

GEORGIA'S KEY FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY CHALLENGES

FOREIGN POLICY OVERVIEW

The purpose of this document is to review the key threats, challenges, and opportunities facing Georgia, as well as to examine the existing policy. In addition, the document offers the public recommendations and perspectives on Georgia’s foreign and security policy in a sustainable, predictable direction aligned with national interests.

KEY CHALLENGES

Over recent years — and particularly following Russia’s full-scale military aggression against Ukraine — Georgia’s security environment has changed significantly. The occupying state has intensified its hybrid pressure against Georgia, encompassing simultaneously military-political coercion as well as information warfare, psychological operations, economic leverage, corruption schemes, and financial and political manipulation. Against the backdrop of the ongoing “creeping occupation” and “borderization” of Georgian territories, the country is experiencing a qualitatively intensified wave of anti-Western propaganda. This aggressive campaign is primarily directed at weakening the historically established pro-Western societal consensus in Georgia, and at stoking discord, radicalization, and confrontation within society.

Systematic disinformation and propaganda — spread by the authorities — portraying deep and catastrophic economic, political, and social crisis and erosion in Europe and the United States, and frequently aligned with Kremlin’s propaganda, combined with the rapid democratic backsliding within our country, the extreme curtailment of human rights and freedoms, and the existence of political prisoners, is destroying our country’s reputation, costing it allies, and undermining its resilience.

In this context, particular importance attaches to objective, well-argued, fact-based responses to disinformation, as well as to the creation of objective narratives that correspond to the country’s interests and existing reality.

THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND KEY CHANGES

1. REASSESSMENT OF THE UNITED STATES' GLOBAL STRATEGY

The United States is redistributing its strategic focus and resources. This is not merely a one-off decision by the current administration, but represents a long-term strategy. Importantly, this does not imply a US "withdrawal" from Europe or a weakening of the transatlantic alliance. The US will remain committed to its obligations within NATO.

At the same time, a reorientation of US strategic priorities is emerging: a reduction of resources directed toward Europe and a concentration of attention on the Indo-Pacific region, where China is regarded as the principal systemic rival. This situation demands that European allies take on greater responsibility for their own security and defense, and mobilize resources over the long term. Simultaneously, there is likely to be a reduced tolerance for so-called strategic ambiguity, and a demand that allies take concrete action.

In practice, this means that countries perceived as unpredictable, inconsistent, or strategically ambivalent will be less likely to fall within the scope of long-term political attention, investment, and security priorities.

The current trend shows that in the near future, European allies will sharply increase defense spending and significantly strengthen the capabilities of their armed forces. For example, Estonia's defense budget stood at \$463 million in 2015. Over exactly ten years, as threats grew, this figure increased substantially and reached \$1.504 billion in 2025, representing 3.38% of GDP.

Lithuania's defense budget was \$471 million in 2015, representing 1.13% of GDP. Over ten years, Lithuania nearly eightfold increased its defense funding, with the 2025 budget reaching \$3.607 billion, approximately 4% of GDP.

Latvia also shows a striking growth trajectory. In 2015, Latvia's defense budget stood at \$282 million, or 1.07% of GDP. Over ten years the budget grew nearly sixfold, reaching \$1.653 billion in 2025 — 3.73% of GDP.

A similar trend is observable in virtually every NATO and EU member state. This indicates that Europe has fully grasped the severity of the threats it faces and is taking decisive steps toward strengthening deterrence and defense.

This process is shaping a qualitatively stronger and more capable Euro-Atlantic security space, in which the combined spending of alliance members will nearly double. Against this backdrop, Georgia faces a critical choice: to become part of this new security architecture, or to remain isolated from the ongoing global changes.

2. RUSSIA'S FULL-SCALE AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE

Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine launched in 2022 has definitively convinced European and American political circles that Russia is a revisionist, imperialist power and the principal threat to European security and stability.

