

Georgia:

The revolution of guns, not roses



Kmara's clenched fist - straight from the Otpor training manual

Executive Summary

On 23rd November, 2003 Eduard Shevardnadze who had ruled Georgia for 11 years was overthrown in a coup d'état following allegations of fraud in the country's parliamentary election held on 2nd November. The Georgian government collapsed simultaneously and new presidential elections have been called for 4th January 2004 with a fresh parliamentary poll to be held at a later date. In the meantime, the country is being ruled by an interim government appointed by the former Speaker of the Georgian parliament - and one of the coup organizers - Nino Burjanadze who is, according to the Georgian constitution, the interim legal acting president.

BHHRG's representatives observed the 2003 election and concluded that it was conducted to a higher standard than all the other polls the Group has monitored in Georgia since 1992. However, BHHRG was aware that elaborate plans had been laid both in Tbilisi and abroad to dispute the conduct of the election as well as the results. The agenda was devised for opposition parties to challenge the compilation and accuracy of the country's electoral registers claiming that voter lists were at the same time both inflated and incomplete, in the latter case due to the absence on the rolls of large numbers of their supporters. At the same time, a deliberately misleading opinion and exit poll was used to persuade the population of Georgia that the Western-favoured opposition parties led in the opinion polls and that its two electoral blocs had been cheated of victory by the manipulations of the Shevardnadze regime.

Although the coup was sentimentally referred to by the Western media as the 'revolution of roses', it has followed a familiar course with the dismissal of large numbers of officials and government employees and their replacement by opposition appointees. Opposition-sponsored violence also seems to be on the increase. Although BHHRG's observers were always outspokenly critical of the Shevardnadze regime when most other human rights groups and democracy activists were silent and supportive, they fear that Georgia's already poverty-stricken, third world status will deteriorate further as its new rulers appear to be more interested in the country's place on the world stage than in domestic issues. Its new rulers

were key promoters of the policies in the 1990s which led to the implosion of living standards in Georgia.

As people struggle to make sense of Eduard Shevardnadze's devastating descent from messiah to pariah, Georgia is moving on and preparing to become a front line in the 'war on terror' as the new regime adopts a more aggressive approach to Russia. If not handled with care, belligerence towards its neighbour in the north could lead to unpleasant and unforeseen consequences that could involve an inevitable confrontation between the superpowers.

Georgia: Parliamentary Elections 2003



A cuddly-looking candidate on the Burjanadze-Democrats list, No.7

Background

Even in Soviet times the south Caucasian republic of Georgia enjoyed a favourable reputation in the West for its physical beauty, vibrant culture and high standard of living. Georgia, of all the post Soviet republics, should have undergone a relatively painless transition after the collapse of Communism and quickly embraced a prosperous future as an independent state. Instead, its declaration of independence in 1990 provoked civil war as two of its provinces – Abkhazia and South Ossetia - proclaimed de facto independence. They still remain outside the control of the authorities in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, although unrecognised internationally. Meanwhile, thousands of refugees from the wars languish in miserable accommodation all over the country.

In 1991, Georgia's first democratically elected president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was overthrown in a violent coup d'état. Many players had a hand in bringing his shaky presidency to an end including local militias, units from Russian bases stationed in the republic and Western governments who regarded Gamsakhurdia as a 'flaky' nationalist with no experience of

government. These disparate groups were delighted when former Georgian Communist Party boss and the Soviet Union's last foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, returned to the country in 1992 and assumed power. He was elected Speaker of Parliament – in effect, head of state - in elections held in October, 1992. After a new constitution was passed in 1995, Shevardnadze successfully won elections as president in 1995 and, again in 2000.

BHHRG's observers monitored these elections.¹ However, although the Group found them to be fundamentally flawed, international organizations and Western states validated the results and uncritically supported Shevardnadze's presidency until the end of the decade. His power base was also bolstered with large amounts of Western aid, making Georgia, by the mid 1990s, the third largest recipient of US financial assistance per capita in the world. The president reciprocated this largesse by faithfully supporting Washington's policy agenda in the region which included sending peacekeepers to Kosovo and partaking in NATO's 'train and equip' programme. In 1999, Georgia became an associate member of NATO's Parliamentary Assembly with the goal of joining the organization in the near future. US troops were allowed to base themselves in Georgia as part of the war on terrorism to pursue alleged Al Qaeda guerrilla activity in the Pankisi Gorge on the border with Chechnya.

Shevardnadze's Georgia was also a co-signatory to an agreement for a pipeline to be built that would take oil from the Caspian Sea via Georgia to Turkey and on to Western markets. Funding and construction of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline are now underway. A further agreement was recently signed for the Shah-Deniz pipeline, this time to take gas from the Caspian - again to Turkey and the West. Georgia's own domestic energy woes were meant to be solved by the sale of the country's main electricity provider to a US company, AES, in 1999.

However, despite his cosy (client) relationship with the West, the financial crumbs never left the table and reached the population of Georgia. During the 1990s the usual course of 'reform' unfolded leading to the closure of most of the country's enterprises while its agricultural sector (including its world-famous vineyards) faced a crisis with the collapse of the Soviet market. Large numbers of people – the young, in particular – left, usually to Russia. According to census figures released in May 2003, the population of Georgia has shrunk by 1m. since independence.² Serious, mafia-related crime often perpetrated by the militias who had overrun the country during the early 1990s, also created misery for large sections of the population. Many supporters of former president Gamsakhurdia were arrested, often tortured and kept in inhumane conditions in the country's appalling jails. A few Western human rights groups expressed concern, but their (albeit muted) protests were never followed up by Mr. Shevardnadze's friends in Washington or Brussels.

¹ See BHHRG's Georgia reports, www.oscewatch.org

² see. IWPR, Caucasus report 15th May, 2003, www.iwpr.net

By the end of the decade Georgia was a mess. Its population survived on a few lari (the Georgian currency) a month – pensioners receive 14 lari. But, large numbers of people in rural areas had opted out of the monetarized economy to live at subsistence level, depending on a few cows, hens and a vegetable garden for survival. The world of oil pipelines seemed far away from the true state of Georgia with its crumbling infrastructure, including bad roads and electricity shortages. Unfavourable stories began to appear in the Western media but, until the late 1990s, Shevardnadze still appeared immune from criticism.

Eduard Shevardnadze's Fall from Grace

Few ordinary Georgians will have mourned the fall of Eduard Shevardnadze on 23rd November, 2003. Most of them were dismayed when he returned to their country in 1992, despite the propaganda dished out to Western audiences at the time which constantly harped on his 'popularity'. Shevardnadze had been a ruthless first secretary of the Communist Party between 1972-85 presiding over a harsh Moscow-backed campaign against alleged corruption. He had also overseen the destruction of large parts of old Tbilisi which led to many residents being thrown out of their homes at a moment's notice and relocated to large blocks of flats whose architecture was wholly inappropriate to the local style. Ironically, his return to power in 1992 was followed by more destruction of Tbilisi as mafia businessmen pulled down historic buildings in the old city replacing them with tasteless houses, bars and hotels.³



One of unsympathetic buildings now being erected in old Tbilisi

Almost immediately, on his return leading Western politicians came to pay court to the man who they lauded for helping to bring an end to the Cold War. Then U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker proffered the hand of unending friendship; Germany's Foreign Minister Hans Dietrich Genscher was another big fan. Shevardnadze was also a regular visitor to the U.S. where he schmoozed with the likes of George Schultz, ending up as a director of Schultz run companies. In 1995 he visited London and took tea with the

³ Natia Jokhadze, "Deconstructing Tbilisi", *ToL*, 29th October, 2003, www.tol.cz

Queen at Buckingham Palace. He was loaded with honorary doctorates from Harvard, Boston and Emory universities in the U.S. as well as numerous, well-funded prizes. In 1993 the Germans gave him the Immanuel Kant prize, in 1997 he was awarded the Onnasis Prize, and, also in 1997, he received the Nixon Prize. In 1999 Madelaine Albright presented him with the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) Harriman Medal of Freedom.

But these were false friends. Zeyno Baran of the Nixon Centre, who was an election observer at the 2nd November election, is now one of his most fervent critics⁴ and the NDI has actively helped bring about his downfall. Perhaps the furies really were after Eduard Shevardnadze when he was given the Enron Prize in 1999 by none other than Ken Lay in a ceremony held in the Baker Centre at Rice University but none of his critics today said so at the time.⁵

But on closer inspection, Shevardnadze's friendship with the likes of George Schultz and James Baker never quite rung true. Despite the sycophantic efforts of journalists like Simon Sebag Montefiore who has continued to boast about his special relationship with the old party hack⁶ the president spoke no English - the only language spoken by his American friends. In Washington, those close to the centres of power hinted that their closeness to Eduard Shevardnadze wasn't a matter of social niceties and that the old Politburo member had been 'turned' and was now an 'asset' of the United States.

