

The first five minutes of this panel are not in the transcript.

**AMBASSADOR IRAKLI ALASANIA**

...and the policy makers to get together and to think, first of all, what was done wrong in the policy over the years, and why were not successful in launching and executing the very productive and effective peace negotiations with the Abkhaz side. I was one who was involved in that decision making and policy making. And the first thing we discovered was that the whole approach of Georgia before the Rose Revolution to conflict resolution was not right in itself. And we agreed that we needed some vigorous, and new, aggressive diplomatic policy, as well as the public diplomacy, to help us to understand why we cannot go beyond the mutual accusation and blame and to start meaningful talks. So, the first things that come from our mind was to understand, for example, I was involved in positive decision making, how to resolve the Abkhaz conflict, what was it we could not really understand about the Abkhaz and what was the Abkhaz internal decision making? To understand that, we thought it would help us to guide this negotiating process. So, I was asked to chair the Abkhaz government, who was continuing functioning, and still continued to function after the '92, '93 war in Abkhazia. Together with that, to formulate the approach that we were to offer the Abkhaz side. At the beginning things were, of course, not looking well, because the Abkhaz side was not really interested in talk on the substantive issues. And our dedication was to first of all identify what was the most important thing for Georgia, and what was the most important thing for Abkhaz as well. Our concerns still are concentrated about the refugees that we have. In that regard, no progress was ever made for fourteen years of conflict resolution. And we were very obvious and very discreet, and at the same time very straightforward with the Abkhaz, that this was the most sensitive issue for the Georgian side, and they have to in some way address this issue.

At the same time we understood that they also had the very huge problem and sensitive issue about their own guarantees of their ethnic and historical heritage that should be guarded. And what was also very important, what helped us, both sides, was the fourteen, thirteen years that passed from the ending of the military confrontation, and the wounds that were in both societies were a little bit healed. So that gave us the environment in which more meaningful talk could be performed between us. So we approached the economic, and the special representative was [NAME UNCLEAR], and we asked them, we wanted to start from the beginning. Let's lay out our positions, let's meet in Geneva and discuss the real substantive issues. So that's where we began elaborating with the Abkhaz side, and... [UNCLEAR] ...two approaches. First was to address from both sides the IDP return right, and the second was for them also to seek from Georgia's side the guarantees that they were looking for, for security. These two issues are very complicated, and I also want to demonstrate before going into detail how these negotiations went, what was the geopolitical context, and also what was the actions that Saakashvilli administration took in these two or three years. The first thing that we identified was hampering these negotiations was the paramilitary organizations that were working with both sides. And the first thing that Saakashvilli made clear that he will not tolerate these kind of criminal groups in the region. So, law enforcement operations were conducted, and most of these paramilitary groups who were working in that area were apprehended and dissolved and disarmed. So that was the first step, good will gesture, from our side to be recognized by them. The second thing was also very important to us, to get a firm hold and grip on the upper Abkhazia. The upper Abkhazia, it's a part of Abkhazia which was never under control of the separatist regime, but was not quite under the control of Georgian government, because the criminal enterprise was running this part of Georgia. After the successful counter-insurgency and the law

enforcement operation, the people in upper \_\_\_\_\_ were provided with basic needs and social terms, and also the law and order was established, which enabled at the same time the UN to start patrolling. So there was another step from our side, from the Abkhaz, to see that we're not seeking any military build up in, in upper Abkhazia, which was the atmosphere that was created by the propaganda and media, but we wanted to bring development, we wanted to provide social things to the people, and this is the way we demonstrated to Abkhaz that this was exactly what we intended to the other parts of Abkhazia. At the same time, having \_\_\_\_\_ with the para-militaries, who were destabilizing the situation, we asked the other side to do the same. Unfortunately, our actions were not met with the reciprocal actions from the Abkhaz side. The situation in \_\_\_\_\_ region stills remains and was very, not even unsatisfactory, but very brutal, because those Georgians who were there, and are still there, who returned without any sense of security to their home, were not provided with the minimal amount of security and protection. This is where we started talking with, at that time we started talking with \_\_\_\_\_ and other organizations to bring elements of law enforcement and security, international law enforcement and security, which would provide a secure environment for the \_\_\_\_\_ there. But this also was met, unfortunately, by resistance from the separatist regime. At the same time we started explaining to the international community, \_\_\_\_\_ and others, that we want to de-isolate the \_\_\_\_\_. Because we were keeping them, and the situation was keeping them isolated, and it was not contributing to better understanding, from their side as well, what is the whole geopolitical changes in the region? They still viewed the Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia as a threat. They still viewed Georgia's aspiration to join that club will harm their interests. And basically we started opening up society members to travel to the west, to the United States. We came up with very successful joint projects with ISAID

and others, other donor organizations, to bring Georgians and Abkhaz together in the various parts of Europe and United States. And this was a very successful operation. And a couple of them that went under my supervision really showed me that these people had a lot in common. They understood that they had a democratic problem in common. The Abkhaz side is losing their democratic situation. They're now, more than forty thousand Abkhaz are also outside the Abkhazia. They are already in the minority. So, but we make very specifically clear that we will not let the separatist regime legitimize, for them to be, to have an access to the international organizations, or these kind of events. Because this will back lash and back fire to the peace process itself. So, with this distinction we approached the NGO's and other organizations to help us to take Georgians and Abkhaz together outside. On the other hand, now I want to get back to the negotiation process with the Abkhaz, it was tremendously important to realize, between Georgians and Abkhaz, that the current status quo is not good for Abkhaz or Georgians. This realization came, I think, to Abkhaz after the de facto unrecognized elections when the \_\_\_\_\_ force actually intervened in a very heavy-handed way. And they realized that they were only tools in their hands to be played against Georgians. But it was hard for them to acknowledge publicly. Because it's a closed society, there were too many criticisms against those who would voice anything against the confrontational mentality. So, from our side, President Saakashvilli tried to, put this behind, in a way, to address the Abkhaz de facto leader, to meet without preconditions. And this offer was made a year and a half ago, which is still valid. Unfortunately, there was sometimes some positive signals from Abkhaz coming that they were willing to meet, but then not until now even we don't have a specific offer from the Abkhaz side that they are willing to meet. But it doesn't mean that we're not going to continue offering them; this offer is still valid. So, within the negotiating format we started

drafting the declaration, which was almost ready a year and a half ago, which called for the Abkhaz to recognize the right of all \_\_\_\_\_ and refugees to go back to their home.

From our side, of course, we again reiterated our commitment to the peaceful resolution of the conflict, and non-resumption of hostilities, which is signed by Georgia...

