
Dick Cheney Mistakenly Staked on Caspian

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// Ilham Aliyev is in no hurry to support the Nabucco project

U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney finished his tour of the South Caucasus, which was intended to strengthen Washington's positions in its struggle for Caspian energy resources. The visit he paid to Tbilisi yesterday went smoothly as expected. However, the talks he held in Baku Wednesday failed. According to the information of Kommersant, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev gave his American guest a cold welcome and sent a clear message that Baku won't support the idea to redirect the energy resources pipelines so that they would omit Russia. He came to that conclusion watching the developments in the neighboring Georgia.

Money instead of tanks

Yesterday at 11 a.m. Dick Cheney arrived from Baku in Tbilisi, where Georgia's Prime Minister Lado Gurgenedze. Before the meeting of the U.S. Vice President with Georgia's President Mikheil Saakashvili Georgian Security Council Secretary Alexander Lomaya revealed the talks' agenda to Kommersant. "First, Dick Cheney wants to demonstrate the U.S. support to Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine," he said. "Second, during the negotiations the parties will discuss the security of communication lines that allow shipping the Caspian energy resources to the West omitting Russia."

After the talks in the new residence of Georgia's head-of-state, Mikheil Saakashvili stated at the joint press-conference, "Georgia feels the U.S. support, which is strong as never before." The journalists had a chance to assess the strength of that support following Dick Cheney's address. The U.S. Vice President said that Washington allocates \$1 billion to restore the Georgian economy. "We stand in solidarity with the people of Georgia. After your nation won its freedom in the Rose Revolution, America came to the aid of this courageous young democracy. We are doing so again, as you work to overcome an invasion of your sovereign territory - and an illegitimate, unilateral attempt to change your country's borders by force that has been universally condemned by the free world," the Vice President stated. "Russia's actions have cast grave doubt on Russia's intentions and on its reliability as an international partner - not just in Georgia but across this region and indeed throughout the international system." Besides, Dick Cheney reiterated that Washington fully supports Georgia's NATO ambitions. "Georgia will be in our alliance," he claimed.

Nevertheless, according to the sources of Kommersant in the Georgian Chancellery, the talks of Mikheil Saakashvili and Dick Cheney didn't go as smoothly as their press-conference did. The discussion mainly focused on the security of the existing pipelines, which were laid in Georgia omitting Russia, and the project of the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline Nabucco. Dick Cheney made no secret of the fact that the U.S. is ready to provide the security of these pipelines using political methods only. So, Georgia won't get military assistance from the U.S. now.

By the way, Wednesday, U.S. State Secretary Condoleezza Rice made this position public. "It is not yet time to look at the questions of assistance on the military side," she stated in Washington. However, Mikheil Saakashvili declared ready to further support American energy projects in the region.

According to the sources of Kommersant, he promised to Dick Cheney that Tbilisi will support the Nabucco project "whatever" in case the U.S. gets the approval of Georgia's neighbors, Baku, first of all.

The Baku emissary

Meanwhile, according to the information of Kommersant, Dick Cheney's visit to Azerbaijan he made on Wednesday turned out complete failure. The guest of honor, who came in Baku for the first time, was met neither by President Ilham Aliyev nor Prime Minister Artur Rasizade. Instead, First Deputy Prime Minister Yagub Eyubov and Foreign Office Chief Elmar Mammadyarov met Dick Cheney in the airport. As to Ilham Aliyev, he was in no hurry to receive Mr Cheney. That's why the U.S. Vice President first went to a meeting with BP President in Azerbaijan Bill Schrader and Chevron Azerbaijan top managers. Then he visited the U.S. Embassy in Baku and held a meeting with Ambassador Anne E. Derse. It was not earlier than in the evening that Dick Cheney went to the residence of Azerbaijan's President.

According to the sources of Kommersant with the Office of Azerbaijan's President, the talks turned out pretty tough, in spite of the fact that Dick Cheney and Ilham Aliyev have had close ties since Mr Cheney worked with Halliburton and Mr Aliyev was SOCAR (Azerbaijan's state-run oil company) Vice President. They discussed the war in Georgia and the prospects of constructing the Nabucco gas pipeline. According to the information of Kommersant, Dick Cheney informed Ilham Aliyev that the U.S. will support its allies in the region and intends to promote the project of the gas pipeline omitting Russia. Nonetheless, Ilham Aliyev sent a clear message that although he appreciates the relations with Washington, he is not going to have a row with Moscow. In fact it meant that under the present circumstances Baku decided to bide its time without fostering the Nabucco project. Kommersant interlocutors with the Presidential Office said that Dick Cheney was irritated by the outcome of the discussion - he even refused to attend a banquet in his honor.

Ilham Aliyev's reluctance to support Washington quarreling with Russia is easy to explain. Baku regarded Tbilisi's definitively losing of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as Russia's tanks entering Georgia as a signal to everyone in the region who is willing to join NATO. Azerbaijan's budget incurs great losses: because of the explosion at the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline on August 12 - Turkey put the blame on the Kurdistan Workers Party - and the pauses of the work of the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline and Baku-Supsa oil pipeline, energy carriers export from Azerbaijan in the western direction was suspended. At the same time Baku has no claims to Russia. Moreover, according to the information of Kommersant, Azerbaijan's authorities expressed their gratitude to the Russian Federation because during the military operation and bombardments of the Georgian territory no BTC-related facilities were destroyed.