The few isolated voices (like BHHRG) who claimed all along that the Shevardnadze regime was corrupt, incompetent and cruel were derided. A British Foreign Office official is reported as saying: "They [meaning BHHRG] also monitored the elections in Georgia in 1995, and it would appear that [they] had made up their minds about the election report even before the election had taken place".⁷ As the BHHRG representative in question had prepared a pre-election report together with the Norwegian Helsinki Committee it is hardly surprising that they were opining before the poll took place. Judging from the briefing material handed out to British Foreign Office employees before the 2nd November 2003 poll, it would seem that their minds had also been made up "even before the election had taken place"!

On 23rd September 2003 the United States announced that it was cutting USAID funding to Georgia. The World Bank and IMF also pulled the plug stopping loans until, that is, the 'corruption' in Georgia was cleared up.⁸

⁴ Zeno Baran, "Georgia: High Stakes for U.S. Credibility", *The National Interest*, 13th November 2003. Ms. Baran later married the US diplomat, Matthew Bryza, who was responsible for Caucasus policy. In November, 2007, anti-Saakashvili demonstrators made scurrilous allegations against them.

⁵ "Shevardnadze to Speak at Rice's Baker Institute April 22". Visit to Rice's James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy. April 22, 1999, www.rice.edu/projects/reno/Newsrel/1999

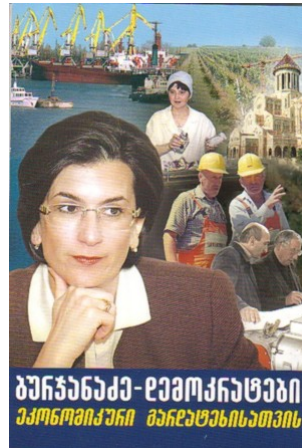
⁶ Simon Sebag Montefiore "Shevardnadze was respected – but never loved – by Georgians", *Daily Telegraph*, 25th November, 2003

⁷ Jeremy Druker "Who's Afraid of the British Helsinki Group" *Transitions*, February, 1999

⁸ Natalia Antelava "United States Cuts Development Aid to Georgia", www.eurasianet.org, 29/9/03

These handouts have never helped ordinary Georgian citizens but they are the engine of much of the corruption in countries like Georgia. The grants and loans are important as they enable a government to pay off its apparatus and attendant cronies. The withdrawal of such funds meant that Shevardnadze's power base was strapped for cash in the run up to the election. This was attested to by the fact that by 23rd November, he had been deserted by his security organs as well as the army and the police.

Georgia on the eve of the 2003 election



A pensive looking Nino Burjanadze seen against the background of a non-existent Georgia, where people have jobs and historical buildings are lovingly preserved

Basic Facts

The 2nd November poll was the fourth parliamentary election held in Georgia since the fall of the Soviet Union.

There are 235 seats in the Georgian parliament. 150 are filled by party lists while 85 MPs are elected from single mandate constituencies. A referendum was held at the same time as the 2003 parliamentary election which asked voters whether they agreed with reducing the number of MPs to fewer than 150. Although passed, the proposition will not, presumably, be implemented as the 2nd November 2003 poll has been declared void. 22 blocs and parties contested the election, an improvement on previous years – in 1999 33 blocs and 3000 individual candidates took part in the poll. In 1999 the election law was amended to introduce a threshold of 7% for a party's eligibility to enter parliament. Only 3 parties/blocs managed to do so that year – the Citizens Union (41.75%), Revival Union (25.18%) and Industry Will Save Georgia which scraped through with 7.08%. Turnout in 1999 was officially 67%. The Unified Election Code was further amended in 2003 to allow for a new CEC and abolish the use of additional voters' lists.

However, the large number of political organizations registered in Georgia creates a misleading impression. Many of them are little more than names and there is next-to-no grass roots political life in the country. Like most post-Soviet societies, politics is a luxury for the few, inhibited for the many by the daily grind. Travel between regions is impaired by bad roads and a virtually non-existent rail network. There are few cities of any size – it takes 4 hours to drive from Tbilisi to Georgia's second largest town, Kutaisi, and there are no regular flights to the country's largest port, Batumi. The constitution allows the president to appoint regional governors meaning that local administrations are under central control. With massive unemployment, many people are unwilling to rock the boat by supporting parties

frowned on by the apparat in Tbilisi. As this apparat has now changed, many voters will cast their ballots accordingly in support of the 'new class', the Burjanadze Democrats and the National Movement.

Political Parties, fronts and turncoats



One of the more improbable turncoats, Guram Absandze, who was Zviad Gamsakhurdia's Finance Minister, is now a member of the new government.

In 1993, Shevardnadze consolidated his rule by overseeing the creation of a political party, the Citizens Union, which won the country's (flawed) elections in 1995 and 1999. Although there has been much romanticism about the 'opposition' which has now overthrown him, its leading members were all personally close to Mr. Shevardnadze as well as being Citizens Union MPs and ministers in successive Georgian governments. For example, Zurab Zhvania was Chairman of the Georgian parliament until he resigned in 2002. He topped the Citizen's Union party list for the 1999 parliamentary election. Mikheil Saakashvili was second on that list and, at the same time, chairman of the party. He later became Minister of Justice resigning from his post in 2001 after claiming that the government would not support him in the fight against corruption. This was the beginning of Mr. Saakashvili's fight for the 'little man'. In the following year, Saakashvili founded his own political party, the National Movement, to contest the 2002 local elections. A coalition of parties, including the National Movement, gained control of Tbilisi city council and Saakashvili became, effectively, the council's leader.

Nino Burjanadze was No. 6 on the Citizens Union list in 1999. Previously Chairman of the Parliamentary Legal Affairs Committee, she became Speaker of Parliament after Zhvania resigned in 2002. Burjanadze and Zhvania joined forces to form the bloc, the 'United Democratic Party' known as the 'Burjanadze Democrats' for the 2003 election. It was openly accepted that she should front the party as Mr. Zhvania is deeply unpopular in Georgia. However, despite the spin which extols Mrs. Burjanadze's gravitas and 'scholarly appearance' due, no doubt, to the fact that she wears glasses, local critics refer to her as a 'marionette' in the hands of the more powerful Zhvania.

Family ties were also at work cementing the three former Shevardnadze loyalists (referred to by critics as 'Shevardnadze's children') to successive governments in Georgia. Mrs. Burjanadze's father had been a close colleague of Shevardnadze's in Soviet times when he ran the country's bread monopoly since privatised to Burjanadze senior's benefit. He had also been best man at Shevardnadze's wedding. Mrs. Burjanadze's husband was also Georgia's deputy prosecutor-general and, before that, the country's chief military prosecutor. As for

Saakashvili, his affection for Mr. Shevardnadze was such that he named his son Eduard after the president.

Although the Western media consistently describes these people as 'the opposition' they are only a small part of the political landscape in Georgia. There have always been anti-Shevardnadze parties but, they are either ignored by Western commentators or dismissed as either 'nationalistic' or 'Soviet nostalgic'. Needless to say, as all power, including the media, rested in the hands of Shevardnadze and his Citizens Union, the real opposition never stood a chance of coming to power. For example, until the mid 1990s, supporters of former president Gamsakhurdia remained implacably opposed to the Shevardnadze regime although the movement lost momentum after the former president died in mysterious circumstances in December 1993. Zviadists still maintain some support in Western Georgia, in the former president's home region of Mingrelia. Meanwhile, the police and security services hounded the remaining Zviadists who were subjected to arrest and trial on what appeared to be trumped up charges. BHHRG met many of them either in prison or living in poverty-stricken circumstances in Tbilisi and concluded that they lacked the means or capacity to threaten the security of the state.