[UNCLEAR] ...seven times. Already there is documents. We were almost there, but unfortunately, that's one of the lessons I learned, and the Georgian delegation learned, that we, the Abkhaz side mainly, were not preparing the public opinion about this possible breakthrough. And right at the end of the negotiating process they backed off. There were some people on the Georgian side as well who also put too much criticism towards this document, so this document was abandoned. But, a month ago, on October 25<sup>th</sup>, there was a very promising visit of the new state minister for conflict resolution, David [NAME UNCLEAR], and during this visit, of course, one trip could not solve the old differences, but what they agreed on was that we have to resume negotiations over the documents that were abandoned a year and a half ago. We have to deal with the situation on the ground where our returned IDP's are in very miserable condition, with no sense of security, and in every day places their lives are threatened. And we also need to come up with a new law enforcement security and coordination mechanism on the line of the cease fire. So these are the three main things that we will take on in the upcoming meetings, which are possibly going to be held in early January or February. I know that the group of friends meeting will be held somewhere in December, hopefully, and this will set the stage for the parties to meet in Geneva. Now the different context I want to bring up, it's the chain of events and provocations that were put in place last year, this year, in the Abkhaz conflict zone. Right after the successful law enforcement operation when the stability came to \_\_\_\_\_, and the Abkhaz, through my interactions with them, understood that there was no threat emanating from the upper Abkhazia

\_\_\_\_\_, there was a heavy air assault incident which targeted the government buildings in upper Abkhazia. My belief is that it was designed to trigger the counter-reaction from the Georgian side, and it was designed to bring new confrontation in place. But, probably now I can say the Georgian reaction was very mature, and we asked UN organs to make full investigation. Unfortunately, the investigation could not do much help in identifying who was behind this attack, but what it did, and it is very useful, all agree that the security council, and they mandated \_\_\_\_\_ to expand their capability, observation capability in that region. And recently... [UNCLEAR] ...under-secretary for the peace keeping operations, they identified that their intent to bring these new elements to their disposal. So it will be very good to have the additional observation power to prevent in the future these kind of provocations. But since then, on August 6<sup>th</sup> there was another incident, I'm talking about a major incident, a bombing of another conflict region, the \_\_\_\_\_ region, with the violation of the air space. On that, we went slightly with a different track. We asked the UN to fully investigate the event, but at the same time we asked the independent experts to come into Georgia and to examine the evidence that we get from the scene. Two expert groups made an evaluation, and both of them said that the violation was coming from the Russian Federation. We brought this to the attention of the international community at the UN, but so far the reaction was not quite conclusive. And we're hoping that this incident also will be brought up in the future, negotiations within the Geneva format. Making things even worse, on September 20<sup>th</sup> Georgia law enforcement identified the group in the vicinity of the upper \_\_\_\_\_, where a very significant group, by the way, very well armed, were on a mission to observe and possibly to target the new construction of the new road to upper Abkhazia. Well, this group was intercepted by the law enforcement agencies. Very unfortunate that there were casualties. Nobody is happy about this.

Two citizens of the Russian Federation, former members of the peacekeeping forces, were killed during this operation. Again, I want to stress that it's very unfortunate that the casualties happened. And this incident again brought the trust among the sides to its lowest level. But no matter, Georgian authorities, which was a very good decision by the president himself, seven Abkhaz were released as a good will gesture in October. So that enabled us to get back to the point with the Abkhaz that in upcoming events we will have very straightforward and open talks with them. I think with the renewed mandate, if President Saakashvili will be elected, he will have more and more opportunity to start even more vigorous diplomatic, and aggressive diplomatic approach to this conflict resolution. And I think there will be new options and new possibilities for us, for diplomats and those who are working in this field, to show ourselves, first of all, and to demonstrate to the international community that Georgia is fully committed to the peaceful talks, and fully understands the responsibility, the new responsibilities now that the situation gives up, and drops on Georgian shoulders, and I think I'm optimistic about the future talks with the Abkhaz side.

**ALEXANDER COOLEY**

Thank you, that's great, thank you very much indeed, Ambassador. Our next speaker is Ambassador Ken Yalowitz. He is former US Ambassador to Georgia, currently director of the John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College. Ambassador?

**AMBASSADOR KEN YALOWITZ**

Thanks, Alex. I want to also begin with a disclaimer similar to what Dick Miles did before. I'm no longer an official, and everything I say is just simply my own opinion

based primarily on reading open sources. I would also, before I begin, like to compliment Ambassador Alasania, by all accounts he did a superb job when he was involved as the chief troubleshooter on the frozen conflicts on the Georgian side. And again, from many people who I've spoken with, he's sorely missed. We're very happy he's here in New York, but he did a splendid job in a very difficult time, and I just wanted to, to mention that. President Saakashvilli came to office four years ago promising economic and political reforms, and also dedicated to restoring Georgia's territorial integrity by bringing back South Ossetia and Abkhazia full under Tbilisi's fold. There was certainly some success in this direction, and I refer primarily to the complete re-integration of Ajara, and all the economic benefits from the port of Batumi, and also the border crossing with Georgia. The situation, though, with the other two is certainly not as promising over the last four years. There is one important change on the ground, as the ambassador mentioned. There are approximately forty-five thousand Georgians who have returned to the Gali Province. This is just simply their returning. And as he correctly points out, their situation is still very precarious. And I would argue that the fundamental political situation in Abkhazia remains unchanged. There have been times of optimism, again, as the Ambassador referred to, hopes for negotiated arrangements to bring Georgian IDP's back to Gali and other parts of Abkhazia under negotiated and secure circumstances. There have been talks on, even more, an opening of the Black Sea rail links, and advancing economic cooperation. But for the most part it's been a history of inability to come to closure on agreements or even frozen contacts, periods of frozen contacts. The establishment of the Sanakoyev Alternative Power Center in the Georgian administered areas of the South Ossetian zone of conflict is a Georgian initiative peacefully to break that deadlock situation. Both conflict situations, however, in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, are characterized by continuing tension,

periodic outbreaks of limited hostilities, suspension of authorized meetings between the two sides, and a virtual absence of progress on confidence building measures. And I am very, very happy that these very senior level Georgian and Abkhaz officials have resumed contacts as of October 25<sup>th</sup>. That is certainly a very promising note against a backdrop of less promising developments. More than sixteen years have passed since the break up of the Soviet Union, and the most serious conflicts arising from that, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Transnistria remain frozen and unresolved. While the details differ in each case, the fundamental result is a significant drag on prospects for democratic development in each state concerned, and weight the expenditures for arms, resettlement of internal refugees, et cetera, rather than economic and social development. For Georgia, the separatist struggles, and Russia's role in sustaining them have continued to poison the bilateral relationship, and have also created degrees of separation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia that I think will be very difficult to overcome. My introduction to the complexity of resolving Abkhazia came almost immediately after I presented my credentials to President Shevardnadze in mid 1998. When I met with the then Georgian defense minister, after hearing out my thoughts on moving the negotiating process forward, the minister responded to me as follows: this is the south Caucasus, both the Abkhaz and Georgian sides know exactly who killed whom, and this conflict is not going to be settled until those scores are settled. Nonetheless, I later worked with the UN Secretary General's Special Representative in 1998 and '99, along with other Western Ambassadors, on a proposal for a return of some Georgian IDP's to Gali Province in return for economic cooperation with the Abkhaz. The written agreements were prepared, and we had received assurances before hand that they would indeed be signed when we came to Batumi, which we did. Unfortunately, Mr. Artzimba [PH] refused to do so on the spot. This probably reflected his own