Occupation, territorial conquest, corruption, propaganda, cyberattacks, sabotage, other methods of hy-

brid warfare, and the systematic use of force are permanent instruments of Russian state policy. These instruments are not temporary — they are a long-term threat and demand a constant, strategic response. Even in the event of changes in the intensity of combat operations in Ukraine, a state of “neither war nor peace” between the West and Russia will likely persist. The Kremlin regime will remain in a posture of confrontation with the West.

For Georgia, this reality is well known. We already live under occupation and face constant hybrid pressure — in the political, informational, economic, and security spheres.

Russia’s aggression in Ukraine has seriously degraded Russia’s capabilities — both military and those needed for hybrid warfare. The Kremlin was unable to come to the aid of its ally Assad’s regime in Syria, Maduro in Venezuela, or Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in Iran. It also proved unable to prevent the resolution of the Karabakh conflict, which Russia had been fanning and sustaining for three decades in order to maintain its influence over Azerbaijan and Armenia.

3. THE RESOLUTION OF THE ARMENIA–AZERBAIJAN CONFLICT

At the regional level, the resolution of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict represents a fundamental shift. The protracted armed confrontation that for decades defined the dynamics of the South Caucasus and impeded regional cooperation and development has ended. This creates a new regional dynamic and new opportunities — particularly in the areas of strategic partnerships, trade, infrastructure development, and political and economic cooperation.

The South Caucasus is no longer a frozen space. This transformation creates a new reality and unprecedented opportunities for all three countries.

4. EUROPE’S STRATEGIC AWAKENING

It is now clear that the European Union has come to recognize what many experts had been saying for years: Russian expansionism, its intolerance of a free Europe, and its aggression are real, long-term, and cannot be neutralized through appeasement. It is equally clear that the primary instrument for stopping Russia is the solidarity and unified policy of the free world. This shift in strategic paradigm will result in European allies mobilizing greater resources against defense and hybrid threats.

Moreover, EU enlargement is no longer perceived by Europeans merely as a normative or technocratic process. Enlargement is now conceived as a geopolitical instrument for ensuring security and stability. The examples of Ukraine and Moldova clearly demonstrate this. Georgia would have been part of this process, were it not for the policies of the ruling party Georgian Dream. Nevertheless, the window of opportunity for Georgian EU membership still exists — though this window cannot remain open indefinitely.

KEY THREATS AND RISKS FOR GEORGIA

1. RUSSIA'S AGGRESSIVE IMPERIALISM AND THE ONGOING OCCUPATION

Georgia's primary external threat remains unchanged — it is Russia's occupation of Georgian territories and the hybrid war being waged against our country. Russia's objectives vis-à-vis Georgia are clear and consistent: Georgia should be weak, undemocratic, corrupt, unreliable, isolated from the West, and its society fragmented, preventing integration into Western institutions.

To achieve these objectives, Russia employs military occupation and the threat of force, propaganda and disinformation warfare, corruption and economic and financial leverage, penetration of Georgia's institutions by special services, and aggressive interference in political and social processes. As noted above, Russia's capabilities — both military and economic — have been substantially weakened by the war in Ukraine; however, this should not be regarded as a factor likely to reduce Russian aggression against Georgia.

Georgian Dream's policies do not contribute to strengthening Georgia's resilience and growth of capabilities against Russia's hybrid warfare. The opposite is occurring. The country's growing isolation, increasing economic, financial, and energy dependence on Russia, the dismantling of democratic institutions and civil society, Georgian Dream's anti-Western propaganda, the stoking of internal discord and encouragement of polarization, and the capture of the state — all of this weakens the country and renders it vulnerable to Russian aggression.

2. GEORGIA'S GROWING INTERNATIONAL ISOLATION

Through its own policies and its desire to retain power at any cost, Georgian Dream is placing Georgia before the real threat of isolation from the West. This appears to be a deliberate choice by the Georgian Dream regime.

As a result of policies pursued in recent years, Georgia is increasingly perceived as a politically unreliable country, owing to its democratic backsliding, curtailment of human rights and freedoms, state capture, and the choice of a trajectory distancing it from Europe.