The Zviadist political movement split as some members urged realism: the president was dead and the only chance of continuing his legacy was to join other parties. However, its remaining intellectual core has remained intact and continues to be implacably anti-Russian, blaming all Georgia's woes on Moscow, despite the fact that economic and social collapse has only come about under Western tutelage. The fact that the Zviadist movement was still something to play for is demonstrated by Michel Saakashvili's cynical appeal to the former president's supporters during the 2003 parliamentary campaign - the movement's Zviad Dzidiguri was among the top 5 candidates on Saakashvili's party list. The representatives of the youth organization, Kmara, also said that Saakashvili had Zviadists "with him". BHHRG was told by Kmara, that Gamsakhurdia had been a "real patriot" whom "everyone loved" adding that no one, either, had a bad word to say for Merab Kostava (Gamsakhurdia's fellow dissident who was killed in a car crash in 1988). "People blame Russia for overthrowing Gamsakhurdia" they added. Several Tbilisi-based, Zviadist intellectuals had swallowed this cynical change of heart - the Kmara youth tend to be children of official Tbilisi which always hated the late president.⁹

The Zviadist realists eventually joined up with the Revival Union, a party that was the brainchild of Aslan Abashidze, the governor of the regional province of Adjara. They cooperated in the 1999 election and Revival became the second largest party in the Georgian parliament. BHHRG's observers at the 1999 election reported that numerous acts of violence and intimidation had been directed against Revival supporters both before and during the poll, presumably by the authorities; BHHRG's observers were convinced that Revival was the real winner of that election.¹⁰ Even *Radio Free Europe* had to admit that Revival was the most serious challenger to Shevardnadze's regime in 1999.¹¹ Other Zviadists remained in their own small organization and fought the 20003 election as the National Unity bloc.

Western governments and their tame media consistently ignore opposition parties they don't like or approve of. For example, 3 Western-orientated parties are always referred to as 'the opposition' in Ukraine, thus ignoring the much larger Communist Party. In Serbia, the situation is so Orwellian that the DOS government which consisted of 17 minute parties continued to be referred to as the 'opposition' well into its 3rd year in power. The main opposition parties, the Serbian Radicals and Socialist parties are, again, ignored or referred to with a peg attached to the nose. In Georgia, there are several leftist parties which all have a reasonable degree of support. For example, there is the Labour Party which did well in Tbilisi in the 2002 local elections. Labour has campaigned against the high cost of electricity prices. Another party, Industry Will Save Georgia, also put forward a leftist platform that demanded the exclusion of the IMF from Georgia. It was the third largest party in parliament

⁹ BHHRG, discussions with Kmara representatives, Tbilisi 29th October, 2003

¹⁰ Georgia 1999: Parliamentary Elections, www.oscewatch.org

¹¹ RFE/RL 29th September, 1999, www.rferl.org

after the 1999 poll. Yet another party, Unity, led by the last boss of the Georgian CP, Jumbar Patiashvili also has a respectable following. No attention was paid to the 'pure' Zviadists re-grouped around Guram Absandze in the National Unity bloc although Mrs. Burjanadze has reportedly rewarded the Zviadists for their support by appointing Absandze a deputy minister of state in the new government.¹²

There is also the situation, familiar in many post-Soviet states of politicians moving from one party to another - from left to right to centre and back again. Saakashvili is a case in point. As Shevardnadze's Minister of Justice he was a 'centrist'. Now he has reinvented himself as a patriotic Georgian nationalist. Other parties have swapped their allegiances. For example, the former Speaker of Parliament in Gamsakhurdia's government, Akaki Asatiani, moved the support of his Traditionalist Party away from its 1999 alliance with Revival to the Burjanadze Democrats in 2003. Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia who had always stood as an opponent of Mr. Shevardnadze allied her National Democratic Party with the pro-Shevardnadze, For a New Georgia (FANG) bloc this time round.

Another turncoat is David Gamkrelidze who left the Citizens Union in 2001 to form the New Rights Party which has strong ties with the U.S. Republican Party. The party's spokesman, Irakli Areshidze, told BHHRG that he was "a neo-con" and that New Rights supported ultra-free market policies, including an increase in Georgia's defence spending to 3% of the budget which would mean even more vicious cuts in social spending. The idea that Georgians living in a malfunctioning rural society which cannot provide the most basic needs like electricity and water should want to increase defence spending defies belief and demonstrates the real agenda behind this party's policies.

Generally speaking, as time goes on and the quality of life fails to improve, fewer people are going out to vote. The turnout for the 2003 election was 50%, down 17% from 1999. Due to the profusion of parties, their mixed messages and strange alliances – blocs often contain groupings of both right and left - people tend to cast their vote for personalities. Even then, their allegiances are fickle: BHHRG remembers voters ecstatically chanting Shevardnadze's name outside polling stations in 1992, yet during the recent election they were screaming abuse at him. In both cases, there was a strong suspicion that the centres of power had encouraged the public response, meaning that power had shifted away from Shevardnadze by November, 2003.

Election-driven coups

The international community began to distance itself from Mr. Shevardnadze and his regime in 2000 when the OSCE harshly criticized the conduct of that year's presidential election. It was the first time that the organization had made an unqualified attack on a Georgian poll. By 2003, many commentators would have agreed with Avtandil Ioseliani, Chairman of the Georgian State Intelligence Department, that "with the approach of the general elections in Georgia ...the intervention of Western countries in Georgian domestic affairs is very likely".¹³

In 2001, several leading figures in the Citizens Union broke away from the party and by the time of the election only 47 members of parliament remained in its parliamentary caucus. The Speaker, Zurab Zhvania resigned followed by the Minister of Justice, Mikheil Saakashvili. Later, Nino Burjanadze, Zhvania's successor as parliamentary speaker also abandoned the presidential team. Other well-known politicians left the Citizens Union, including Eelena Tevdoradze who was the parliamentary human rights chairman under Shevardnadze. BHHRG visited Georgia in 2001 and talked to the opposition as well as its tame media and NGO support system.¹⁴ It was obvious then that plans were being laid to ditch Shevardnadze's regime. However, the shock caused to the USA by the 11th September events and that country's preoccupation with the upcoming war in Iraq probably delayed the president's eventual ouster.

¹² See, Rustavi 2 reported in www.bbcmonitoring.co.uk. 6th December 2003

¹³ Zviad Pochkhua "Georgia human-rights organization accused of meddling", *Daily Georgian Times*, 1st May, 2003

¹⁴ See report "Twilight of Shevardnadze" www.oscewatch.org (2001)

During the Group's 2001 visit there was much talk of Mikheil Saakashvili as the 'coming man'. He had obviously been targeted some time ago to play a leading role in Georgian politics having been groomed during an extensive period of study at American universities, including Columbia Law school. His various U.S. diplomas are always prominently displayed on the wall behind him during television interviews. He also spent time as an intern with the top New York law firm, Patterson, Belknap, Webb and Tyler. Later, he founded his own political party, the National Movement, to fight local elections for the Tbilisi city council in 2002. The NM adopted the trappings of ancient Georgian independence, including its red and white flag.

President Shevardnadze's supporters formed a new bloc, For a New Georgia (FANG) to contest the 2003 election. Probably reflecting the absence of foreign funding, FANG's campaign was a pale shadow of those conducted in the past by the Citizens Union. By 2003, the party's offices were situated in a dark, run down building away from the city centre. Its election campaign and posters were positively restrained compared with those for the Burjanadze Democrats and Saakashvili's National Movement, whose lavishly coloured banners decorated numerous buildings and bestrode the country's major highways. Poverty-stricken Georgian peasants driving their few pigs and goats along these roads must have marvelled at the 'democrats' no-expense-spared election campaign and calculated that the cost of one of these banners could have paid their pensions for several years.

BHHRG interviewed George Zurabashvili, Secretary General of the Citizens Union, about the campaign. He was dubious about the level of support claimed by opposition parties saying that the media inflates their numbers. He alleged that Zhvania's popularity was nil and that Mrs. Burjanadze had a reputation as a "dirty politician". He also expressed suspicion about the motivation for criticizing the electoral lists claiming that the "chaos had been prepared deliberately to provide an excuse to falsify the election". He also wanted to know what had happened to the list prepared by the U.S. based International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES). Although BHHRG was told by other parties, including the Labour Party, that the government controlled all the levers of power Zurabashvili hinted that there were people in all parts of the administration, including the departments of state, like the Justice Ministry, who supported the opposition and could be part of its plans to sabotage the poll. Mikheil Saakashvili was Minister of Justice until he resigned in 2001. In the days before the 23rd November 'coup', Tedo Japaridze, Secretary of the National Security Council and former Georgian ambassador to the U.S., appeared to jump ship. On 30th November he was rewarded for his disloyalty to Mr. Shevardnadze by being made the country's Foreign Minister in the new government.¹⁵

How to manufacture a failed election:

There were several strands in the strategy which led to the coup d'etat, officially caused by the peoples' indignation that the election had been stolen. First of all, a level of confusion was created so that the electorate was driven to lose faith in the veracity of the electoral process. This was primarily done by constantly denouncing the state of the election registers.