personal misgivings, but I have little doubt that there were also outside pressures. As such I had and I have no illusions about the difficulty of resolving these problems. It was also assumed that resolving South Ossetia would be somewhat easier than Abkhazia, because the fighting had not been as vicious, and the ties between Ossets and Georgians not so completely torn asunder. The serious outbreak of fighting there in August of 2004, and the establishment of the Sanakoyev Administration, however, suggest that a settlement is still uncertain. I was in Georgia last week and found a high level of concern about Abkhazia. Several Georgian officials told me that there had been an influx of Russian forces and military equipment into Abkhazia, and they were worried that those forces were being positioned to prevent a Georgian response in the event of a declaration of Abkhaz independence following the likely declaration of independence in Kosovo next month. Independent efforts are being made to confirm those reports, but no matter their veracity, I think a potentially unsettling period in Abkhazia and South Ossetia is now upon us for several reasons. And let me explain. First, there are Duma elections just in a few days in Russia, and presidential elections early next year both in Georgia and Russia. Given the deadlock in negotiations, the unsettled situation on the ground, and the instances of armed conflict since 2004, the possibility of an outbreak of violence in either South Ossetia or Abkhazia or both aimed at influencing the outcome of those elections cannot be excluded. Second, decisions are imminent on the political fate of Kosovo. If independence is declared, as seems very likely, it cannot be ruled out that Abkhazia and South Ossetia will use this opportunity to declare their independence, relying on a Russian military shield to protect them against a Georgia military response. The Georgian side has repeatedly stated that they would regard such a declaration as an act of war. Third, Georgian/Russian relations are obviously in a very difficult state. The Russian trade boycott and closure of borders

remains in place. The level of vitriol between Moscow and Tbilisi remains high, and Georgia's western orientation continues to vex Moscow. Indeed, a key objective of Georgian policy is to get the Russian role as the peacekeeper, and in diplomatic forum related to the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts, either eliminated or substantially reduced. There is a positive note, the Russians have closed their third military base in Georgia, in Batumi, and have transferred that equipment to Armenia. Fourth, I think there is really very little pulling the parties together right now. There are presently no active confidence building measures except for limited economic cooperation in South Ossetia under OSC auspices. The negotiations on resuming railway connections through Abkhazia have stalled. The details of Tbilisi's concept for autonomy of South Ossetia and Abkhazia I believe are still to be laid out. Sokhumi and Tskhinvali want commitments to non use of force and economic incentives first, whereas the Georgians want movement on status issues and internationalization of the peace process. And the fundamental divide remains with the Abkhaz and South Ossets positing that they have won independence even though, correctly, no state has recognized their claims. And the Georgians offering autonomy, and demanding respect for Georgian territorial integrity. The Bowden paper, charting a way forward to begin the discussion on the delimitation of Constitutional authorities between Tbilisi and Sokhumi likewise remains in the freezer. Fifth, the frozen Georgian conflicts are not near the top of the list of concerns of the United States and Europe, although the EU has taken the desirable step of naming a special ambassador for the unresolved conflicts in the south Caucasus. A consistent, high level involvement by the United States and EU in helping negotiations resume on non use of force, status issues, and confidence building measures is needed, as there will be considerable economic and technical assistance in helping any agreement reached by the parties in the future. Finally, I'd like to call attention to a factor in understanding the

longevity of these conflicts, and that is corruption and contraband trade. And the ambassador has already talked about this. Violent incidents in Abkhazia and South Ossetia often can be traced to fighting amongst criminal groups on both sides of the cease fire lines, dividing up the markets for cigarettes, mandarins, hazelnuts, et cetera. There are vested parties whose economic interests would be harmed by a peace settlement, and their opposition needs to be taken into account and neutralized. I wish I could present a more optimistic future, picture, I'm sorry. Georgia has tried to change the situation in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. With the former, after the military action in the Upper \_\_\_\_\_ Valley in July 2006, they moved the Abkhaz government in exile to the area to set up an alternative power base to the Sokhumi government. In South Ossetia they facilitated the establishment of the Sanakoyev group as an alternative power base to the authorities in Tskhinvali. While neither action has brought a solution closer over the short term, certainly I would argue that the jury is still out on the Sanakoyev autonomy initiative. The main tasks as I see them over the next few months therefore include keeping the situation from worsening by increasing resumption of confidence building measure discussions, reminding all sides that these conflicts cannot be resolved by hostilities, and with the US and EU demonstrating interest and involvement to promote dialogue and better balance in the negotiations.

**ALEX COOLEY**

Ambassador, thank you very much. Our final speaker today is Bob Legvold, who is the Marshall Shulman Professor of Soviet Foreign Policy here at Columbia University.

Bob?

## **ROBERT LEGVOLD**

Thanks Alex. My comments are not fundamentally different from Ken's in their spirit. They will be cast in a somewhat broader framework, because I'm going to speak about the problems of Abkhazia, South Ossetia in the context of Russia/Georgian relations. And I start with four propositions, only two of which I'll actually elaborate. The first is, when you look across the post-Soviet space, there is something unique about the Russia/Georgia relationship. It is the only relationship of unalloyed pure hostility, with the possible exception of the Armenian/Azerbaijani relationship. Russians relations with other countries where there's been trouble and tension, with Ukraine at various points, with Azerbaijan at various points, with Karimov's Uzbekistan before Andijon, have been mixed relationships. And similarly for many of the other countries in the area that have trouble with their neighbors, they're often mixed relations. This is a relationship that has become one almost of pure hostility. Secondly, there are, sources of this hostility are multi-dimensional, um, and they have proliferated over time. My time frame is from 1988 forward, and the synergy among these different sources of tension, everything from bases to visas to citizenship that's granted, those within the separatist territories, to the energy issues, even to the alleged assassination attempts during the Shevardnadze period, um, have not only grown in number, as I've said, but the synergy among them has intensified. But at the very core of this multi-dimensional, these, these multiple sources of tension, is the question of the separatist territories, the break away territories. This proposition, the evolution of this relationship toward the deep hostility that now characterizes it has been through a series of stages, and it's interesting and useful to look at the stages by which we got to this point. That's one of the things that I'll make a few comments on in a moment. The fourth and last point is that if in, if

you're in the haberdashery business, and you want to issue white hats and black hats, go out of business. There are no white hats and there are no black hats in this case. You may want to argue about who's got a lighter gray hat, uh, but there are no white hats and there are no black hats. If you come to this issue of culpability, who is most responsible for the state that Russia/Georgian relations have reached today, I would assign primary culpability to the Russians because of the nature of the source of the culpability. In the case of the Georgians, I think the culpability has primarily to do with, A, the mishandling of the issue that finally led to the separatist challenge from the territories, and subsequently with the mishandling of various moments of opportunity along the way. And the second source of culpability on the Georgian side is the extent to which they have oversimplified and transferred too much blame to the Russian side, or misunderstood what Russian policy has been in it. But that seems to me, in its nature, less serious than what are the sources of Russian culpability. Russian culpability, going back to Dick Miles' earlier characterization of a very large and powerful state dealing with a small state as being a bully, and Russia has become increasingly a bully in dealing with Georgia, so much so that it went over the top after the September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2006 events in a way that were literally outrageous in international relations, and certainly against Russia's long term interests, never mind the effects on Georgia. But secondly, I think Russia bears more culpability not merely because it's been a bully in this relationship, but because a number of its policies, judged, I think, by third parties, can be seen as directed against the national interests of Georgia. It's very difficult to define Georgian policies unless it be from a Moscow perspective, the movement toward NATO membership, directed against Russia's national interests. So, in the end I have no difficulty saying that while there are no white hats and no black hats when it comes to the, the nature of the culpability, that the Russians are, are more culpable in the

relationship, I, however, want to comment only on two of the propositions. One, the multi-dimensional character of the sources of the hostility, and the synergy that has operated increasingly and intensely over this period since 1998. And then secondly, the issue of stages, but do it primarily in terms of the third, the question of stages.

