

U.S.-GEORGIA FORUM

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GEORGIA'S SECURITY CHALLENGES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Georgia's Strategic Position

Georgia is strategically important for the West, while the West remains vital for Georgia's security and development. The country is located at an important geopolitical juncture between South East Europe, the Black Sea littoral, the Caspian Basin, and the Middle East. Securing Georgia as an independent, integrated, stable, and economically successful democracy is in the interests of both NATO and the European Union, as this projects the interests and values of Western countries and institutions toward all intersecting regions. For Georgia, NATO and EU are important institutions to which it aspires to belong and with which it seeks mutual and complementary political, economic, and security benefits.

The step-by-step inclusion of Georgia in the Wider Europe and the broader trans-Atlantic community will settle its security fears and act as a deterrent to future conflicts. It will also stimulate democratic consolidation, as it did in Central Europe and throughout the Balkan Peninsula. The more stable and successful Georgia becomes, the more it will encourage neighboring countries to pursue meaningful democratic reforms.

NATO's Bucharest Summit in April 2008 stated that Georgia would become an Alliance member and the decision was reaffirmed at the Chicago Summit in May 2012. Georgia's progress has been underscored through implementation of its Annual National Program (ANP) and engagement in the NATO-Georgia Commission. Alliance members agreed at the Chicago Summit to enhance NATO-Georgia links by strengthening political dialogue, practical cooperation, and interoperability. The Summit also acknowledged Georgia's substantial contribution to Euro-Atlantic security, as the largest non-NATO nation contributing troops to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan.

Georgia has assumed a responsible position in the wider Caspian and Central Asian region, especially in deploying with NATO forces in Afghanistan. Georgia remains a reliable military partner not only for the U.S. but also for NATO, as demonstrated in the ISAF mission. It remains the highest per-capita contributor of troops and despite the fact that it has suffered casualties, domestic support for the mission remains unchanged. This is due not only to the motivation of its soldiers but because Georgian society exhibits a high degree of support for NATO. The U.S. government and Congress recognize Georgia's significance, with broad bipartisan support for Georgia in the Senate and the House. Georgia is near the top in program and funding tables in foreign aid bills. The billion dollar assistance package to the country after the August 2008 war with Russia has spanned two administrations, and in 2011 and 2012 Georgia was second only to Ukraine in U.S. assistance to the Wider European region.

Security Challenges

Georgia remains in a paradoxical position in that it needs to issue alerts regarding threats to its security without discouraging investors and stifling economic development. Constructing a durable democracy and a productive economy in an unstable security environment is a major challenge for the country. In the past ten years Georgia has developed from a fragile and failing state to a potential regional model, although it must continue to ensure democratic consolidation over several election cycles. The World Bank has highlighted Georgia as a successful example for combating corruption and listed it as an easy place to do business. Georgia's democratic development and domestic stability will remain a major component of its security. Parliamentary elections are scheduled for October 2012 and it is imperative that the process is fully transparent and meets OSCE standards. Tbilisi has invited all election monitoring organizations and assigned an interagency task force to help strengthen preparedness for the balloting.

While it seeks to consolidate its democracy, the threat of regional instability looms over Georgia and could be triggered by a number of events. This may involve another Russian military incursion, on the pretext of either combating terrorism, supplying the Russian military base in Armenia, assisting Russian-speaking minorities, or pre-empting an alleged Georgian assault on the occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia is also making preparations to intervene militarily in the South Caucasus if a war were to erupt over suspected Iranian nuclear weapons facilities. The justification could be to protect Russia's military base in Armenia, to provide a humanitarian corridor of assistance to Iran, or as a response to potential U.S. intervention.

Moscow's core objective is to undermine Georgia's independence and sovereign choice in its security arrangements and international alliances. To achieve its goals, since 2000 the administration of Vladimir Putin has seized on various opportunities to destabilize Georgia and exploit its weaknesses. It has thrived on divisions and ambiguities in the positions of NATO members regarding Georgia and has exploited the U.S. "reset" policy to apply new pressures of reintegration vis-à-vis its former satellites.

Since the Rose Revolution in 2003, Russian officials have attempted to neutralize and disqualify Georgia as an aspiring Western state that could encourage other post-Soviet countries to adopt a democratic model of governance. This has included support and sponsorship of separatist movements, territorial occupation and partition, military mutinies, terrorist plots, and propaganda attacks. Moscow is intent on replacing the government in Georgia with a more pliable and dependent administration. It failed during the August 2008 war to discredit President Mikhail Sakaashvili domestically and internationally, and since then it has tried other tactics to unseat the incumbent government.