Election Lists: When examining the farrago that surrounded the allegations that the election lists in Georgia were a mess¹⁶, two important factors have to be borne in mind. Firstly, everyone who lives in the country and has the right to vote has a passport or identity card. Georgia's constitution does not permit dual citizenship, so there can be no 'foreigners' who can vote in the republic. In other words, compilation of the electoral register should be simple. Secondly, voters' lists have been consistently bad in the past because the authorities permitted the use of an additional list for those whose names were not recorded on the official register. No doubt, a combination of *schlamperei* and manipulation by the powers-that-be (which, until recently included the Saakashvili-Zhvania-Burjanadze trio) allowed this unsatisfactory practice to continue. Everyone admits now that the additional list enabled

¹⁵ See, www.batuminews.com, 30th October, 2003

¹⁶ "Voter List Discrepancies Cast Pall Over Georgia's Parliamentary Vote" www.kvali.com

people to vote in several polling stations by adding their names to these lists and that their use was widespread. In previous polls monitored by BHHRG its observers noted unusually high numbers of voters on these lists.

BHHRG was told by the Labour Party that extra names had been added to boost FANG's share of the vote while their own supporters had been removed. Members of the Zviadist National Unity bloc made the preposterous claim that 140,000 members of their party were left off the lists. On the one hand, they were inflated, on the other, large numbers of people were alleged to be missing. Complaints continued until the last moment that people had been added/left off the lists – again, mainly in Tbilisi and Kutaisi. Mrs Burjanadze herself said that she had been left off the electoral register in Kutaisi. According to the National Movement, the only living people on the list for Tbilisi's Krtsanisi district were the Shevardnadze family and three other residents¹⁷ On 30th October, the New Rights Party added their voice to the debate claiming that there were only 1.58 m. eligible voters in Georgia while the CEC put the number at 2.7 m. Articles appeared in the press claiming that thousands of dead people were registered while the living were missing.

The deadline for completion of the registers was pushed forward to 30th October, 3 days before polling began. In the event, the final lists were hand written as there had been no time to print them out from the computerised material. The authorities in Adjara tired of this game, so, they conducted their own census and produced their own computerised lists, with photographs appended. Nevertheless, the NDI claimed, falsely, that the lists in Adjara were not computerised.¹⁸ Despite their best endeavours and with no evidence other than bald assertions, the OSCE and other election monitors repeated the allegation that the Adjara lists were inflated. As the Georgian script is impenetrable to most Westerners it is still a mystery how these observers can have had a clue about how many people there are and who lived where in Georgia.

There were many recommendations from experts before the 2003 poll, including from the Venice Commission, the Council of Europe's legal arm which demanded, among other things, more women candidates. During the early months of 2003 the US-based organization, International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), sent a team to Georgia to computerise the voter registers. At the same time, the Georgian Ministry of Interior was compiling its own lists. There were constant complaints about the slowness of the process as well as allegations that names had been both added or omitted. The situation was further complicated when a new Central Election Commission began work at the beginning of September. IFES presented its computerised list in October giving the new CEC little time to check its contents before the 2nd November poll. Then, on 27th October, IFES mysteriously shut up shop saying it was closing its operations because its workers were "too tired". The team left Tbilisi, its work uncompleted.¹⁹ Following this, both the opposition and CEC decided it was "too difficult" so late in the day to check the computerised data and opted to use hand-written lists.

However, it was the Georgian authorities rather than the international 'experts' who ensured that additional lists were abolished for the 2003 election. A change was made to the election code to that effect. BHHRG's observers have repeatedly reported the unsatisfactory state of the election lists in Georgia and it seems that most people, at least on the ground, agreed. However, the possibility of participating in the poll anyway by having ones name added to the additional list meant that no one bothered too much about the system. It is now admitted that these lists enabled people to go around and vote in several polling stations without being detected. As it happens, the Shevardnadze government feared that this kind of malpractice would now be used against *them* and, therefore, stopped the practice.

¹⁷ Natalia Antelava, "Dead Man Voting" www.tol.cz, 27/10/03

¹⁸ "U.S.: Pre-Election Delegation's Statement " 7th October, 2003, www.civil.ge

¹⁹ See IFES press statement, 28th October, 2003 www.ifes.org

People were also urged to check the lists, but “ a poll of 600 [voters] in Tbilisi found 25% wouldn’t protest as they think the outcome of the election predetermined”²⁰ The implication being that they wouldn’t vote anyway – so what did it matter if the lists were inaccurate? On the 1st November, CEC head, Nina Devdoriani announced that people not on the lists could vote after all if they showed reliable identification at their polling stations.²¹ This should, finally, have buried the issue of the lists. But, of course, her intervention wasn’t widely reported and complaints from NGOs and Western observers continued.

Some Georgians could be forgiven for thinking that this mess was deliberately engineered to create maximum dissatisfaction with the authorities. The implication was clear: the government was involved in falsifying the registers to its own benefit. However, this does not necessarily follow. The two places with the worst lists – Tbilisi and Kutaisi – are opposition-run towns and opposition appointed personnel (presumably) provided the information for the central authorities to work with. In 2002, BHHRG’s observer at the Georgian local elections suspected large scale fraud on the part of Mr. Saakashvili’s party in Tbilisi. It is conceivable that from within the system local supporters of both Mr. Saakashvili and Mrs. Burjanadze deliberately sabotaged the lists.

During BHHRG’s observations on polling day they heard only one complaint from a voter about the state of the registers. This was in Western Georgia, in the region of Poti and Senaki – a part of Georgia not controlled by the opposition. The only guide for non-Georgian speakers when it came to verifying the lists was the presence or absence of birth dates and the numbers on houses/blocks of flats. In the past, BHHRG observers had noted that birth dates were often missing, but in November 2003 this was not the case. Commentators jeered at the fact that the date ‘1860’ appeared against some names. However, this denoted the fact that the voter’s date of birth was unknown – ‘1860’ is the first date a computer comes up with and is used to denote ‘not known’.

Composition of election commissions: The Saakashvili trio also complained about what they claimed was the unbalanced composition of the CEC, saying it was biased against them. In July 2003, former US Secretary of State and Shevardnadze crony, James Baker, was dispatched to Tbilisi to try to broker an agreement between the government and its critics over both the composition of the CEC and the compilation of the lists.²² The OSCE’s office in Tbilisi handed Baker a list of 3 acceptable candidates for chairmanship of the CEC. Zurab Chiaberashvili, head of the ‘Fair Elections’ NGO, told BHHRG that the OSCE would not have submitted a candidate who was pro-government. The 3 were: a former ombudsman, Nana Devdariani, David Usupashvili and Vakhtang Khmaladze, a candidate for the New Rights party. BHHRG interviewed David Usupashvili in 2001 at the offices of the Young Lawyers Association, an NGO funded by the U.S. IRIS educational programme. Mr. Usupashvili, a fluent English speaker, made no secret of the fact that he supported Saakashvili and was obviously close to Western interests in the country. A compromise was reached and Nana Devdoriani was chosen. Presumably, the government looked upon her as the least worst option in terms of being influenced by ‘outside interests’.

Baker then tried to persuade the Georgian authorities to change the composition of the CEC. He wanted a formula whereby 5 seats would go to the government and 9 to the opposition, by which he meant the West’s favoured parties. However, membership of the CEC has normally reflected the parties’ representation in parliament which meant that the Revival Union and the Industrialists had a greater claim to seats than the Burjanadze Democrats and National Movement which were only formed, respectively, in 2002 and 2003. When Baker departed, Revival and the Industrialists successfully made their case for having 5 seats on the commission, based on their seats in parliament – 3 for Revival and 2 for the Industrialists. The Western-favoured ‘opposition’ gained 4 – one each for the National Movement,

²⁰ Liz Fuller “Falsification Fears Overshadow Georgian Parliamentary Election” 31th October, 2003, www.rferl.org

²¹ RFE/RL 3rd November, 2003

²² Giorgi Kandelaki: US Pressure Helps Achieve Breakthrough in Georgian Domestic Political Dispute” www.eurasianet.org 18th July, 2003, “US Suggests Election Guidelines to Georgia” www.civil.ge 7th July, 2003

Burjanadze Democrats, Labour Party and New Rights distributed between them on the basis of having been the top 4 parties in the Tbilisi city council elections in 2002. In other words, Baker's formula was turned down and the US was furious.