The consequence is the erosion of partners' trust, the destruction of the country's reputation, and growing strategic vulnerability. Isolation does not create stability — it creates vulnerability and makes Georgia an easy target for an aggressor.

3. SYSTEMIC DAMAGE TO GEORGIA'S RESILIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION

Not long ago, Georgia was perceived as a reformist, freedom-loving, and reliable partner of the West. Today, due to democratic backsliding, pressure on civil society and independent media, and the capture of state institutions, this perception no longer exists.

This reputational erosion undermines the effectiveness of deterrence more than any deficit in military capabilities. **In Georgia's case, peace and security are not maintained through silence or acquiescence — they must be maintained through reliability toward partners, strong allies, and above all through societal resilience, the development of the country's capabilities, and the degree of freedom it upholds.**

Strategically, before resorting to military force, Russia needs to destroy Georgia's reputation, alienate its friends and partners, and undermine its internal resilience — through the weakening of political pluralism, institutions, free media, civil society, and the country's intellectual and professional elites. The aim is the fragmentation and polarization of society and the spread of nihilism, ultimately leading to a **kleptocratic, informationally controlled autocracy** — a governance model resembling the Russian state.

When strategic sectors, fundamental decisions, or foreign policy are shaped by opaque, clan-based arrangements rather than by a transparent strategy built on clear national interests, this distances us from international partners and assists forces hostile to Georgia in achieving their aims.

Such practices damage Georgia's credibility, give allied countries well-founded cause for doubt, and destroy strategic trust. In international politics, perception rapidly becomes reality — states avoid strategic risks associated with unreliable partners.

Such a policy does not protect peace; on the contrary, it leaves Georgia without allies, with a divided society, deepening elite corruption, and an inadequately funded defense system. This constitutes direct grounds for the intensification of external pressure and, potentially, renewed Russian aggression.

Also, alarming is the trajectory of Georgia's defense spending in recent years. Georgia's defense expenditure amounts to approximately 1.7–1.8% of GDP, significantly lagging behind other countries in the region and inadequate to the existing threats. Investment in real defense capabilities is also meager and mismatched to the threats. Accordingly, it does not meet NATO standards. A poorly funded defense system cannot provide an effective deterrence policy and poses a real threat to peace.

OPPORTUNITIES GEORGIA IS NOT USING

1. EU ENLARGEMENT — A HISTORIC CHANCE

The political will formed at the highest levels in Europe has made EU enlargement a geopolitical imperative. The process has moved beyond distant, purely technocratic frameworks and has become a tangible, rapidly achievable goal — as the accelerated integration trajectories of Ukraine and Moldova clearly demonstrate.

For Georgia, this represents a unique, historic opportunity to resolve the strategic challenge facing the country.

However, the ruling regime — for which the retention of power has become the supreme priority — precludes Georgia from taking advantage of this historic opportunity. By portraying the EU as a hostile entity and sabotaging the integration process, Georgian Dream is endangering the country's European future — a chance that, if missed, may not recur for decades.

2. STRATEGIC CONNECTIVITY [TRANSIT POTENTIAL] AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

The end of the protracted Armenia–Azerbaijan armed conflict is a fundamental turning point for the South Caucasus. The conflict, which for decades defined the region's dynamics, has given way to a new reality, creating new opportunities for strategic partnerships, regional trade, improved efficiency of transport and energy corridors, and deepened political and economic cooperation. The South Caucasus

is no longer a frozen space — it is in a process of active transformation, containing both challenges and unprecedented opportunities for all three countries.

In this new reality, Georgia should naturally become a key hub connecting the region to the West — both politically and infrastructurally. Instead, the policies of the country's illegitimate government are distancing Georgia from the West, reducing its strategic effectiveness, and freezing — or deliberately undermining — critically important infrastructure projects.

