

Burjanadze Can't Bring Arab Spring to Georgia

By [Paul Rimple](#)

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Georgian opposition leader Nino Burjanadze last week was in Kiev, where she publicly denied the allegations that her ill-fated coup d'état was a Russian-backed conspiracy. She added that if it had been orchestrated by Russia, she would have been able to overthrow Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili with 4,000 armed men.

Such grandstanding echoes Igor Giorgadze, Georgia's former security chief who refuted charges that he attempted to kill President Eduard Shevardnadze in 1995 by saying, "If I had, I would have been successful."

Giorgadze is another marginal Georgian opposition leader in exile, much like Burjanadze's husband, Badri Bitsadze, who fled the country last week after being charged with "organizing attacks on policemen."

Burjanadze, who had a popularity rating of about 1 percent, said she was trying to "peacefully

achieve the transformations my country needs.” So when her supporters attacked a police car and innocent people were suspected of being collaborators, they were doing it peacefully. But most news coverage failed to mention that.

Burjanadze had absolutely no chance of imitating the Arab Spring, her stated intention. For one thing, Georgia set the trend for peacefully toppling perfidious regimes eight years ago. But more important, she has no support. The 2,000 people whom television cameras showed on the streets the first day did not come because they love Burjanadze. They came because they are poor and hungry and cannot compete in the new system that the Rose Revolution so rapidly introduced.

What the cameras didn’t show was that the crowd dwindled down to several hundred the next day and that other fringe opposition leaders failed to join because they hate Burjanadze as well as one another.

Many local observers believe that her real intention was to simply discredit Saakashvili and prove she was still relevant enough to do so. Burjanadze knew Saakashvili would send the riot cops in when she tried to prevent him from holding a military parade to celebrate 20 years of independence from Russia. Her rabble-rousing supporters brandished sticks and planted caches of Molotov cocktails on side streets. She wanted them to get their heads cracked, and they did, while she escaped in a motorcade that left a policeman dead in its wake.

The story was never about Burjanadze. What the cameras caught was Saakashvili’s riot cops cracking heads. If this wasn’t a scenario planned in the Kremlin, then at least it gave Moscow a good laugh.

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