The media and opinion polls: Rustavi TV has been broadcasting in Georgia since 1996. It is a slick, professional operation compared to the dowdy, dull Georgian state TV. Rustavi has been a major mouthpiece for the Saakashvili opposition for the past 3 years. BHHRG visited the stations headquarters in Tbilisi in 2001 and learned how it had received Western funding in the past, although its chief editor claimed then that this was no longer the case. Rustavi 2 was a key ingredient in the election campaign – as Radio B92 had been in Serbia. Like B92, Rustavi gave air time to the local youth group – Otpor in the former, Kmara in Georgia - who urged people to go out to vote, threatening 'reprisals' to the government if they were found cheating. It also broadcast the results of an opinion poll consistently showing that the approved opposition parties were in the lead with For a New Georgia only garnering support in single figures. This set the scene for outpourings of rage when the opposition failed to win its predicted victory. Mikheil Saakashvili "threatened to convene national protests. If Shevardnadze refuses to acknowledge the "true" election results he will meet the same fate as ...Slobodan Milosevic"²³

Opinion polling itself was in the hands of a USAID-funded organization, the Institute for Polling and Marketing. Although there were at least 4 other polling agencies whose findings were broadcast on other Georgian TV stations, including state TV and the independent Imedi TV, its findings were exclusively used by Rustavi 2 and by Western media. Unsurprisingly, this poll always put the favoured opposition parties in the lead. Opposition-supporting NGOs also created a system for the parallel counting of the vote and turnout at targeted polling stations (the Burjanadze Democrats told BHHRG that this should amount to c. 20% of the total) which was broadcast throughout the day on Rustavi TV. The intention was plain: to lead viewers into believing that these were the official figures. When the CEC approved results began to come through, the opposition duly cried foul.

International observers: It was also necessary to make sure that key, experienced personnel were part of the international observer teams. Patrick Merloe an 'election expert' with the NDI was one member of a team visiting Georgia from 4th to 7th October.²⁴ BHHRG encountered Merloe in Armenia in 1998 when he had been part of the campaign to discredit the conduct of that year's presidential election which brought Robert Kocharian to power. In 2000, he appeared in Lima as a member of the NDI team observing Peru's presidential election which foreshadowed the downfall of Alberto Fujimori. BHHRG also saw several old hands from the Balkans present in Tbilisi during the election period, including those who had been present in Albania in 1997.

The President of the International Republican Institute (IRI), George Folsom, arrived in time for the poll. Folsom was active with the opposition in Venezuela in the run up to April 2002's brief coup to unseat President Hugo Chavez during which he boasted that "IRI has promoted the strengthening of democracy in Venezuela since 1994 and recognizes that Venezuela's future is not a return to its pre-Chavez past"²⁵

Bruce George, a British Labour Party MP and 'special coordinator' of the OSCE observer mission to Georgia, talked up Mrs. Burjanadze as "my vice-chairman" referring to her role as part of the Georgian delegation to the OSCE parliamentary assembly. However, this whiff, nay, stench of bias has never been commented on in the media.

On 4th November, BHHRG spoke at length with an OSCE election observer in Tbilisi who had seen nothing untoward on polling day. It is not unusual for the "foot soldiers" in the international observer missions to have their opinions ignored while the key people report

²³ Rustavi 2 reported on RFE/RL, 3rd November, 2003, www.rferl.org

²⁴ See NDI statement, *ibid*

²⁵ "President Folsom praises Venezuelan Civil Society's Defense of Democracy" IRI press release 12th April 2002, www.iri.org

violations like ballot stuffing, stolen election materials, violence etc. Most former Soviet states have invited so-called 'experts' from international organizations to become intimately involved in their domestic election planning. It is difficult, anyway, for them to refuse to cooperate with bodies like the OSCE of which they are members. However, due to Mr. Shevardnadze's long and close relationship with the United States there is even more involvement from abroad in the day to day business of government in Georgia. BHHRG noticed, wryly, that groups like the American NDI and IRI which never complained about human rights abuses in Georgia - like the appalling state of the country's prisons - have become particularly vocal on the election front.

The Serbian model

All these developments reveal parallels between the events that took place in Tbilisi in November 2003 and the coup d'état that followed the presidential election in Serbia in 2000. Of course, to many observers, this was something to celebrate as it showed the triumph of 'people power' in the face of institutional corruption - in both cases the alleged 'stealing' of an election. The media was quick to label the overthrow of the Shevardnadze regime as a 'velvet revolution' - CNN followed up with the soubriquet, 'rose revolution' to give the event its own particular identity, although few roses grow in Georgia at the best of times, let alone in November. Presumably the bloom held aloft by Zurab Zhvania was imported, like most things to do with this celebration of popular democracy in Georgia.

BHHRG noted several key developments that pointed to a 'Belgrade' solution:

Richard Miles:

The appointment of Richard Miles as ambassador to Georgia in 2002. Miles's career has been accompanied by a trajectory of violence and upheaval. He was ambassador in Baku, Azerbaijan in 1992-3 during Abulfaz Elchibey's short-lived presidency that ended in a coup d'état in June 1993. Then, he moved to the Balkans. From 1996-9 he remained the U.S.'s chargé d'affaires in Belgrade after official diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia had been severed. In 1998 he took part in 'negotiations' during the Kosovo crisis, ostensibly to forestall violence, but, in reality, to foment it as the KLA was only emboldened by the U.S.'s position. Violence increased and NATO attacked Yugoslavia in 1999. By now, Miles had moved on and was ambassador to Bulgaria, a stone's throw from Belgrade. While serving in the embassy in Sofia he helped another government come to power, this time led by the former king of Bulgaria, Simeon Saxe-Coburg, while, at the same time, preparing the groundwork for Bulgaria's forthcoming membership of NATO.

Mr. Miles has made no secret of his support for the opposition in Georgia since his appointment as US Ambassador in January 2002. On 30th October, BHHRG was present when Miles in the company of Zurab Zhvania and surrounded by a posse of bodyguards visited the offices of the United Democratic Party for 'consultations'. Later that morning, Bruce Jackson, former Vice-President of arms manufacturer Lockheed Martin and President of the U.S. Committee on NATO, held meetings with party members in the same building.

Civil Society:

As BHHRG has pointed out, it is impossible for a country like Georgia where people live hungry and cold in a collapsed infrastructure, for there to be a vibrant 'civil society'. Yet, Georgia's already oversubscribed NGO sector dedicated to the study of international relations, human rights and promoting Western values seems to have proliferated even further during the past 2 years. On closer inspection, these NGOs aren't non-governmental at all, being sponsored by various Western foundations, governments and embassies. Their activities involve holding seminars, providing experts and writing about Georgia, usually for dedicated web pages. The aim is to ensure that Western audiences receive the 'party line'. Such organizations also act as cover for bringing foreign currency into the country so that the right people can be paid off. If civil commotion is factored into the equation (as it was in Serbia in 2000) even more money will be required to buy off the local structures, including

the police and security organs. BHHRG noticed that there had been an increase of \$77.76m. over the same period the previous year in the sums of money entering Georgia via Western Union transfers between January to September 2003²⁶ Added to which, despite the fact that the government was about to collapse, the value of the lari remained stable, presumably because the country was awash in dollars.

Several Georgian NGOs participated directly in the 2003 election process, most notably a well-funded organization called "Fair Elections" and an NGO, Kmara (Enough). Kmara a loose grouping of young people without an identifiable leadership was formed, ostensibly, to encourage people to vote, meaning, vote out the present government.

Kmara:



The Kmara/Otpor fist symbol on a young volunteer's T-shirt

These groups mirrored organizations operating in Belgrade during the 2000 presidential election, in particular, CeSID (the Centre for Free Elections and Democracy) and Otpor (Resistance). Kmara had adopted Otpor's symbol, the clenched fist, and BHHRG was told they had "studied" Otpor which included visits to Belgrade. The Group also learned that a certain "Slobodan" from Belgrade was part of the OSCE observer delegation. Like Otpor, their allotted role was classic Communist-style agitation – they predicted that they could mobilise 5000 people quickly if they needed to and even claimed that they were popular with 'children'.

BHHRG visited the Kmara offices in central Tbilisi and talked to the young activists who were milling around doing very little 'agitation' three days before the election. They said that Soros's Open Society Foundation (as well as other NGOs) funded them but foreign embassies in Georgia only offered "moral support". BHHRG was told that the group's lavish advertising campaign on Rustavi 2 TV would be very expensive - a one minute's advertising slot costs \$1200. Was this paid for from Soros funds too?

They claimed to have "a few" election observers – one boy in the group talking to BHHRG wore one of the jackets donated by the British embassy in Tbilisi to the 'Fair Elections' organization - but their task was to "make propaganda" and put on activities such as street theatre. Unlike their more sinister equivalents in Belgrade, the young people at Kmara were positively wholesome. Many of their complaints – about corruption in Georgia's university system and the difficulty of getting jobs on graduation are well-founded. BHHRG saw no signs of Kmara activity in the streets of Tbilisi – neither street theatre nor public meetings. On Tuesday 4th November an open-topped truck containing about 30 young Kmara representatives waving the clenched fist flag progressed along Rustaveli Avenue, but no one seemed to take any notice.

