Davit Kezerashvili - Not Caught Not Thief, Georgian Justice

It’s hard keeping track of Georgia’s ex-ministers. They were often shady figures to begin with – either they did nothing before politics, as entering parliament is one of the few ways of earning a decent living in that country, or they tried to hide their real connections. At least two members of the previous Georgian government, Nika Rurua and Vano Merabishvili, were professional gangsters. Rurua, former killer and war criminal was exiled from the country for his litany of murders and extortions but then brought back to be – don’t laugh – Culture Minister.

Merabishvili, Minister of Internal Affairs, had contract killers on his personal payroll, including at least two with direct ties to the notorious murders of former Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania and Sandro Girgvlian, a young banker who was brutally murder by those in his and the president Mikheil Saakashvili’s inner circle. The former minister is awaiting trial now, charged with a long list of corruption charges and is implicated in a string of murders as well. Well, Al Capone was only ever jailed for tax evasion.

But whenever Georgia makes the news, especially recently, one name keeps cropping up: Davit Kezerashvili. He made international headlines during the 2008 Russia-Georgia War as the “29-year old Georgian Minister of Defense”. Questions were asked about how he had obtained such a responsible position at that tender age. Even more questions were asked about what he actually did all day long. But they weren’t asked for long in public, because all the right people knew the answers, as he was chemically high and acted as the go between and bag man on various corrupt deals.

Kezerashvili holds dual Georgian-Israeli citizenship. He was born in Georgia, but lived for a number of years in Israel. He didn’t migrate voluntarily. As contemporaries recall, he initially fled to Russia to avoid being arrested for drug dealing – aged 14. After living with his grandmother for some years he returned to Georgia and studied at Tbilisi State University. There he threatened one of his female professors for refusing to give him high marks, an action she maintained was reasonable as he had not attended lectures. He was known on campus for his fits of rage, believed to have been drug-related.

After his eventual graduation he joined the Ministry of Justice. This was during the presidency of Eduard Shevardnadze, who had risen to the top in Soviet times by turning the Georgian Communist Party into a web of corruption in which everyone was beholden unto him. As President of Georgia he remained in power by turning the whole country into a similar web of corruption and networks of patronage. It takes a special sort of talent to run a Justice Ministry which only exists to legitimize injustice. The minister Kezerashvili served under was a certain Mikheil Saakashvili, who had been well trained by both Russian and US intelligence agencies. Kezerashvili was head of his Information Department, the mouthpiece of Georgian justice. He then followed his mentor to Tbilisi City Council and joined him in founding the United National Movement in 2001.

When the U.S. finally tired of Shevardnadze, his role in providing transit and money laundering services to alleged terrorist, it suddenly discovered that the elections were being rigged, thus allowing Saakashvili to stage his Rose Revolution with the only support that mattered. The real reason was he was not as good as he was once in playing both sides as before.

Kezerashvili was again by his side. His years in the Ministry of Justice had not been wasted – he knew that it’s illegal
to deport a Jew from Israel, so that if anything went wrong he could run away again and do what he wanted from there. He was set to work in the new Finance Ministry. A well-documented feature of the Saakashvili regime was its stealing of successful businesses, and closing of uncooperative ones, by making false allegations of fiscal malfeasance against their management. From 2004 to 2006, Davit Kezerashvili was head of the financial police force.

From there, he was moved to the Ministry of Defense – with no prior experience whatever. As such, he was responsible for procurement. Another well-documented feature of the Saakashvili regime is its defense and banking system relationship with – you've guessed it – Israel. Kezerashvili is fluent in Hebrew. A multitude of reports, from unconnected but publicly available sources, name Israel as one of the states which has dealt with Viktor Bout, the world’s most notorious black market arms dealer, “Merchant of Death”, and the Melvale Corporation, an intermediary company of dubious international standing which has been known to use Georgian-issued “end user certificates” in its operations. It had direct links with Serbian and Jordanian arms manufacturers and exporters – and all with the full knowledge of the US administration. There are also several air cargo companies set up in Georgia with the purpose of transporting various cargoes to hotspots around the world, at least when not making charter flights for the UN in Africa.

Various international laws and conventions prohibit the sale of weapons to those who might use them for illegal purposes. Nevertheless, terrorist groups always seem to have them. This is because the shipments they receive carry fake end user certificates, stipulating that the weapons will be used by someone legal, like the Georgian Army, for legitimate purposes.

It was discovered during the 2008 war that the Georgian Army had only a fraction of the weapons and equipment procured for it by the Defense Minister, Davit Kezerashvili. Georgian soldiers were sent to die as cannon fodder, as they were unable to defend themselves and command and control from the top had collapsed. Where were all the weapons they should have had? Probably – and in some cases definitely – in the hands of the terrorists whose handiwork you see on TV every day. The Defense Minister of Georgia, Davit Kezerashvili, was responsible for them being there.

These deals had been going on for years, since before his time. But other ministers could be removed – and were – if their hands were found too far in the till. Kezerashvili was too valuable to the ruling party. It wasn’t funded by its members because most of Georgia is poor. To pay its bills, it needed to steal. Kezerashvili was allowed his percentage as long as he bankrolled the United National Movement and its election campaigns through an ever-increasing portfolio of criminal arms and drug deals (weapons for drug swaps). Indeed, he might have done so for a lot longer if President Saakashvili’s uncle, Temur Alasania, hadn’t muscled in on the act and asked for a bigger share of the blood money.

It’s safer to report personal feuds than criminal dealings. Soon the Georgian media knew about the weapons stockpiles dumped at the borders, intentionally left to fall into Russian hands so that if the wrong people used them it would be Russia’s fault. Soon we knew about the deals with Alexander Islamov, second only to Victor Bout in the arms business, who agreed to supply outdated and useless military hardware to Georgia. Soon we knew the names of those involved in implementing all the dodgy deals, and their many connections with each other, Georgian transit companies, Alasania and Kezerashvili, and Bet Din intelligence services. They were reported on Maestro TV, reports by the Georgian Human Rights Centre in several newspapers, and on posted several websites.

It became too obvious that Kezerashvili was using the 2008 war, and Georgian lives, to steal with impunity and protect his cohorts. He was moved aside, having lost 20% of Georgia. Still the ruling United National Party needed the weapons and drug money, but it couldn’t get it publicly. So Kezerashvili continued to “concentrate on his business interests”, as the local media put it. When his friends lost power in 2012 he fled the country. Last month he was found in France and arrested at the request of Tbilisi on a catch-all corruption charge and he was boarding a plane to Albania, another weapons trafficking hub. Tbilisi has arrested several former ministers, and various international figures have objected. But this time only Kezerashvili’s lawyer is saying that his arrest is politically motivated.

So will Davit Kezerashvili spend the rest of his life in jail? If he can be sprung to Israel, NO; but if a real attempt is made to investigate the allegations against him, also a definite No. Certain people know for sure who a talkative Kezerashvili will take down with him. It is no coincidence that the U.S. and Jordan, a strategic ally also has a longstanding defense arrangement with Georgia – and did while Kezerashvili was the minister in charge. The former FBI director also is worried as to who will Kezerashvili take down with him. One way or another, traditional Georgian
justice will triumph once again. The final question is: what will be the fate of all those international players: those who help facilitate these deals, cover ups and who networked in providing the financial mechanisms and enabling paperwork?

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