Parenthetically, if it comes to a discussion of where this hostility comes from, there is an argument that it is longstanding, that it has deep historical roots going well back into the nineteenth century and imperial Russia. There are even those who would argue that you have competing myths between the two countries which are essentially counter-poised and are a sense of the tension between the two. I don't doubt that the historical legacy in some dimensions is part of it, part of the background, in particular the way in which it's imagined today, because I think there is not a clear and good understanding of the history between imperial Russia and Georgia, except among specialists in the two countries. I believe, having acknowledged that, that the fundamental problem has been the dynamic and the contemporary periods since 1988, and the stages. I believe it's gone through five stages, the first being 1988 and leading up to the events of April 1989, the violence in Tbilisi, and then the rise of Gamsakhurdia with the extreme nationalism, with the extreme anti-Russian position. I and three others met with Gamsakhurdia in the, in the family mansion in 1990, before he was elected President. And he was ranting furiously, not merely against the Russians, that was the easy part, but against the United States, even against \_\_\_\_\_ for being too soft in pursuit of national independence.

That immediately created tension in the relationship, and that was a period of very high hostility from which I think there was a retreat subsequently. The second period, from point of view is '92 to '94, which is a mixed and murky period that's dominated by the war against Abkhazia in August of 1992, settled by the, or stopped initially by the cease fire in 1993 at the end. Before that you'd had the rising violence beginning in the fall of

'88 in South Ossetia, and then the re-flare up of the violence in 1991. And during this period of time, I say mixed and murky, because although in the Georgian memory the notion is that from the start and up to the top in Moscow it was their purpose first to instigate the war, and to damage Georgia through the war, and then was a key facilitator for the war, and indeed the primary reason for the defeat of the Georgian military forces in that war, uh, the actual picture so far as one can reconstruct it, I said it's murky, was far more complex than that. Uh, in the summer of 1992, a month or two before the military operation, largely because of the relationship between Pavel Grachev, the Russian minister of Defense, and Tengiz Kovani, the Georgian minister of defense, arrangements were made to transfer substantial stocks of military hardware from the \_\_\_\_\_ military district to the Georgians, and I think that played a role in Kitovani's decision to go ahead with the, the August invasion in, in 1992. But then, by, by late '92, by the first months of 1993, in the midst of the war, there was a very clear shift, at least on the ground, on the part of Russian military forces, to come to the military assistance of the Abkhaz in that war. And there's no question of the role that the Russians played from various military commands in the area, and contributing to the Abkhaz military success. Now that success was also contributed to by fighters that came from the mountain people, the north Caucasus, Chechans and others, that came to line up behind the Abkhaz during that period. Whether this was sanctioned by the ministry of defense back in Moscow, let alone with the approval of Yeltsin, is unknown. The one thing that one can say that transfers responsibility to the Russians for that shift in behavior of Russian military locally in '93 is that, if they were freebooters, that they were never prosecuted, there was never any effort on the part of the Moscow authorities to get to the root of what was going on, but then as you get toward the end of this period and the cease fire, the Russians did play a role in arranging for that cease fire, and for

the subsequent agreements that were reached in 1994, including the agreement that today is the cease fire agreement that everyone refers back to. But there were also other agreements during that period that represented, I think, revealing aspects of the Russian policy, a treaty of friendship and good neighborliness, that Yeltsin was never willing to take for ratification to the Duma. There was also, in February of 2004, the protocol that extended Russian basing rights to the three bases for a twenty-five year period, which the Georgian parliament then never ratified. But those were arrangements that I suggest, that I have in mind when I suggested the relationship was a little murkier in that period. And in the fall of 1994, that was the first attempt on the part of the Russians to force a return, or to press for a return of IDP's into Gali. And that was actually resisted by the Abkhaz at the time, forcefully. And if you go back to the fall of 1993 when, after the cease fire, the Abkhaz overran Sokhumi, probably again with Russian military assistance, heavy artillery in that attack, even before that the Russian had applied this economic embargo to the Abkhaz, and embargo that would remain in place until 1990. Third period I see as 1995 until Ken arrives, and I charge him with no responsibility with what happens after 1998, I would characterize that period as one of maturing discontent. Although the interesting thing is that during that first Chechnyan war in 1994, Shevardnadze actually supported the Russian side in that war. The second Chechnyan War had a very different effect on the relationship, a hundred and eighty degree different effect on the Georgian/Russian relationship. It was, at the end, marked by, Ken referred to going to Sokhumi with the agreement, but it was marked by the events of May of 1998 where the Abkhaz went after the Georgians in, in Gali, and drove out twenty thousand with several hundred killed, fifteen hundred houses destroyed, largely as a result of what IDP return had occurred before that. And I think what happens to Russian policy after that, one can disagree about this, whatever had been the

Russian willingness to promote reconciliation or reintegration of the communities, Georgian and Abkhaz, now it's turned around entirely, and Russian policy subsequently is basically committed to keeping the two communities apart as a way of coping with a potential explosion along the way. It's also a period of time, this is now Ken's period, where the Georgians begin lobbying very hard to get rid of the Russian bases, whatever had been the original assumptions in 1994, and that will lead to the agreement at the OSC, Istanbul meeting, on the Russian part, to get rid of them in conjunction with what has subsequently happened around the conventional forces in Europe agreement. So, a lot of these things get linked back into the European diplomacy. 1999 through 2002, which is the overlap between Ken and Dick, is from my point of view, a rapid descent in the Georgian/Russian relationship. It's marked by the effect, in a most pronounced way, by the 1990 second Chechnyan War, where the Russians now held the Georgians responsible for the fleeing Chechans in \_\_\_\_\_, wanted the Georgians to do more to stop it, or to allow the Russians to follow in hot pursuit into the \_\_\_\_\_ gorge. The demand for the return of the thirteen within the area, and then the air violations on the part of the Russians around the Chechnyan War. It's marked by a series of things during that period. In 1999, after the '98 tragedy, and in the context of the deteriorating relationship around Chechnya, you get the Russian decision to lift the embargo on Abkhaz, and they re-open the border, the trade begins again across the border point, and the Russians begin pursuing a far more ambitious economic agenda within Abkhazia than they had up to that point. Until then it had been largely a matter for local regions within Russia that had a stake in Abkhazia that cut their own deals, all the way up to Moscow. You also have, in the spring of 2002, the decision by the Russian Duma to extend or recognize Russian citizenship for those in both Ossetia and Abkhazia, first by stamping their old Soviet passports, and then by issuing them new passports in 2002 at