²⁶ AOL Daily News 19th November 2003

BHHRG concluded that the Kmara people they met were there to chat to visiting foreigners and were not the organization's main activists. Other hidden faces seem to have played – and still play – a more menacing role. Rustavi 2 reported that “Kmara warned that election commission members would be arrested and jailed if they falsified results”.²⁷

Fair Elections:

The Fair Elections group was set up to monitor all aspects of the electoral process and operated from smart offices in central Tbilisi. While BHHRG was visiting, a large consignment of green fleece jackets was being unpacked, apparently donated by the British government-backed agency, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. The jackets would be worn by the group's observers on election day. The floors of the well-equipped suite of offices were covered with piles of election registers which large numbers of young people were endeavouring to 'correct'. Fair Elections' head, Zurab Chiaberashvili, said that they would have observers in 80-85% of polling stations on election day and BHHRG's observers can confirm that their presence was widespread. He admitted that the lists outside Tbilisi were “better” except, it seemed, for Kutaisi. They had just ‘corrected’ the official Kutaisi voter lists which, according to their research, was missing c. 600 voters. He couldn't say whether the corrections they had recommended were made however, it did seem rather convenient that several hundred more opposition voters (Kutaisi is Mrs. Burjanadze's stronghold) could be added to the town's lists.

Conduct of the Poll

In its preliminary statement BHHRG outlined its conclusions of the conduct of the poll based on the findings of its observers on 2nd November, 2003.²⁸ Basically, the organization of the election was an improvement on previous Georgian polls monitored by the Group. For the first time, the authorities sensed that they were under serious scrutiny from the international observers and responded by cleaning up their act – which only goes to show that improvements could have been brought about in the past had organizations like the OSCE wished them to happen. By November 2003, it was too late for the authorities to gain any kudos as the West had made up its mind that the parliamentary election was going to be the occasion to mount a coup to remove the Shevardnadze regime.

BHHRG found no problems with the notorious electoral lists when they visited polling stations in the Western Georgian towns of Poti and Senaki. The Group's observers even went to the district election commission headquarters in Poti to inquire if voters had complained in person about not being on the lists. Even if these officials were lying (when they said there had been no problems) BHHRG was struck by the absence of visitors to the office. They also saw no surge of voters around the lists posted in the polling stations, trying to find their names.

The Group encountered 'Fair Elections' observers everywhere they went. In Senaki, they also ran into a representative from a group funded by the US polling company, Global Strategy, who was compiling figures for the turnout in that particular polling station; there was no sign of an exit poll being conducted at the same place. BHHRG's observers were told that between 400 and 500 had voted by mid-afternoon – a very precise tally! It was strange to see the logos on these people's jackets revealing the names of their sponsors, among which were: 'USAID', the 'Westminster Foundation for Democracy' and the 'British Council'. Tax payers in the U.K. and U.S. are ignorant in the main of their governments' largesse in the 'new Europe'. Bringing democracy to the 'savages' in places like Georgia is probably about as popular with the American public as is paying for hospitals and schools in Iraq. Poorly funded public transport and utilities regularly top voters' concerns in Britain.

²⁷ “Election Commission Cancels Accreditation of Main Independent Television station”, www.eurasianet.com 14/11/03

²⁸ See, Georgia, Parliamentary Election 2003: BHHRG's Preliminary Statement, www.oscewatch.org

Adjara



Aslan Abashidze, president of Adjara

False rumours which the OSCE, NDI observer missions allowed to circulate unchecked stated that the Adjaran authorities would not permit observers to operate in the region on 2nd November. “Abashidze has always barred international monitors from observing the election and has banned them once again this year”²⁹ This lie has even been repeated since the election by the Western media,³⁰ despite the fact that both the OSCE and NDI had long term observers in Adjara leading up to the poll while teams from both the NDI and OSCE observed the voting on polling day, as did BHHRG.

The international community is unremittingly hostile to the government in Adjara and its president Aslan Abashidze who is regularly referred to as ‘dictatorial’, an ‘aging autocrat’ and ‘iron-fisted’. At the same time, it is grudgingly admitted that the standard of living for ordinary people is far better there than in Georgia proper –there is work and pensions are paid. No doubt, part of this is due to the Adjarans’ luck in having the major port, Batumi, under their control but Abashidze’s policies of smartening up the town and subsidising cultural and educational projects also plays a part. Therefore, it is perfectly understandable for people to enthusiastically support the Revival Party - Mr. Abashidze’s creation – they are well aware of how bad things are in Georgia.

Adjara’s peaceful, (relative) prosperity may have also led other Georgians to seek work in the province. According to the authorities in Batumi, this has led to an increase in the Adjaran population as revealed in a census conducted earlier this year. Abashidze ordered the census as conflicts raged over the electoral lists in Tbilisi. On election day, Adjara had region-wide, computerised lists with photographs of each voter also recorded.³¹

Without any concrete proof and ignoring the factors mentioned above, the foreign observers claimed that the census had inflated the number of voters in Adjara. From this, they deduced that the high turn out in the 2nd December election was rigged. (95%) It is interesting to recall, that when Mr. Shevardnadze (who was the only candidate standing) won the 1992 election as speaker of the Georgian parliament he did so with 95% of the vote. There were no complaints from organizations like the OSCE who inferred that Mr. Shevardnadze was, according to the BBC, “so popular that no one wanted to stand against him”.

It was also alleged that other parties were afraid to campaign in Adjara even though Batumi hosted the offices of several mainstream Georgian political parties. BHHRG visited the offices of the New Rights party on 1st November. The party’s spokesmen said that they had no

²⁹ “Dead Man Voting”, *ibid*

³⁰ “Ye shall not be saved” *The Economist*, 22nd November, 2003

³¹ see NDI statement, *ibid*

trouble campaigning and had no interference from the authorities there. They also regarded the National Movement's decision to campaign in Adjara as a provocation.

BHHRG was told that OSCE and NDI observers had been rude and surly to electoral officials in Adjara on election day. There was also an urgent desire on their part to uncover and expose incidents of election-related violence and abuse. For example, when the NDI representative in Batumi learnt that a brawl had broken out on the night of 2nd November he was keen for it to be confirmed as election related, which was not the case. Similarly, a 'dispute' that looked suspiciously like a provocation broke out in one polling station between Giorgi Mshvenieradze, an observer from the Young Lawyers Association (which has an office in Batumi) and local electoral officials. OSCE observers were conveniently on hand when Mshvenieradze was arrested. He was released on 7th December, but only after pressure from Western officials, including the NDI representative in Batumi.

One journalist (who also happened to be the OSCE's long term observer in Batumi) concluded that the elections in Adjara "proceeded with striking, almost suspicious efficiency" in other words, an election that appeared to be conducted correctly must have been rigged if the winner is damned in the eyes of the West!³²

Before the 23rd November coup, Mr. Abashidze sought to cooperate with Shevardnadze, (normally, there is little love lost between them) in order to try to prevent the inevitable destabilization in the country that was underway. He has distanced himself from the new regime in Tbilisi but, as yet, Adjara has not declared independence on the lines of Abkhazia and South Ossetia nor has Abashidze said he has any intention of going down this path. However, there is a strong animus against him, if only because the 'reformers' will want to get their hands on the valuable economic assets, like the port of Batumi. One thing seems sure – if they do regain control of the region it will collapse into the same economically stagnant condition as the rest of Georgia.

The results

Anyone who had failed to take on board the parallel tally of the turnout and count could be forgiven for thinking that the National Movement had won the 2nd November election. Rustavi 2 TV showed an 'exit poll' on the evening of 2nd November giving the party the largest share of the vote. As the hours passed and more votes were counted, the percentages for FANG and Revival grew. On Tuesday 4th November the OSCE delivered a damning report on the conduct of the poll, as did the U.S. State Department. When the official results of the vote count were finally announced on 10th November, FANG was in the lead with 21% and the National Movement second with 18% etc.³³ It was a miserable victory for Mr. Shevardnadze's party – 21% of the vote, hardly indicative of massive ballot stuffing.

Election-related Violence

The media's sound bite, 'revolution of roses', spread the myth that the Georgian coup was non-violent. This is not true. During the campaign, the National Movement regularly incited its supporters into turbulent confrontations with both its political opponents and the police. BHHRG was told that there was a high risk of violence and that the opposition had weapons. On 23rd October, in what was obviously intended to be a provocative move, National Movement activists visited Adjara and there were scuffles with local residents in the seaside town of Kobuleti where the National Movement's offices were burnt down. Mr. Saakashvili is a critic of the region's government and he has no support in Adjara. Even some of Shevardnadze's opponents admitted that the way Saakashvili's supporters had behaved had been unwise.

