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Tbilisi's Political Corpse Gets 'F' on Democracy

By Tsotne Bakuria

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U.S. diplomat Richard Holbrooke was a staunch ally of President Mikheil Saakashvili, who named a cobblestone street in Tbilisi after him. Holbrooke's death last week was bad news for Saakashvili. The number of Saakashvili supporters in the West have dwindled to a record low.

The WikiLeaks cables underscore the level of disappointment in Saakashvili and his failures in building democracy.

In one diplomatic cable, U.S. Ambassador John Bass wrote: "With a more stable economy and no viable rival, President Saakashvili is stronger politically but paradoxically more insecure, burdened by the fear history will judge him to have lost irrevocably the occupied territories."

This is a reference to Saakashvili's reckless invasion of South Ossetia that sparked the brief war with Russia in August 2008 and the loss of roughly 20 percent of what many in Georgia considered Georgian territory.

Bass also notes "a steady drumbeat of Russian accusations about the legitimacy and behavior of his government." Reading between the lines, the ambassador is no doubt referring to the corruption in Saakashvili's government and the continued stream of scandals.

Bass also wrote: "Officials have avoided suggesting that the contribution will help Georgia get into NATO, saying instead that it will help Georgia demonstrate itself as a contributing partner, with the apparent implication that NATO allies will then take Georgia more seriously."

What Bass doesn't say is that Georgia will never be admitted into NATO as long as Saakashvili is president.

In his new memoir, former U.S. President George W. Bush assessed the Georgian president's personality as "hot-blooded." European leaders also do not take Saakashvili seriously, and more are joining in President Dmitry Medvedev's belief that he is a "political corpse."

"Much of the public," Bass said, "is still looking for the government to make good on its promises of a new wave of democratic reform as articulated by Saakashvili after the August 2008 conflict."

The 2003 Rose Revolution, which ushered in a wave of optimism, has resulted in stagnation. There is no democracy in Georgia. There is only a small street named Holbrooke and a larger one named Bush.

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The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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