about the time the Russians are imposing a visa regime on Georgia more generally. And of course it's during this period of time, before Saakashvili, that Shevardnadze gets much more serious in pursuing the NATO option, in talking about NATO as an important option. It's also the period of time where Georgia becomes part of GUAM, Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, which the Russians see as essentially motivated by an attempt to balance their influence or address the security threats. So this is a period, I think, of very substantial deterioration in relations, and it really has begun to harden. You then get to the present period which I'll finish with in two minutes, quickly, on how I see things stand. Because I agree with the way Ken has characterized it, including this moment of danger heading through the two election cycles, and a shadow of Kosovo above all of it. Two things, first of all, when Nina \_\_\_\_\_ was here two years ago in a private setting, I don't think this is out of school, she described her first meeting with Putin after the Rose Revolution, she was one of the first within the triumvirate to go to Moscow, and Putin began sounding off on how external agencies, George Soros, NGO's, Western intelligence agencies, had made the Rose Revolution. And she said, but that's not correct. I was there. I saw it. I participated in it. And he looked at her, and he said, according to her report, you don't know. I have my sources. The second thing is, about four months after that I had breakfast with an acquaintance of mine in Moscow who's very well connected. He's not in the Putin government, but he's very close to it, around it. And we were talking about what had happened now in Georgia, and he said to me, he said, you know, for many of these people around Putin, the attitude toward Saakashvili is roughly the same as the attitude within US administrations toward Castro. That was his comparison. And Georgia, by that time, was beginning to look like what Cuba looks like to the United States at this stage. From there, I think it's been downhill. There is, there was the successful move on Saakashvili's part against

Abashidze in Ajara, but then there was this effort to apply something of the same pressure, threaten it, with Abkhazia in the spring, which led to a rapid rise in tensions, and admonitions on the part, literally warnings from Moscow, confrontation from Moscow, and then admonitions from both Brussels and Washington to tame some of the recklessness that they feared may be involved. And then as Ken referred to, the events in August of 2004 in Southern Ossetia, for which Saakashvili bore very considerable responsibility, and created the further impression in Moscow, some echoes of which were in Western capitals as well, that the new government was prepared to be, my phrase a moment ago, reckless in addressing the question of escalating the tension around the territories. In 2006 you have to skip over, because I'm speaking too long now, you have this remarkable event that I referred to earlier with the arrest of the four Russian officers and then the Russian retaliation, which was simply over the top and out of bounds, and is still in place. It's very difficult to explain why it occurred in that fashion. It was, from my point of view it's juvenile behavior, it has nothing to do with statesmanship or pursuing Russian's interests, including the ongoing embargo at this point. But everything else that was associated with it, the expulsion of Georgians, the intimidation of Georgian entrepreneurs, guest workers in Moscow and the other cities and all the rest of it. Now, where things stand at, at the moment, I would not want to challenge Ambassador Alasania's hopes that the dialogue may be re-opened. Indeed, actually, formally it has been re-opened. There may even be a chance to move forward on some of the more limited issues, such as improving the security of Georgians already there, whatever progress can be made on IDP's in the case of Abkhazia, improving the technical features around the cease fire and so on. I think that's conceivable. The real challenge, it seems to me, is to move beyond this notion that the primary obstacles to real progress are external actors and, in the case of the Russians, or the hope is external

actors, in this case the West, the EU, OSCE, and for the two sides to recognize that this is only going to make progress if the two of them engage one another, and the others are then facilitators, they're not principles. And I don't know how close either side is to doing that. I do have a sense, and this is just a guess, I'd be interested in Ambassador Alasania's counter, if there is a counter to it, that the strategy is changing on the part of the Georgians. Jonathan \_\_\_\_\_ and I were in Tbilisi for the summit 2007 that was held the first part of the month sponsored by the Georgian government with \_\_\_\_\_ Fund assistance. And we were taken to South Ossetia for Saturday to meet with Dmitry Sanakoyev, and see all the things that were done there. That strategy is not merely to recognize this administrative unit as of April 2007, and as Ken suggested I think there's a parallel in moving the government in absentia into Abkhazia, into the \_\_\_\_\_ Gorge, into the city in that area, but accompanying both of those is a strategy of attempting to build infrastructure to give the people in the area a stake in association with Georgia. It's a little like what the Russians are doing too late in Chechnya, in rebuilding Grozny, and so on. But we were shown the hydroelectric station that's been rebuilt. We were taken to the cinema, we were taken to the secondary school. We were told about the new oil and power lines that were being built in the area. Those two things combined, the notion of the Sanakoyev administrative operation, not recognized by Tbilisi as now the alternative government, but as an administrative structure, formerly by the parliament in the spring of this year, and the action with \_\_\_\_\_ Gorge in 2006 suggests the, the notion, two sides of it, that one can begin, at least in the case of Ossetia, trying to create an alternative that puts pressure on \_\_\_\_\_ and the regime, Tskhinvali, with its Soviet support, to provide a political alternative, and looks as though there's a kind of opening or opportunity to transform attitudes within Ossetia with respect to Georgia. That, it seems to me, is much more fragile and implausible in

the case of Abkhazia. But there's one other element, and that is, throughout all of this, whatever may be the diplomatic initiatives, there also appears to be now a willingness to continue to strengthen Georgia's potential military position vis-à-vis the territories, or vis-à-vis threats in the area. Some of it has to do with the defense budget, the new defense budget which will, which will create a force of thirty-two thousand.

Incidentally, and fairly smaller, much smaller than the Azerbaijani military, or the Armenian military for that matter, and indeed that's part of the justification, but modernization that goes far beyond the advised levels that came from the international security advisory group from the US State Department a few years ago, twelve to fifteen thousand. But, in addition, the building of the two bases, most recently in \_\_\_\_\_, which is on the edge of Ossetia, and then Sunaki [PH], near Abkhazia, so one wonders what the options are that Tbilisi is weighing, and I would add that to the concerns that Ken raised for you at the end about where we are now. I hope the notion that these small steps and re-engagement that Ambassador Alasania spoke about will carry us forward. Secondly, I agree with Dick that while the Russian, I think, have wanted to exploit the diplomatic advantages of the implications of UDI and Kosovo by threatening the same thing in the area, I don't think the Russians want to go that route. By the way, in the press conference, Jonathan, you may remember, when Sanakoyev was asked about the Russians and Kosovo and recognition afterwards, he said he doubted the Russians would do it because he said he thought it raised too many issues within their own country about separatism and the threat from it. So, I'm less concerned about that, but I am very much concerned about the general lay out, political lay out in the context of this uncertain electoral cycle in the two countries that Ken talked about. Thank you.

**ALEXANDER COOLEY**

Thank you very much, Bob. Now, we'd like to take your questions. What I'd like to do is, if you have a question, please come up to the microphone, please state your name, your institutional affiliation, and if you could keep your question concise please, it would be appreciated, as well as who it's directed to. Thank you.