³² Daan van der Schriek "Quiet Election in Adjara Prompts Worries of Tampering"

www.eurasianet.org

³³ The results for the proportional list were: FANG – 21.32%, Revival Union – 18.84%, Saakashvili, National Movement – 18.8%, Labour Party – 12.4%, Burjanadze Democrats – 8.79%, New Rights – 7.35%

Later, on 27th October, there was trouble when National Movement campaigners visited Zugdidi in western Georgia. BHHRG watched television reports which showed several men kicking a car, after which fighting broke out. BHHRG was told that Saakashvili's supporters were responsible for the incident. Earlier, National Movement campaigners were involved in a fight in the mixed Georgian - Azeri border village of Talaveri. Police claimed to have confiscated 385 passports and identity documents from the NM group which, they said, were in the names of dead people and which, they alleged, were about to be handed out for use on election day, presumably, to Saakashvili supporters.³⁴ Acts of violence were perpetrated against Revival election workers in Tbilisi and elsewhere and while the media was hailing the peaceful "revolution of roses", the Revival office in Tbilisi was burnt down and its workers attacked.

On 6th November, Saakashvili took his supporters to the town of Gori, which had still not declared a result. "They tried to burst into the headquarters of the local election commission and were pushed back by police. Taking the building by storm, they smashed a huge plate-glass window, as a result of which one of Saakashvili's supporters cut an artery and was badly injured".³⁵

Mr Shevardnadze consistently stated that he would do anything to avoid 'civil war' and said he had resigned on 23rd November to avoid violence. The same reasoning was given by Russia's Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, for brokering an agreement that led the president to go. Had there been a serious recourse to arms, Mr. Shevardnadze's erstwhile friends in the West would have undoubtedly pressed for 'peacekeepers' to be sent to Georgia which would have effectively represented an invading force.

Since the coup the violence has continued. On 29th November a car bomb damaged the Labour Party headquarters in Tbilisi. The same day, regional offices of the Christian Democratic Party were attacked. There was another explosion outside state television on 3rd December. On 5th December, the counsellor at the Russian embassy in the capital was beaten up and his car was stolen³⁶ Kmara youths broke into media offices and "staged reprisals" against journalists.³⁷ It has been noted that all the attacks, so far, have been against organizations and people associated, fairly or not, with the old regime.³⁸

The coup aka 'revolution of roses'



³⁴ Tea Gularidze "Election Campaign Turns Violent", www.civil.ge.

³⁵ Kvali Online magazine www.kvali.com, 7th November, 2003

³⁶ www.bbcmmonitoring.org 5th December, 2003

³⁷ RFE/RL, 27th November, 2003, www.rferl.org

³⁸ Zaza Baazov "Georgia": Counter-Revolution Fears", *IWPR*, 4th December, 2003, www.iwpr.net

The first cuckoo of the Revolutionary Spring - Kmara youths drive down Rustaveli Avenue waving their Otpor flags on 4th November 2003.

As BHHRG and other international observers prepared to leave Tbilisi on 4th November, demonstrations against the 'falsification' of the results were beginning. Getting out the crowds was going to be difficult. Some Western-favoured opposition party members even admitted that the Burjanadze-Saakashvili-Zhvania trio was deeply unpopular in the country.³⁹ So, at first, these gatherings were low key as the organizers relied on the usual crowd of extras, Georgian-style, to express the 'indignation of the people': the elderly, disparate youth and (paid) Abkhaz refugees, hundreds of whom live in two hotels situated in central Tbilisi. For a few days they stood uncomfortably outside the city hall as Mikheil Saakashvili ranted on about Mr. Shevardnadze, who he now compared to Ceauşescu and Milosevic. A strike called for 14th November failed to materialize⁴⁰ and *Radio Free Europe* reported that "comparatively few protesters heeded Saakashvili's demand to form a human chain around the state chancellery"⁴¹ On 18th November, it was reported that "Georgian railroad workers do not support the call for disobedience"⁴²

It was clear to those observers who had followed events in Belgrade in 2000 – that a coup was being hatched. However, Shevardnadze's premature resignation could have derailed the plot. It seems that the president was prevailed upon in the months leading up to the election to hang on, thus ensuring that a proper 'revolution' took place which removed him and his government from power and marked a clean break. From a common-sense perspective, there wasn't any need to force him out as his term of office was due to expire in 2005. No doubt, he could have been prevailed upon to live with a new government more to Western tastes.

But, that was not to be. On 22nd November, parliament was stormed and Mr. Shevardnadze unceremoniously bundled out. During the night of the 22nd November, the Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, appeared in Tbilisi and during the following hours managed to broker a deal between the two sides: Shevardnadze agreed to leave office and, as Speaker of the previous parliament, Nino Burjanadze took his place until early presidential elections are held. These have been scheduled for 4th January, 2004 but no date has been set yet for parliamentary elections.

On 23rd November, thousands rallied to observe the final act of the drama outside the Georgian parliament where a large television screen had been erected to transmit to the world the 'spontaneous' joy of the people. Interviewed by CNN and the BBC, Mr. Saakashvili hailed the 'European' nature of his revolution and the victory of 'reform'; he had nothing to say to the millions of Georgians to whom he had promised more jobs and a higher standard of living. The BBC's reporter, Damian Gramaticas, failed to respond with any irony when reporting that Saakashvili had marshalled his supporters at the foot of Stalin's statue in Gori. There was much gloating in the West over the 'peaceful' nature of the 'revolution of roses' even though the offices of the Revival Party in Tbilisi were ransacked and its employees attacked. In the following days, more violence was reported.

Almost immediately, government ministers and provincial governors were removed and replaced by opposition placemen.⁴³ Zurab Nogaideli was re-appointed finance minister, a post he held between 2000 and 2002 when the government was under attack from Mr. Saakashvili for corruption. The traffic police chief in Tbilisi, Gia Vatsadze was also sacked and replaced by Gia Beradze who had held the post in the past.⁴⁴ BHHRG noted that the Georgian 'custom' of bribing motorists had stopped in recent years. However, it will now presumably start again. On 1st December, Zurab Chiaberashvili, head of 'Fair Elections', replaced Nina Devdoriani as Chairman of the CEC. 'Fair elections' itself will become, officially, a part of the future election monitoring process.

³⁹ Irakli Areshidze "Who Lost, and Won, in Georgia", *Wall Street Journal*, 25th November, 2003

⁴⁰ RFE/RE 14th November, 2003, www.referl.org

⁴¹ RFE/RL 14th November 2003, www.refrel.org

⁴² Interfax 18th November, 2003, www.bbcmonitoring.co.uk

⁴³ "Georgia: All but one regional governors have been dismissed" Rustavi 2, 27/11/03

⁴⁴ "Traffic police chief sacked..." www.bbcmonitoring.co.uk 28th November 2003

It is difficult to know what Mr. Shevardnadze thought about such an act of betrayal by his long-term friends in the USA. As he pointed out, he had done everything Washington had asked of him – he was even about to send Georgian troops to Iraq. But, he had been complaining for some time about interference in the election process by, among others, George Soros and his local Open Society Institute. After he left office, he went further and attacked Ambassador Miles for his role in the coup.⁴⁵ Of course, his craven behaviour towards the US brought about his downfall. Georgian society is deeply infiltrated by personnel from the West at every level. There is a vast army of people who can cause trouble: the Western-funded civil society outlets, humanitarian organizations, the oil workers, politicians like Saakashvili with freebees to the US and, to cap it all, units in the Georgian military who have been involved in the NATO-sponsored 'train and equip' programme. Poured into this bubbling cauldron were millions of dollars, distributed selectively to some or all of them to bring about a change of regime.

Not long ago, Washington-engineered coups were conducted in a clandestine manner as interference in the internal affairs of foreign states was regarded as too sensitive to admit. Now, freelance vigilante groups, reminiscent of Mussolini's blackshirts, are funded by the West to intimidate ordinary people and harry legitimately elected governments. In a recent article, Otpor activist, Slobodan Djindjic hailed Kmara's role in the Georgian coup and announced that "we are working with civil movements in several countries", presumably to bring about similar results.⁴⁶

Many heads of state, particularly those in other post-Communist states, should be looking over their backs with alarm. There are already straws in the wind. In Ukraine, "Yulia Tymoshenko, described as a 'radical opposition leader' called on the Ukrainian authorities to learn the Georgian lesson"⁴⁷. Critics of Belarus's President Lukashenko have also jumped on the band wagon. Added to which, the conduct of Armenian presidential elections has been attacked by the West and, most recently, Azerbaijan looked as though it might take the Georgian route as violence erupted after the presidential election held on 15th October, 2003. Although the government in Baku (unlike Georgia) has the money to pay its own police and security organs, Azerbaijan is still vulnerable to outside interference should the decision be taken to implode it.

