



Interview With David Kikalishvili of Rustavi 2 TV

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Tbilisi, Georgia
July 10, 2008

QUESTION: Thank you for this interview because it's very important for our audience. And we start with first question. Recently, Russia has numbers of (inaudible). And what would you advise Government of Georgia how this current conflict should be resolved to find a long-term solution that will allow our IDPs to return to their homes in peace?

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. Well, first, the United States stands strongly for the territorial integrity of Georgia. We believe that this is a frozen conflict that can be resolved peacefully. There are several elements. There really needs to be a de-escalation. There needs to be a sense that there is a peace process going forward. We have been in favor of the Germans and other friends of Georgia of direct talks between Abkhazia and Georgians. I think that would be very important.

It would be very useful to have a plan for the economic development of the region. But really, the -- some of the steps that Russia has taken we have spoken out about and said that they are not helpful and conducive to an atmosphere of resolving this in a peaceful manner. All sides need to look to the future of an Abkhazia that is prosperous and an Abkhazia where there is enough political room to maneuver so that all interests can be accommodated.

QUESTION: What should our government do to improve our relations with Russia? In my view, why Russia is so aggressive in Abkhazia is our alliance with United States and desire to become a member of NATO.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I certainly hope that Russia is not trying to link decisions that the alliance NATO may take. It is, of course, up to the alliance, up to NATO, to decide the various course. We have a very good (inaudible) dialogue now with Georgia. It's no secret that the United States believes that Georgia would further its development, it's democratic development in MAP because, after all, MAP is not membership, it's a Membership Action Plan.

But the important thing is the United States and many other countries have very good relations with Georgia. There is no reason for Russia to fear that or to find that it in any way counter to Russian interests. In fact, I think it's very much in Russian interest. And I hope that some of the repeated meetings that Russian leaders and Georgian leaders have will start to bear fruit. But Russia and Georgia need to have a good relationship.

QUESTION: And what is your feeling Georgia's NATO aspiration? We wanted MAP status, as you know. I mentioned that that we worry that there may be no decision in December. And many Georgian thinks that may be happening because not just members, countries, many of them interested in Russian Government, now it's time for some democracy or something else.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we will continue to argue, the United States -- and by the way, the United States is by no means alone in Bucharest in making this argument -- that countries should go into MAP when they're ready for the MAP. That should be the only criteria. And in fact, we did get a very strong statement out of Bucharest, a very strong statement that really points to the future that makes very clear that there are no barriers to Georgian membership in NATO when Georgia is ready for that membership. That was signed on by all 26 members of NATO. And so I think Georgia should feel good about its transatlantic prospects in the future.

But Georgia has work to do, too. There needs to be a strong sense of movement on the democratic institutions here, on the ability of opposition and free media to operate. There will need to be continued work to resolve the conflicts with the South Ossetians, with the Abkhaz. So there's still work to do, but I would hope that Georgia took the Bucharest statement as a kind of opening to know that the NATO alliance feels strongly that Georgia will have a transatlantic future.

QUESTION: You know our soldiers are serving in Iraq. We're (inaudible) they have a very close partnership (inaudible). But when a new administration comes to power in Washington, will that change?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the new administration will have to make its own choices. That's why we have elections; people get to choose their own course. But I strongly believe that an American president, whoever that is, is going to understand the stakes in the Middle East; is going to understand that, in fact, Iraq, after a very, very difficult time, is beginning to make real progress; that that progress is dependent on the strong support and the strong will of Iraq's friends and allies; that a strong Iraq will be -- a strong, democratic Iraq will be one of the pillars of a Middle East that is more peaceful; that a strong Iraq will be a barrier to Iranian aggression in the region. And so while I can't speak for whoever the next President will be, I do know that very often in American foreign policy these elements of continuity do seem to appear once someone is elected.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. It's great to be with you.
2008/T20-12

Released on July 12, 2008