**MAN**

[NAME UNCLEAR], a visiting scholar at the Harriman Institute of Columbia University. I have two questions, one question to Ambassador Irakli Alasania, and a second question to the Professor Robert Legvold. I'll start with Mr. Ambassador, in my own judgement, the conflict has been the most legally undefined conflict I think in the world, in Europe at least, in terms of whether any genocide occurred, or whether there was any ethnic cleansing taking place in Abkhazia. Even so, we have from thirty to thirty-five thousand people dead, and another three hundred and fifty thousand people expelled from their homes, like I mentioned, it's still not defined as an ethnic cleansing or even as a genocide. I'm wondering, what is the take of the current Georgian administration regarding this problem? Are we promoting this legal definition? Or it's kind of unpractical for the policy which we are promoting, the peaceful reconciliation and so on and so forth, and you kind of say, winners are not judged, and let's start everything from zero. And my second question is to the Professor Robert Legvold, it's a kind of simplistic question, but I'm just interested in your opinion as a political scientist, do you think it's real to take place, the reconciliation between Georgians and Ossetians and Georgians and Abkhaz on the background of the Russian military build up in the Tshkhinvali region, and especially in Abkhazia region? And do you think it's possible

that Russians will \_\_\_\_\_ military force from these regions? Do you think it's real?

**ALEXANDER COOLEY**

Thank you.

**MAN**

Thank you .

**ALEXANDER COOLEY**

What I'd like to do is take another couple of questions, and then answer them as a group, if that's possible. Thank you. Yes?

**MAN**

Nick \_\_\_\_\_ from the National Interest. I wanted to throw out a somewhat broader question, but related to some extent, about the way in which these conflicts can be resolved. We have two models at this point, we have the Kosovo model, which is essentially you create a deadline, you say this conflict will resolve by a certain point, and if sides can't reach negotiations that you begin to conceive of imposing a settlement, if necessary. The other model is the Cypress model, which is, you have a conflict, it's unresolved, it goes on for decades, people sort of learn to live with a separatist enclave. In the case of Cypress it doesn't even preclude it's very own economic development and even joining the EU, at least the government side. For the conflicts in Georgia, where do you think in the next years you'd be likely to see a push, on the Kosovo side, which is resolve quickly on a time line, and impose if necessary, or a situation like with Cypress where everyone says this conflict should be resolved, but if they go on for another

twenty years, no one is really that concerned about it?

**ALEXANDER COOLEY**

Great, super. Thank you, Nick. Let's take one more.

**MAN**

Thank you. My name is Yuri \_\_\_\_\_, I'm a Professor at Moscow in International Relations, and currently a visiting scholar here at Columbia. Well, I have two questions to two ambassadors being present here. First one to Ambassador Alasania, in your capacity as a negotiator with the Abkhaz, and I understand you were negotiating with \_\_\_\_\_ primarily, did you really see any good will on their side to enter into any substantive agreement with Georgia on the possible integration of that territory into Georgian republic, or did you see that they were really straightforwardly seeking independence, and didn't see any other options for them? And as to Ambassador Ken Yalowitz, I have a question that just recently, this week, in Annapolis, we saw the high representatives of many countries trying to resolve more or less the same issue, the issue of a resettlement of immigrants and displaced persons in another territory. What kind of prospects do you see for the peaceful Georgian population, and resettlement of those who have to leave their homes after the events of the early nineties? Thank you.

**ALEXANDER COOLEY**

Thank you very much. So, that's a lot for our panelists to consider, and I'll start with the Ambassador.

**AMBASSADOR IRAKLI ALASANIA**

I'll start with the question on the ethnic cleansing. What happened in Abkhazia, no doubt was a classical form of ethnic cleansing, and it was methodical, it was against the Georgian population, people were targeted and killed only because they were Georgians. And I'm talking about the civilian population, beginning with the civilian leadership in the government of Abkhazia, and people who live there. There are over ten thousand who were killed methodically, civilian population, during this conflict. And there are a couple of international organizations, like OSC, statements, summit declarations that are acknowledging the reports of ethnic cleansing. Unfortunately, the UN and UN resolutions are not talking about this. Only one resolution was enacted in '93, under the number 876, recalls the reports of ethnic cleansing. And that's it. I think it was very unwise from the Georgian side to not have a strategy to raise the awareness at the UN community for ten years now about this. And what we did, under the direction from the Georgian political leadership, we started now, a year ago actually, raising this awareness. We are bringing in material, with the help of the NGO's and others who will have this kind of material with them. We also are distributing the state's commissions findings about the ethnic cleansing, Georgian State Commissions findings on ethnic cleansing. And we recently started introducing some of the resolutions in various UN organs to focus on the IDP and the refugee issues, as well as what happened there, to give them the status of really what happened during this war, which was classically ethnic cleansing. So we are working toward this direction. The term genocide, now after fourteen years of this conflict, now will be very hard to get this qualification. But I'm optimistic that the UN community will be reciprocal to the material that we are bringing over. And we're going to continue doing this throughout the next year as well.

Now, to talk about the... And it's not going to be counter-productive. Although we are trying to get the misunderstanding and rivalry with Abkhaz over as this is predominantly, I think, fair to assess this situation as it was. And it's not going to give us any set backs in negotiations. There are people on the Abkhaz side who have suffered as well. There are people of the Abkhaz side who suffered and killed during this conflict, and we are also acknowledging that as well during our discussions here, and with Abkhaz as well. So this is the common thread. This is the tragedy that happened to Abkhaz and Georgians, and there is no shame for, for us, both sides, to acknowledge that. I think this will help us to guide us beyond the blame and accusation. To get back to the several issues that my dear colleague on the panel mentioned. I avoided the Russian segment purposefully. I know that those who are out of the government, it's a better chance for you to talk freely about this issue, but I cannot avoid mentioning two things. The involvement of the Russian federation, its political and military elite in the conflict, and the beginning of the conflict, is undeniable. This is obvious to all of us. At the same time, what's changed recently, and what is, I think, adding to the tensions, at least from the Russian side towards Georgia is that we have totally new leadership in Georgia who is free of the psychological pre-disposition towards Russia as a big and a strong brother. So this makes our political elite only concentrating on the Georgian national interests, and coming out and building policies towards Russia and toward outward, only solely depending and realizing Georgia national security interests. Which was not the case before. And this is, I think, very important to understand for all of us, that if this fight will be lost today and now, it will cost the West, and I think the international community, it would be another Cold War. Because now a decisive moment is for Georgia to be really free of the post-Soviet influence, without mistakes maybe made at some certain points that you mentioned, but

this is, the basic thing is that we are on the right track, we know, and the public expressed their willingness where they want to belong, and it is the Western Atlantic community. This is not Saakashvili or Burjanadze or the other political leaders who have decided, this is people who actually voiced it, and which, by the way, will be hopefully confirmed on January 5<sup>th</sup> on the NATO integration as well. And I don't want to miss a chance also to speak about the Kosovo issue. No matter, we all can kind of predict how this thing will go after December 10<sup>th</sup>. But no matter what is going to be the Russian position on this, no matter if they're going to declare their support for the independence of the Abkhazia or \_\_\_\_\_ area, I think it is very important, not only important, it's existentially important for Georgia to have the very strong position of the West, United States, European Union and other countries, that this is not the precedent to set. And which is the position now at this point. Russians have to lose a lot if they're going to go ahead with the recognition. First, they're going to compromise themselves as a member of the group of friends, and as a member of the negotiating process. There's a huge environment in the North Caucasus that Russia has to think twice before actually making this kind of step, because the North Caucasus, and we are very interested in having the stable North Caucasus in our neighborhood, but it's a time bomb. And no matter who thinks the situation is totally under control in the North Caucasus, I have information, and we all will have this access to the information, real information that's coming out there, it's a very sensitive situation there. And we can backfire in the region, in Russia, in the first place. So, I think there's a lot of things that Russia should think about before making this step. And personally, me, I think it's going to be very important, and still Russia, the West, the United States, and Europe has the capability and ability to sway Russia from taking this action to Kosovo. Now, really quickly about the other questions that were asked.