Russia and the Great Game

Anti-Russian sentiment in Georgia is weak, despite the rhetoric from the victorious opposition parties and their supporters many of whom – like Nino Burjanadze, are the children of former Communist bigwigs. Hard-line, nationalist Zviadists have always been anti-Russian but by 1996 even followers of the former president admitted to BHHRG that most ordinary people in Georgia would welcome the return of the Soviet Union with its basic economic certainties. As Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov has also pointed out, there are many Russians living in Georgia and c.300,000 Georgians in Russia. Those who have fled the disastrous economic situation in Georgia have tended to move north rather than West, although there is also a large community of Georgians in Israel.

The shift in the West's positive attitude to the Shevardnadze regime seems to have begun in 1999, soon after Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia. Putin won the presidential election in March 1999 and parliamentary elections were held in Georgia the following November. For the first time, international observers seriously criticised aspects of its conduct. BHHRG also noted that the West's affection for Ukraine's president, Leonid Kuchma, dimmed around the same time. Presumably, there was wariness of the new Russian president, about whom, it

⁴⁵ "Georgia's Shevardnadze Feared Bloodbath", Burt Herman, AP, 26th November, 2003. See also, "Georgia revolt carried mark of Soros", Mark MacKinnon *The Globe & Mail*, 26th November, 2003 www.theglobeandmail.com

⁴⁶ Natalia Anteleva "How to stage a revolution" <http://news.bbc.co.uk>, 4th December 2003

⁴⁷ "Opposition ponders Georgian scenario in Ukraine" UNIAN news agency Kiev, 24th November, 2003 www.bbcmonitoring.co.uk

seems, they new little. The fear must have been that Putin might try to re-exert Russia's influence in the former Soviet republics. As members of an older generation, neither Kuchma nor Shevardnadze had any explicit contacts with Putin, but old Soviet hands were members of their respective governments. BHHRG was told repeatedly by the 'opposition' in Tbilisi, from 2001 onwards, that they disapproved of people like State Counsellor, Vazha Lortkipanidze who was close to Shevardnadze, and whom they perceived to be a friend of Russia.

In Georgia, members of the Western-funded and approved opposition as well as their tame NGOs dwelt on their concerns that Russia was trying to re-establish its former dominant role in local politics. Members of the Kmara youth organization expressed their 'dismay' at Russia's bombing of guerrilla positions in the Kodori and Pankisi Gorge regions of the country in 2001. Much was also made of the recent purchase of the country's electricity system by the Russian conglomerate, Unified Energy Systems (UES) which had bought out the failed American company AES Telasi in September 2003.⁴⁸ This was followed up with a deal between the Georgian government and Gazprom.

Members of the Burjanadze Democrats told BHHRG that the Georgian government had not supported AES, resulting in its failure to improve the country's electricity supply. The murder of Nika Lominadze, the company's financial manager in August 2002 was the 'last straw'. They also pointed to recent provocative remarks by UES boss, Anatoli Chubais, who had talked of a "new, liberal Russian empire" in the making, based on Russia's ability to meet CIS energy requirements.

But, this interpretation of Georgia's energy woes leaves much out. AES bought into Georgia failing to realise that there were no longer any large enterprises left to generate a decent level of profit while the average domestic consumer was unable to pay the fuel bills. The company was reduced to disconnecting large numbers of small consumers from the grid. The Georgian government did not obstruct AES which, anyway, received subventions from the US taxpayer to ensure that it didn't leave earlier than Washington wanted it to. In the end, Chubais's UES did AES a favour by taking the loss-making company's Georgian operation off its hands. BHHRG visited the offices of UES where the employees still seemed to be in shock following AES's departure. Loyalty to the new owners had not yet taken hold as Valeri Pantsulaia, AES's commercial manager, told the Group that he preferred working for the US company.

However, explanations that the Americans change of heart over the Shevardnadze regime was based on energy considerations and Russian rivalry fails to take into account the fact that the anti-Shevardnadze campaign was well underway in 2001, two years before Gazprom and Mr Chubais arrived on the scene.

However, Russia is the country that should be most concerned about the events in Georgia. The position of Mr. Ivanov is hard to fathom – he also brokered a similar deal that led to Milosevic conceding defeat after the 2000 presidential poll in Yugoslavia. But Georgia is not Yugoslavia. Analysts have been perversely trying to show that Russia is the 'winner' following the November coup, but this is the opposite of the truth. The U.S. and its NATO allies now have more leeway than ever before to interfere in Georgia and the surrounding Caucasus region. Allowing this coup to happen on its doorstep could be very costly for Russia.

There is, indeed, rivalry between the West and Russia over the construction and route of oil and gas pipelines as well as other energy-related matters which have been put into a harsher perspective by the failure to subdue Iraq and fully exploit its oil reserves as planned. The Americans may have decided to divert their attention to what seems to be a much softer target, namely, Russia, and take control of her abundant energy resources sooner than they anticipated.

⁴⁸ Jean-Christophe Peuch, "Georgia: Smell of Russian Gas Hangs over Election Campaign", www.rferl.org, 13th June, 2003, Dima bit-Suleiman "Georgia: Russian Hands on the Switches", www.tol.cz 11th August, 2003

Conclusion



NATO has already set up shop on Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi

One assumes that Mikheil Saakashvili will win the 4th January presidential election in Georgia with an Abashidze-size proportion of the vote – which, in this case, no one will query. Large donations to cover the cost of the poll have been pledged by Western governments. However, it seems perverse for the new regime to rush into a presidential election while putting the parliamentary poll on the ‘back burner’, so to speak. The present parliament’s mandate ended in November and a replacement should be elected as soon as possible. As pointed out, Mr. Shevardnadze’s presidential term was not due to end until 2005.

There is also the added peculiarity that the Constitutional Court which voided the election only targeted the proportional part of the 2nd November vote, leaving the majoritarian results standing. Mr Abashidze has remarked on the illogicality of this decision as the alleged deficiencies with the 2nd November election must have covered all aspects of the poll. For example, why should the election registers be deemed inaccurate when people were voting for candidates on the proportional list while remaining acceptable for those who won as majoritarians? Presumably, the ‘opposition’ gained enough support in the latter part of the poll for them to want to hang on to the results. In addition to this strange bit of logic chopping, the CEC has made the startling proposal “for voters to be offered financial incentives to register by entering them into a draw”.⁴⁹ Why should voters need “financial incentives” to register to vote? Reports in the pre-election period said that the average Georgian was desperate to vote and furious with the authorities for the chaos that surrounded the compilation of the electoral register.

With the presidential election behind it, the new government in Tbilisi will then set about expelling the two remaining Russian bases at Batumi and Akhalkalaki. Perhaps Georgia will also be admitted speedily to NATO. Until then, more foreign troops, possibly under NATO command, will be ‘invited’ into the country. There is evidence that the OSCE has long-term plans too to significantly increase its presence there – a recent advertisement in the Georgian English-language press announced tenders for the construction of 17 missions “some of them reachable by helicopter only”.⁵⁰

There is also a strong possibility that the installation of a new regime in Tbilisi will be accompanied by an intensification of the war in Chechnya. During the night of 2nd-3rd December, fugitive Russian businessman, Boris Berezovsky, paid a dramatic 6 hour visit to Tbilisi. Although Berezovsky now has asylum in the U.K. he is still wanted on an Interpol warrant and, according to Moscow, he should have been arrested and handed over to the Russians. Some Georgian politicians have suggested that Berezovsky’s visit was not

⁴⁹ Rustavi, 7th December, 2003, www.bbcmonitoring.co.uk

⁵⁰ OSCE advertisement, *The Messenger*, 4th November 2003

unconnected with the Chechen cause – he is a well-known supporter of the rebels.⁵¹ Alexander Litvinenko, a member of Berezovsky's entourage, who also lives in the U.K., has said that "it is necessary to sow hatred among the nations and levy war in the Caucasus"⁵².

But the international community no longer puts pressure on the Chechen 'freedom fighters' - it only seems to encourage them. Another figure on Moscow's terrorism 'wanted list', Akhmed Zakayev, spokesman for ousted Chechen president, Aslan Maskhadov, was also given asylum by the British government recently. It is Mr. Putin who is criticized and ordered to stop the 'atrocities', seemingly committed exclusively by Russian troops. The West's aim is to drive Moscow's representatives out of Chechnya. After that, other parts of the north Caucasus will be put under pressure from 'separatists' in order, as Alexander Litvinenko says "to destroy Russia".⁵³

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⁵¹ "Exiled Russian tycoon may've had contacts with Chechen rebels in Georgia – view" *Interfax*, 6th December, 2003 www.bbcmonitoring.co.uk

⁵² Quoted in "Chechnya: Whose Islamists are they anyway?" www.oscewatch.org News Item, 14th October, 2003

⁵³ www.oscewatch.org 14th October 2003, *ibid.*