In this context, the risks of Moscow's possible meddling in Georgia's internal politics through discrediting and undermining the democratic process must not be underestimated. This would include financial and other support to political forces willing to be patronized by the Kremlin and the price of which could culminate in the country's destabilization. If these risks materialize, the momentous shift in Georgia's foreign and security policies will be followed by democratic rollback and the resurgence of autocratic tendencies not only in Georgia, but in the wider region as well. Moscow has been engaged in political infiltration and corruption among its neighbors for over a decade, with Lithuania and Latvia serving as two documented examples. Georgia may become a test case for the Russian authorities in

exploiting the democratic process in neighboring countries to its advantage while thwarting its own domestic yearnings for democracy. Instructively, despite Russia's strong opposition to Georgia's sovereign choice regarding its international alliances, no immediate neighbor or any state belonging to the Moscow-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) objects to Georgia's accession to either NATO or the EU.

20 percent of Georgian territory remains under the occupation of the Russian military, including Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and adjacent areas next to these two regions. 10,000 troops are stationed on Georgian territory with advanced military hardware. Tbilisi faces the challenge of reintegrating its occupied territories without sparking armed conflicts with Moscow. It therefore needs sustained international support together with the development of various soft power tools and incentives toward its occupied lands.

Aside from direct and indirect Russian pressures, other regional factors can impact on Georgia's security. Deteriorating security conditions in the North Caucasus are a consequence of Russia's failed policies in subduing independence movements and militant Islamist groups. Moscow's heavy-handed approach can have a negative impact on Georgia's own security, whether through an outflow of refugees, hot pursuit operations by Russian forces against Islamist guerrillas, or the outright bombing of Georgian territory. While Georgia has good relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, its two southern neighbors are on the verge of a new open conflict over Nagorno Karabakh and other Armenian-occupied regions of Azerbaijan.

Moscow has scheduled a large-scale military exercise along Georgia's northern border, dubbed as Kavkaz 2012, at the end of August and early September 2012. The exercises will take place during Georgia's election campaign and seem intended to heighten the sense of insecurity. The scenarios of Kavkaz 2012 may include: Russian military intervention to assist Armenia in case of a war with Azerbaijan over the territory of Nagorno Karabakh; the capability to connect with the Russian military base in Armenia; and a response to a potential conflict between the U.S. and Iran that would spill over into the region. In all these scenarios, Moscow would cross Georgian territory without the agreement of Tbilisi and could use the opportunity to unseat the elected government.

Security Principles

- A clearer signal is needed from NATO about the future of the Atlantic Alliance and the position of partner and aspirant countries. This itself is important for Georgia's security aspirations and reform momentum. Any potential weakening or decline of NATO as a security and defense organization would rebound negatively on Georgia's objectives and on regional stability.
- Georgia should be integrated in all European and trans-Atlantic institutions. The process of qualifying for institutional inclusion is itself a stimulator of democratic, economic, and security development. Integration in NATO and the EU will also give both Washington and Brussels more influence in Tbilisi.
- With regard to Georgia-NATO strategy, Georgia needs to continue to improve its

performance, so that the special relationship is advanced in terms of procedures and frameworks. Recent successes are apparent, as evidenced by Georgia's inclusion in the same basket as the three Western Balkans aspirants (Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina) slated for NATO integration.

- Georgia's inclusion in NATO will ultimately improve relations with Russia, similarly to the situation for the Central European and Baltic states. It will temper any temptations for military intervention and act as a restraint on armed conflict. Without the prospect of membership in an effective collective defense organization, Georgia will feel less secure in an unstable and unpredictable neighborhood and will be more vulnerable to outside pressure.
- Georgia's self-defense capabilities need to be enhanced and its armed forces modernized to meet NATO standards. Educational programs can better educate civil servants on security policy. There is progress in Georgia's air defense and coastal defense. The sale of M4 carbines has been approved over this summer. The emphasis has been on defense modernization. Foreign Ministers and International Military Education and Training (IMET) officials have met at the highest levels. Aside from the ISAF deployment, there should be more joint exercises with an American presence on the ground in Georgia.
- Georgia's regional relations with all neighbors can be enhanced. Several post-Soviet states are looking at Georgia as a potential success story and model to emulate. To fulfill such a role Georgia requires continuing Western support. Georgia is also constructively seeking to stabilize its northern borders by developing closer relations with the North Caucasus republics through visa free travel, an outreach media program, cross border trade, and the recognition of the region's distinct history. This soft power promotion of economic, social, and cultural interchange should be assisted by Western governments and institutions. By discouraging cross-border conflicts Georgia is contributing to regional stability and contributing to the integrity of the Russian Federation.
- It is important not to bypass Georgia in any relations or dealings with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as bilateralism gives credence to Moscow's position that these territories are independent entities and encourages their intransigence. Georgia must remain open to both regions in all dimensions – economic, social, cultural, infrastructural, security, and political. On the other hand, Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders must continue to be supported, as was evident in NATO's Chicago Declaration, which called on Moscow to reverse its recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states and voiced concern over Russia's military build-up on Georgia's territory.