**ALEXANDER COOLEY**

Let's maybe go on, and if you have thoughts in the second round, we can add them to those. Ambassador Yalowitz?

**AMBASSADOR KEN YALOWITZ**

The question about the return of the IDP's to Abkhazia is a very, very interesting one, because if all the Georgian IDP's were to return, the Abkhaz would be a small minority in Abkhazia, which presents obviously a very interesting situation. I think Ambassador Alasania has really put his finger on it. I think what's really important over the short term is the situation of the IDP's who return to Gali. In 1998 they had returned earlier, they were driven out, their situation is still very precarious. And I think that ought to be the primary short term objective to clarify their status and remove all the uncertainties that stand beyond that. Beyond that, as I say, it's going to be very, very difficult, because the more Georgians that are allowed to come back, the more the Abkhaz are going to feel isolated in their own cities. So I'm not sure I have a solution to that, but that is the nature of the problem that remains out there. In terms of Kosovo and Cypress models, you sort of laid out two alternative, two polar alternative models. I think there's one in the middle. Maybe I'm State Department and I still think in terms of the middle. I see Dick is smiling too, so... The model that I always, when I was in Georgia, always talked about to my interlocutors, was that if the Georgians proceeded as they are clearly doing now in the direction of economic growth, job creation, encouraging foreign investment, and making Georgia really a dynamo in the south Caucasus in terms of economic growth, that that would probably be the best way to attract back the Abkhaz and the South Ossetians. I think there is probably nothing more attractive than jobs and

cross-border trade, and the obvious possibilities of both sides enriching themselves. The Kosovo model I don't think is going to work. I don't see who's going to enforce the terms. And the Cypress model, as I say, I just think that that is, we've already been fifteen years almost with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. And I don't like to leave these things in an indeterminate fashion, and I would like to see a lot more attention paid to internal growth in Georgia, less spending on military equipment, and more creation of an attractive model.

**ALEXANDER COOLEY**

Thanks. Bob?

**ROBERT LEGVOLD**

Let me combine the two questions, the question about whether with the kind of Russian military influence that now exists in Abkhazi, could expect direct and productive discussions between Tbilisi and Sokhumi, and then this broader question about which models for settlement in the area. I think it's much broader than merely the Russian military influence, because in the absence of success along the second \_\_\_\_\_ agreement, the agreement in 2003 between Shevardnadze and Putin, which was supposed to produce joint effort to rebuild the \_\_\_\_\_ hydroelectric plant as a key part of the energy side, and to facilitate the return of the IDP's. But also the railroad from Sochi to Tbilisi. When that, under that agreement, for which Shevardnadze was much criticized in Georgia, in the bilateral commissions that were set up, the three in those three areas, that extended to 2004, the new regime, Saakashvili's administration has moved away from those bilateral agreements, and back to the bilateral commissions of the friends of the secretary general, when that came apart the Russians then

unilaterally began doing a number of these things with Abkhazia, including the restoration of a part of the railroad, and so on. So, it's more than merely the military influence. And the Russian attitude right now is very unhelpful on this score. I don't think they want the lid to blow off. I think that's the limit. They're concerned to make sure that things don't get out of hand. But on the other, on the other side, they are at this point not in any mood to facilitate success for Georgian efforts to conduct a dialogue. Right after that meeting I referred to at the summit, 2007, Tbilisi, I went to Moscow for what was the two hundredth anniversary of the establishment of US/Russian relations, and came early enough to talk to a number of people, but also to watch television. I can tell you, there was no place in the world where there was more wall to wall coverage of what was going on in Tbilisi from November 2<sup>nd</sup>, particularly November 7<sup>th</sup>, than in Moscow, across all of the stations, with more than a little pleasure. And when you talk to a number of people, they were already beginning to write President Saakashvili and the regime off. I had any number of extensive arguments with Russians of that mood. Now, this is not to say that there are not a number of Russian experts in the Academy, or in the institutes, some of them private, and within political circles, that aren't perfectly sound, when they look at the situation perfectly capable of analysis with which I could agree in looking at what's going on. But unfortunately I don't think they are what is influencing opinion at this stage. Now, in terms of the larger model, the imposed settlement growing out of UDI, or the Cypress model, I agree with what Ken has said, I don't think either of those is going to exist. First of all, the international community, as both Dick and Ken, Dick particularly this morning emphasized, are not going to mobilize themselves in order to make either of those things happen unless there's an enormous emergency. And I would extend Ken's comment about a strategy that I think has some chance. I think it has some chance in South Ossetia. I think Abkhazia,

because there is so little access to the broader community, there is no equivalent to that administrative zone that Sanakoyev presides over, which maybe, they claim forty percent of the territory, fifty percent of the population. There is nothing comparable to that, even with this location of the, the Abkhaz government in exile in Kodori. But the idea of developing the region, all the things I said we saw, makes a lot of sense. The problem is, I think it needs to be a two track strategy where it's not designed essentially to de-legitimize the authorities within Tskhinvali. And if you take something like the European reconstruction project, which is designed for the entire region, and that has a commitment of seven million dollars, two million from the United States for the entire region, instead what, and the Georgians have contributed two hundred and fifty thousand Euros to the overall effort, and only after, only recently in October did they add another fifty thousand, but out of their budget they've consigned seven million to the development of the Sanakoyev side of it. I think that it is in their interest, although there are tensions between the two strategies, for them to make equal commitments to the development of Ossetia broadly, including this broader European effort, and then what they do within the Sanakoyev region. And I think if, along the way, the jobs, the opportunity, the improved infrastructure, because the infrastructure in the village look terrible in Ossetia, as we went through them. I mean, this is really impoverished territory. If they really make success along this way, I think more than the Georgians, even the Ossetians, because these are mixed villages, sometimes separated villages, will begin rallying to the idea.

#### **ALEXANDER COOLEY**

OK, great. We have time for one last quick round of questions, please keep them concise.

**MAN**

Sure. Alexander... [UNCLEAR] ...International Studies. I have a cluster of three questions, very quickly.

**ALEXANDER COOLEY**

No cluster, just keep...

**MAN**

OK, sure. Can you comment on three things: one, opening of electoral offices. As you know there is an election coming up in Russian Federation this Sunday, and there are reports about the opening of the electoral offices in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Related to this, the news about the build up in Abkhazia, military build up, can you provide more details about this. And finally, the impact of the Sochi Olympics of 2012 on Abkhazia.

**ALEXANDER COOLEY**

Good.

**MAN**

That's actually addressed to all members of the panel. Thank you.

**ALEXANDER COOLEY**

Great, thank you.

