zhvania's death should not arouse much sorrow among outside observers. He was, by all indications, a cruel person enriching himself at his country's expense. But his demise is symptomatic of a larger, more disturbing trend, personified perhaps by Temur Alasania and the Moscow-New York "consortium." Georgia since the US-backed "Rose Revolution" in November 2003 that brought Mikheil Saakashvili to power has witnessed a rapid deterioration of human rights, mass-scale arrests, imprisonment, torture and deepened corruption.²³ This is in a republic that had already experienced economic collapse, a drastically decreased population due to large numbers of Georgians fleeing to Russia for survival, and speedy social degradation. For the historic visit of US President George W. Bush to Georgia earlier this year, the regime quickly renovated key transport arteries such as the road from Tbilisi airport to the city center, to create a Potemkin-like path amid the squalor for the viewing pleasure of the Georgians' important guest.²⁴ There can be no question that ordinary Georgians are worse off than in Soviet times.

Saakashvili has presided over the creation of a *de facto* one-party state, with a dummy opposition occupying a tiny portion of seats in the parliament,²⁵ and this public servant is building a Ceausescu-style palace for himself on the outskirts of Tbilisi.²⁶ Until some time this year, the salaries of Saakashvili and many of his ministers were reportedly paid by the NGO network of New York-based currency speculator and philanthropist George Soros—along with the United Nations Development Program.²⁷ While one might imagine the political result of all this international involvement to be warm and fuzzy, the reality is far different. In his desire to appear a strong leader, Saakashvili regularly seems to mimic Mussolini in his speeches and posturing. He has urged the shooting of prisoners rioting in his country's appalling prisons and publicly threatened to shoot Russian civilians visiting Abkhazia on holiday.²⁸ To crown his achievements, he has worked as cheerleader-in-chief for fascistic youth organizations like the "Patriots," whose members dress in camouflaged fatigues and practice firing Kalashnikovs at makeshift military camps while the country's educational system deteriorates.²⁹

This is "democracy" of the US-approved variety.

Notes

1 "Top Djindjic suspect surrenders," *BBC News* (May 3, 2004).

2 "FBI rules that Georgian PM's death accidental," *Agence France Presse* (Feb. 11, 2005).

3 "Aide to dead Georgian Prime Minister commits suicide: official," *Agence France Presse* (Feb. 4, 2005).

4 Марина ПЕРЕВОЗКИНА, "Люди в сером," *Московский комсомолец* (Oct. 7, 2005).

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 "Rumsfeld vows to support Georgia," *CNN.com* (Dec. 5, 2005).

9 See Candace Rondeaux, "Power Outage," *St. Petersburg Times* (Mar. 13, 2005). "A favorite of Washington's political elites, Zhvania received the Washington-based National Democratic Institute's prestigious Democracy Award in December 2004."

10 ПЕРЕВОЗКИНА, *Московский комсомолец*.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid. See also "Opposition Leader Heading to U.S. to Reveal 'Truth' About Saakashvili's Georgia," *MosNews* (May 12, 2005).

13 ПЕРЕВОЗКИНА, *Московский комсомолец*.

14 See Celia Chauffour, "Is there a scandal surrounding the rebuilding of the Tbilisi international airport?" *Caucaz.com* (Sep. 24, 2005); "Turkish Company, Georgia at Odds over Tbilisi Airport Deal," *Civil Georgia* (Sep. 9, 2005); "Celebi's Tbilisi Airport Contract Cancelled," *Zaman Online* (Sep. 6, 2005);

15 Chauffour, *Caucaz.com*.

16 ПЕРЕВОЗКИНА, *Московский комсомолец*.

17 See Вадим ДУБНОВ, "История счастливого, застигнутого врасплох," *Новое Время*, No. 50 (Dec. 14, 2003); Руслан ТАГИЕВ, "Сказка Новой Грузии," *Монитор*, No. 44 (Jan. 17, 2004); Зураб БЕРЕЛАШВИЛИ, "Международный грузин," *Еженедельный Журнал*, No. 102 (Jan. 13, 2005); see also list of members, 59th Session of the General Assembly of the UN, First Committee on Issues of Disarmament and International Security, Secretariat (<http://www.un.org/russian/ga/59/first/secretariat.htm>).

18 ПЕРЕВОЗКИНА, *Московский комсомолец*.

19 Ibid.

20 See Владимир АЛЕКСАНДРОВ, "'Бархатные лапки' М. Саакашвили," *informacia.ru* (<http://informacia.ru/facts/saakashvili-facts.htm>).

21 "Russia, Georgia agree on bases withdrawal," *People's Daily Online* (May 31, 2005).

22 See Владимир АЛЕКСАНДРОВ, "Саакашвили Михаил Николозович - президент Грузии: С самого начала," *informacia.ru* (<http://informacia.ru/facts/saakashvili.htm>).

23 See "Georgia 2005: Rose Revolutionary Justice" (report), www.OSCEwatch.org and also "Georgia 2004: The 'Rose Revolution' Ploughs On" (report), www.OSCEwatch.org.

24 Natalia Antelava, "Georgia spruces up for Bush visit," *BBC News* (May 9, 2005), see also "Georgia Names Street After George Bush," *MosNews* (Sep. 14, 2005).

25 "Georgia 2004: The 'Rose Revolution' Ploughs On" (report) www.OSCEwatch.org.

26 "Do Not Photograph Saakashvili's Palace!" *Georgian Times* (Aug. 1, 2005).

27 "UNDP, Soros fund salaries of Georgian officials," *Civil Georgia* (Mar. 22, 2004); see also Mark Almond, "U.S. Blinded by Its Love Affair With Saakashvili," *Moscow Times* (Aug. 10,

2004).

28 Simon Ostrovsky, "Keep off our beaches or we'll shoot, Georgia warns Russians," *Times Online* (Aug. 5, 2004); see also "Georgia's New Flag: Sieg Heil Saakashvili!" (report), www.OSCEwatch.org (Jan. 15, 2004) <http://bhrg.org/LatestNews.asp?ArticleID=30>; "Georgia: History Repeats Itself" (report), www.OSCEwatch.org (Mar. 1, 2004) <http://bhrg.org/LatestNews.asp?ArticleID=31>.

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