

Saakashvili's About-Face In Lobbying Washington

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Chalk one up for President Mikheil Saakashvili's PR machine, whose lobbyists have managed to convince U.S. Representative Michael Turner that Georgia is a tyrannical, abusive and violent nation, unworthy of U.S. support. Makes you wonder whose side Saakashvili is on.

Turner, a right-wing Republican, also cosponsored amendments to the U.S. Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, which, if passed, could mean Georgia will receive less defense aid from the U.S. for backsliding on its commitment to build a "free and democratic society."

In 2007, Saakashvili set a benchmark for Georgian democracy when his incorruptible police violently crushed a political demonstration and aggressively shut down an independent television station. Meanwhile, Turner was doing some backsliding of his own. Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington named him one of the most corrupt members of congress for ethics issues stemming from a no-bid marketing contract his that his wife won from a group that receives federal funding.

This is the same Turner who claims to be a "pork buster," yet added a provision to the NDAA to restore \$6 billion in funding a nuclear facility in New Mexico, even though both the Pentagon and the National Nuclear Security Administration stated the proposed facility was unnecessary. But then Turner received some \$70,000 in campaign funds from companies connected to the nuclear lab. This boondoggle occurred not long after Saakashvili's police officers again ferociously beat protesters in 2011, an event that resulted in two deaths.

Turner and the U.S. Congress had no problems with Georgia's democratic progress when it awarded Georgia more than \$11 million in military assistance in 2007 and \$17.9 million in 2011. But now, after a historic democratic transfer of power, it does. Moreover, Turner, a chickenhawk in the classic sense, aims to punish a country that is contributing more troops to the NATO mission in Afghanistan than any other member nation. Thirty-four Georgian soldiers have died supporting U.S.-led missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Thanks to Saakashvili's lobbying efforts, the U.S. House of Representatives claims the Georgian government — led by Saakashvili's arch-foe, Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili — is pursuing a course motivated by political and personal motivations and warns this could have a negative impact on cooperation between the two countries. It's rather cynical that Saakashvili is pursuing a similar course and is lobbying Congress to reduce its support to his country, instead of to increase it.

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