**WOMAN**

My name is [NAME UNCLEAR], I'm a consultant with \_\_\_\_\_ for Policy Research, and I'm working on track two diplomacy with \_\_\_\_\_. My question is to Ambassador Alasania. I'm glad that you mentioned that sometimes society is not ready for either this or that result of negotiations. And as we all know, successful negotiations are full of compromises. My question is, what are the compromises the Georgian government is considering, if at all, and what is the strategy that you would present to the Georgian people.

**ALEXANDER COOLEY**

Great. And sir, did you have a question in the back? No, you're just standing there. OK, so that's it. Ambassador, you have a lot to respond to.

**AMBASSADOR IRAKLI ALASANIA**

Yes, I will begin with a couple of remarks on South Ossetia. First of all, I think that it is very important, I'll be very short, that the administration of Sanakoyev, symbolically represents, is chaired by the man who was fighting against Georgians in confrontation. And this means a change in the psychology of some of our old citizens since this conflict originated. And the reason that we're helping him and providing some financial help is very logical, because we want him to be successful, and others who were fighting against Georgians in this conflict, also to rethink their approach to Georgians, and to think more about co-existence, rather than keeping with arms again. So, I think it's only natural for Georgian NGO's and even government officials to somehow try to facilitate and incentivize their approach. About the upper Abkhaz and legitimate government in

exile, and I want to make it clear that this is the only constitutional organ that can have a governance over this region is the Abkhaz government, by constitution. And they were there all of the time, under the legal status they were responsible for this Kodori region. Criminal gangs were not allowing them to do this. So this special operation only straightened things out, but nothing was changed dramatically, and we didn't impose, specifically putting this government up in Kodori, because it was already there. So this is used by an argument, and very frequently by the Russian negotiators, it really spoils the atmosphere of trust. It's not true, because they always were there. now, to go straight to the questions, the first thing about the Sochi Olympics, I think this can be turned into an opportunity for us. A lot of people look at it as a threat, but I look at this as an opportunity, with a very calculated, smart approach, this can be used to the benefit of the conflict resolution in the region. About the opening of the electoral offices, I'm not aware, it was the case before during the elections, so I would not be surprised if they're going to do it again, these kind of actions from the Russian side is again putting their integrity and their impartiality under the question. But I'm not sure specifically at this point if they're opened up, because I'm not informed. Talking about compromise, I forgot to mention that the Georgian side prepared a document which was called "The Basic Principles of the Conflict Resolution," of the political settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia. And this document was passed on to the Abkhaz side a year ago, year and a half ago. And this document, which was made available to the \_\_\_\_\_ and the group of friends, there is a principle providing all possible rights, political rights, to the Abkhaz side to secure their ethnicity, their historical heritage. Of course there are provisions providing security for the other nationals, if there are Georgians there of course. And this document was passed on to the Abkhaz side. All possible compromises were in that document. We also intentionally made this document in a manner that we asked the

Abkhaz side to contribute, to fill in, to make their own recommendations. And what we got back was the document called the “Key to the Future” which talks only about independence. But we understand that this kind of compromise will never be made by the Georgian side. We are ready for the old types of compromise, not only on the expense of the Georgian territorial integrity and national security interests of course.

**ALEXANDER COOLEY**

Super, thank you. Last comments from Ambassador Yalowitz and Bob Legvold.

**AMBASSADOR KEN YALOWITZ**

I just simply wanted to say that I hadn't heard anything further about these allegations about Russian military equipment and troops being moved in additional, being moved in Abkhazia, I just have not heard anything further, and I don't know if Ambassador Alasania has anything on that. But, I simply wanted to make one comment on the, we spent, and Bob was terrific in going through the stages of the Russian/Georgian relationship, but I just wanted to add two things very quickly. One, I certainly found in talking with Russian diplomats and intelligentsia of a certain age group, that Shevardnadze's role in the end of the Soviet Union is something that they never forgave him for, and that that was one of the elements of this sort of underlying negative attitude. But very specifically, in 1999, when the Russians came to Shevardnadze and asked permission to use the four military bases in Georgia to attack Chechnya from the south, and that permission was refused, I think that was a very seminal event. The vitriol and the anger and bombings, and a whole series of things began after that, and I don't think it ever recovered.

## **ROBERT LEGVOLD**

A comment on the question about the Olympics, I agree with the Ambassador, I think potentially the Sochi Olympics could be helpful in this context because it's a very high priority item for Putin and people around him, and they do not want to jeopardize their successes in holding the Olympics. And major instability within the region would be a serious threat. There's no questions that this is on the minds of people around Putin. And I was struck in Moscow just how important this decision has been from Moscow's point of view, to secure the winter Olympics in Sochi. But it extends more broadly then, because I think there is one other thing, for all of my pessimism about what I see as a stalemated conflict over Abkhazia with very little prospect of success, the issue of Sochi is one positive factor, I believe. The second is the attitude, the Ambassador referred to it I believe in passing, maybe others have commented as well during the course of the day, that the Abkhaz are not entirely comfortable with their extraordinary dependency on the Russians. They're grateful to them in many ways for what they see as essentially a security umbrella, but they're aware that the Russians are using them for their broader purposes. And you'll get not Abkhaz officials, but you'll get some of the political commentators on the Abkhaz side that will say this, that we are essentially a pawn in a larger game. They don't like it. And one of the things that drove the point home, I think this was the allusion by the Ambassador earlier, was the 2004 elections where Putin came in and essentially lobbied against \_\_\_\_\_, who won the election, for another candidate, the candidate he supported is now the deputy to him, it was kind of a dry run for the Orange Revolution, and it produced essentially the same effect of what Putin's involvement in the Orange Revolution produced, it was counter-productive, it went the other way. But it also alerted many in Abkhazia that the Russians had their own games

to play politically, and that, I think has reinforced the feeling along the line. But, as I've said, I think the general situation is very difficult. And if you want a measure of it, let me finish with a quote that ties the NATO thing together with a question about the voting polls, whether it's going to be placed in Ossetia and Abkhazia. This is \_\_\_\_\_ on February 28<sup>th</sup> in an interview that he gave to \_\_\_\_\_, and he says the following on NATO: we have strictly warned both Georgia and those who are actively inviting Georgia into NATO, that we will not permit Georgia's membership. And then he goes on to say, we have stressed that the sides common security in this neighboring region, which is so important for the stability of the southern part of Russia, there is another aspect, that is the presence of tens of thousands of Russian citizens in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. We are responsible for them. I guarantee you they will be voting.

#### **AMBASSADOR IRAKLI ALASANIA**

Just one more thing really quick, to end this, to sum up. I'm a believer that this conflict will not be resolved in Moscow or Washington or somewhere else. At the end of the day Georgia and Abkhaz will sit together, and we have to decide our fate. So, no matter what the Russian involvement will be, or the other strong countries, I think being in Sokhumi after the conflict, and negotiating with Abkhaz, there is really a chance for us to sit down and get over what happened, and to start thinking about co-existence. I believe in that.

#### **ALEXANDER COOLEY**

Thank you, Ambassador. Thank you to all our panelists, thank you for your thoughtful questions. And we will reconvene for the third session in fifteen minutes at three thirty.