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It Should Be So and it Will Be So!

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Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili addressed the 63<sup>rd</sup> Session of the United Nations last week. Georgia, Saakashvili told heads of government and ambassadors of the 192 member nations, was “invaded by our neighbor.” Rather than dwell on the war, however, the Georgian President set out two challenges for the peace. He asked the international community, “Will we draw a clear line and defend the principles that uphold the international order, and declare—enough? Then he rededicated Georgia to ambitious democratic reforms in a “Second Rose Revolution.” It was a principled call to action on several fronts.

To many delegates who gathered in New York, Georgia is a faraway place, and the facts of Russia’s August assault may have been unclear. For them, Saakashvili deftly painted the picture of Russia’s war.

“We saw proxy forces and militias cynically unleashed to ethnically cleanse the population of my country...80-year-old men and women driven from their village homes...hundreds of thousands of innocent souls taking shelter from bombings...a sickening campaign of “ecocide”... hundreds dead; nearly 200,000 displaced...a small country of less than five million being trampled by a neighbor 300 times its size.”

More important was the universal lesson Saakashvili drew from the smoldering rubble of Russian aggression. “Despite our small size,” he told the world body, “the legal, moral, political, and security implications raised by that invasion could not be larger in consequence. Indeed, those issues cut through to the heart of the UN’s founding charter.”

“The international community,” Saakashvili concluded, “has emerged from the invasion of my country with something truly valuable—clarity... With clarity comes responsibility.”

On the international front, at a minimum, the world must take up the positions that Saakashvili sketched in New York: vocal opposition to aggression; unequivocal support for Georgia’s territorial integrity, including Abkhazia and South Ossetia; insistence upon full implementation of the ceasefire agreement; and active engagement in an effective process for real peace.”

On the home front, Saakashvili announced a remarkable twist. Georgia will “fight the specter of aggression and authoritarianism with the most potent weapons in our arsenal. Whereas others waged this war with arms, we will wage it with values.”

The President of Georgia outlined four bold new reforms at home: “greater independence to Parliament and to the judiciary...increasing funding for opposition parties and ensuring they have greater access to the airwaves...trials by jury, and lifetime judicial appointments...expand and deepen protections of private property.”

Saakashvili persuasively combined democracy at home with the principles upon which the United Nations was founded—“inviolability of sovereign borders; the sanctity of human rights; the supremacy of international law; and the global rejection of armed aggression.”

The two are connected. Saakashvili correctly said that Russia lashed out because Georgia is democratic. Moreover, if Russia were democratic, working out its own post-Soviet destiny, it would be unlikely to dispatch uniformed hoodlums to attack its tiny southern neighbor.

Only the Russian people can bring about democratic change in Russia. Only the Georgian people can continue democratic change in Georgia.

Now, says distinguished Georgian scholar Archil Gegeshidze, "Words should be followed by action." Quite right. Georgians—government and people—must believe that it should be so and it will be so!

And if it becomes so, that will be a call to action on a third front—NATO.

Brussels repeats two points so often that they have become near clichés: no third country veto of any candidate and membership is performance-based.

When NATO balked at a Membership Action Plan for Georgia at its April 2-4 Bucharest Summit, it came about as close as possible to a third country veto without inviting Russian Czar Vladimir Putin into the room. Contrary to NATO rhetoric, as Georgia's performance on its current Individual Partnership Action Plan grew more solid, and as Moscow grew more intransigent, the alliance criteria for MAP turned downright political.

The Bucharest bumble played at least some part in emboldening Moscow to attack Georgia.

Now that the television phase of the war is done, NATO has resumed talk of performance-based decisions, with particular emphasis on rule of law reforms. On the eve of his recent visit to Georgia, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told the *Financial Times* that his message to Georgia would be, "You are a democracy, act like a democracy, strengthen your democracy strengthen the rule of law."

Fair point.

In New York, Saakashvili accepted the challenge. Now, NATO should be clear that it expects to see in weeks, not months, an implementation plan and the first steps toward the further democratic reforms outlined at the UN. It should be equally clear that if Georgia performs, the NATO foreign ministers meeting in December would grant it a MAP. Full implementation of the democratic reform package could become one of the criteria written into the MAP, which is, after all, a rigorous reform plan.

If the western countries learned anything from this war, it should be so.

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