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How Saakashvili Tries to Avenge Ivanishvili

By Paul Rimple

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After Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili conceded defeat the day after his party lost in the Oct. 1 parliamentary elections, he said he would work together with Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili for the sake of Georgian democracy. Everybody in Georgia knew that was bunk. It isn't that these guys have fundamental political differences. They don't. It's that Ivanishvili is a threat to the private interests Saakashvili's United National Movement has accumulated in the past nine years. They are not going to let those go.

To highlight this point, Saakashvili created his own private army on Nov. 21 when he signed a decree establishing a "special paramilitary body of executive government directly subordinate to Georgia's President."

Some of us had hoped that the United National Movement's surprise defeat would have led Saakashvili and his team to do some soul-searching and honestly ask themselves "where did we go wrong?" Obviously, this hasn't been the case.

In a video address commemorating the 2003 Rose Revolution, Saakashvili magnanimously said, "We have handed them more powers than was envisaged by the Constitution because we want them to be able to govern and to deliver on those promises they made to you."

Who is he kidding? The United National Movement is a highly concentrated machine with one aim: to regain power. It wants Ivanishvili to fail and has placed booby traps everywhere to achieve this goal. To be sure, Ivanishvili has been good at stepping on them so far.

Ivanishvili's binge of arresting Saakashvili loyalists has backfired because everybody now believes that the campaign was politically motivated. A rash of nationwide strikes, believed to be instigated by the United National Movement, has reportedly shut down two companies, and the government's incapacity to confront the problem is scaring away foreign investors. Ivanishvili's prison reform means releasing perhaps thousands of prisoners, which the prime minister has admitted will likely lead to an increase in crime.

Saakashvili said, "I've been with my people in peace, war, hardship and during rebuilding, and I will not leave my people in the times of danger either." But it's no thanks to him there has been war, hardship and danger.

Saakashvili forgets that there was a reason his party lost the elections last month. Why else would he surround himself with his own private army? If he really wants to help Georgia, he can start by no longer putting himself before the country.

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