Nevertheless, Baku can't overhaul its stance towards the pipelines on the territory of Georgia. Azerbaijan is said to have increased the workload of the Baku-Novorossiysk oil pipeline. It concluded that in the present situation it's more secure to transport gas to Europe via Russia, rather than Georgia and Turkey. Even more so in June Gazprom offered to buy Azerbaijan's gas at any volumes according to the European pricing formula. During his visit to Baku in July Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Ilham Aliyev agreed to launch negotiations concerning the matter. It seems the talks will be accelerated, just like the pace of Baku and Moscow's developing closer relations.

The Russian leaders have already started work in this direction. In the evening after the talks of Dick Cheney and Ilham Aliyev finished, Dmitry Medvedev called Azerbaijan's President. Sources in the Kremlin explained to

Kommersant the necessity of the telephone conversation with Dmitry Medvedev's desire to bring home to Ilham Aliyev, one of the region's most influential players, Russia's position regarding Georgia. Even more so Azerbaijan has a territorial dispute with Armenia, which remains unresolved. "Armenian leader Serzh Sargsyan has recently visited Moscow and discussed the situation over South Ossetia and Abkhazia during his talks with Dmitry Medvedev. The Russian President thought it important to discuss those matters with the Azerbaijani party as well because Baku belongs neither to SCO nor CSTO - the organizations Russia has intensified contacts with," a source in the Kremlin told Kommersant. In her turn, Press-Secretary of the Russian President Natalya Timakova told Kommersant that during their conversation the leader of Russia and Azerbaijan discussed a possibility of a meeting in the near future.

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Purge in Georgia's army

A massive purge started in the Georgian army, with Mikheil Saakashvili controlling the process personally. "After the hostilities it's natural that we should estimate the efficiency and effectiveness of the military's actions. After the assessment we'll take all necessary measures," said Georgian Deputy Defense Minister Batu Kutelia. According to the information Kommersant got from Georgia's Defense Ministry yesterday, "Land forces artillery brigade commander Devi Chankotadze was the one to have best distinguished himself during the hostilities." Yesterday he was appointed Deputy Head of the Georgian Army Staff. He succeeded Alexiy Osepaishvili, who was downgraded to head of one of the Ministry's minor directorates because of "a bad organization the troops' movement" during the war. Land brigade commander Zurab Agladze also got promoted - he was appointed land troops commander. His predecessor Mamuka Balakhadze was sent to Germany for advanced training.

Besides, National Guard Commander David Aptsiauri, who was responsible for the preparation and mobilization of reservists, was fired. In the view of the Georgian authorities, the mobilization process was badly organized during the war. For example, the leadership of the National Guard was unable to provide ammunition and coordinate the activities of the reservists, which led to numerous casualties among them.

Georgy Dvali, Tbilisi

Georgian government arrested Tsotne Gamsakhurdia

Wednesday night, son of Georgia's first President Zviad Gamsakhurdia Tsotne was detained by the Georgian Interior Ministry in Tbilisi airport after he arrived from Moscow. He is accused of attempting to stage a coup. Here the events of the autumn of 2007 are meant. At that time the Georgian government and opposition confronted. On November 7, 2007 as the confrontation was at its peak, causing clashes between the police and demonstrators, the Georgian Interior Ministry made public a record of a telephone conversation between Tsotne Gamsakhurdia and his elder brother. During the conversation Tsotne, who resided in Moscow, reproached the leaders of the opposition that they didn't prompt people to take to the streets and storm governmental buildings on November 2 during an unprecedented anti-government meeting in Rustaveli Avenue. The authorities regarded it as an attempt to stage a coup.

Interestingly, Tsotne Gamsakhurdia knew that a suit was brought against him, but after the Russia-Georgian military conflict he decided to return to his motherland. Perhaps he was encouraged by the fact that such suits were brought against many opposition leaders, but no one of them was arrested. For example, the Georgian Prosecutor General's Office instituted proceedings

against Labor Party leader Shalva Natelashvili, but didn't arrest him. Apparently, the deciding factor was that unlike Mr Natelashvili, Tsothe Gamsakhurdia had lived in Moscow and returned to Tbilisi after the war. Tbilisi is sure that the Russian government's aim during the recent conflict was toppling President Saakashvili.

Activists of the Svoboda (Freedom) opposition party told Kommersant, "The Interior Ministry doesn't let lawyers visit Tsothe Gamsakhurdia, and that's why we may apply to the international community."

Georgy Dvali, Tbilisi

Alexander Gabuev, Vladimir Solovyov; Rafael Mustafayev, Baku; Georgy Dvali, Tbilisi

http://www.kommersant.com/p1020720/Ilham_Aliyev_reluctant_to_fully_support_America/