Security Recommendations

Concrete and Consistent Steps Toward NATO Integration

Beyond the positive message from the Chicago summit, NATO must undertake a number of concrete steps and generate consistent signals concerning Georgia.

1. The core principle that Alliance enlargement is a prescription for a more stable Europe needs to be reiterated. In this context, Georgia is part of the broader process of enlargement and the NATO aspirant countries are moving closer toward membership.
2. The case for membership needs to be reiterated at the heads of state level. A joint declaration for advancing security and stability in Europe would validate NATO's open door policy.
3. NATO should send officials to the four aspirant countries to signal the launch of a campaign demonstrating that progress is being made and decisions on enlargement are expected at the next NATO summit scheduled for 2014. This is consistent with the recent statement by the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that Chicago would be the last non-enlargement Summit.
4. Georgia must be involved in all meetings of NATO candidate countries, including ministerial sessions and core partner meetings. It must also be included in NATO documents as one of the candidate group for Alliance membership. Following the Chicago Summit, Georgia is now linked with the three Balkan countries whose accession is accepted as inevitable once the necessary conditions are met.
5. Membership Action Plans (MAPs) should not be considered as the only necessary process leading to NATO integration. Alternative methods can include the Annual National Plans and the U.S.-Georgia Commission. These can be upgraded to fulfill MAP's functions in promoting inter-operability and conducting performance reviews. The prospect of inclusion in NATO is an efficient way to stimulate reforms in aspirant countries. Western assistance is likely to decrease in the coming years, so it is a bargain for the U.S. to incentivize NATO membership. This also creates economic opportunities for U.S. business.

Developing the U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership to Enhance Georgia's Self-Defense

The goal of the U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership, launched in January 2009, is the full integration of Georgia into European and transatlantic political, economic, security, and defense institutions. The Charter consists of four priority areas or baskets: Defense and Security Cooperation; Economic, Trade and Energy Cooperation; Strengthening Democracy; and Increasing People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges.

1. U.S.-Georgia security normalization has passed through several phases. Since 2008, Washington has focused on a "brains before brawn" approach, emphasizing training and

education and deploying Georgian troops away from Georgian soil. However, difficulties remain regarding territorial defense, as Tbilisi has experienced problems in obtaining basic military items from NATO member states. There are several keys to normalizing the US-Georgia defense relationship, including transparency with all interested parties; coordination with NATO allies; placing the relationship in the framework of the non-use of force pledge and in the context of UN Charter Article 51 and the Helsinki Charter that every nation has the right to self-defense, that borders cannot be changed by force, and that every state can form its own alliances.

2. Washington and Tbilisi need to conduct a more effective and pro-active information campaign on their bilateral defense and security cooperation, including its objectives and achievements, otherwise rumor and disinformation can undermine these developing relations. Defense and security cooperation must have a clear goal of strengthening Georgia's defense capabilities, including its air defense and radar systems. Additionally, a mechanism for consultation between Washington and Tbilisi can be established during periods of heightened tensions in and around Georgia.

3. In the Defense and Security Cooperation basket of the Strategic Partnership, an important initiative would be to review the language of Section 1242 of the NDAA regarding Senator John McCain's sponsored language on defense cooperation with Georgia. The goal of "normalized defense cooperation" should develop discussions on how best to support Georgia's territorial defense needs, particularly with regards to materiel and training. U.S. Secretary Hillary Clinton's visit to Georgia on 5 June 2012 sent a positive signal with the announcement of new military assistance under a USD 16.6 million aid package. This includes radar training for coastal and aerial defense, the upgrading of Georgia's helicopter fleet, and officer training to improve its ability to defend itself and operate in NATO missions. Clinton stated that modernizing Georgia's defenses was a "shared priority."

4. Other areas for security cooperation include Georgia's role in a post-2014 military mission in Afghanistan once NATO, the U.S., and Afghanistan decide what this mission would look like. Additional components can include Georgia's potential role in NATO's Global Partnership initiative and how Georgia could play a constructive role in the overall security provisions for the Sochi Winter Olympic Games in Russia in 2014.