Strategic connectivity — the development of transit capabilities — is not merely a transit or economic concept. It represents a geopolitical framework encompassing the development of multidimensional links between East and West across various sectors: energy, infrastructure, logistics, the digital sphere, security, and environmental protection. Such connectivity strengthens economic development, political integration, and strategic partnership, while simultaneously functioning as a deterrence mechanism and a means of consolidating our country's political significance. Its strength is directly linked to the consolidation of sovereignty and sustainable economic development.

Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine has definitively confirmed its revisionist and imperialist nature. This aggressive behavior represents a long-term threat and demands long-term strategic responses, including in terms of connecting Central Asia and Europe by bypassing spaces controlled by Russia.

It is vitally important for Georgia to develop a comprehensive national policy on strategic connectivity. The construction of the deep-water port at Anaklia, the modernization of the railway, the development of digital capabilities, and the implementation of other promising projects — along with the formulation of appropriate regulatory, tariff, and procedural policies — are necessary steps that will significantly improve Georgia's strategic importance and weight. These initiatives should be viewed not merely as support for infrastructure projects, but as geopolitical investments. This direction has economic and geopolitical value only if American and European companies are actively involved and take a leading role. China and Russia have no interest in developing this concept, as they already possess their own infrastructure networks tailored to their own interests.

Georgia must assume leadership in serving as the link connecting East to West, through active cooperation with its neighbors — as a facilitator of processes rather than a passive observer. Strategic ambiguity, democratic backsliding, and international isolation damage Georgia's national interests and endanger the Georgian state. Georgia faces a clear choice: a sovereign, European state, or a vulnerable, deeply corrupt system under Kremlin influence, governed by a Russian-style information autocracy.

TRIPP: The transit corridor between Armenia and Azerbaijan (TRIPP) represents for the United States an instrument for reducing Russian influence in the South Caucasus and promoting regional stability. However, the realization of this corridor's goals — and specifically the establishment of a regional transit-logistics hub compatible with Western standards — depends significantly on the formation of a tandem with Georgia as a secure outlet to the Black Sea. With increased Russian and Chinese influence in Georgia, Moscow and Beijing would gain the opportunity to obstruct or exploit this potential for their own interests.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The negative consequences of the grave political and strategic errors, missed opportunities, and disregard for threats described above are already being felt in the security, economic wellbeing, and international standing of Georgia's citizens. In order to remedy these negative consequences and return Georgia to its historical trajectory, we consider the following steps to be essential — steps that are fully aligned with Georgia's national interests and the aspirations of our society.

➤ ACCELERATED EU ACCESSION

The open window of opportunity for Georgian EU membership must be utilized to maximum effect. This requires full political alignment with EU priorities; the holding of independent and transparent parliamentary elections in the shortest possible time; the release of political prisoners; the implementation of genuine reforms; concrete steps toward restoring a democratic system of governance; respect for human rights; the cessation of Russian propaganda; confirmation of commitment to the values of freedom — and the pursuit of a genuine integration policy.

➤ RESTORATION OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES

Strategic partnership with the United States is essential for Georgia's national interests. Its suspension was caused by Georgia's democratic backsliding, the authorities' anti-Western propaganda, and the change in strategic direction. Once again: the holding of new parliamentary elections, the release of political prisoners, the restoration of a democratic course, and the repeal of repressive legislation are the first steps toward restoring this partnership.

➤ RESTORATION OF GEORGIA'S REPUTATION

Georgia must once again be perceived as a freedom-loving, democratic, rapidly developing, and predictable country. This is a key security resource, not merely a matter of general image.

➤ REGIONAL COOPERATION AND STRATEGIC CONNECTIVITY AS NATIONAL POLICY

Georgia must take ownership of the process of political and infrastructural integration of the region with the West. Tbilisi — through active cooperation with neighboring states — must become the primary driving force of this process rather than a passive observer. Our task is to ensure regional stability through robust strategic interdependence.

Above all, it must be connected to the West — both through infrastructure and regulations, and through the degree of freedom and quality of institutions it embodies. The deep-water port at Anaklia, railway modernization, adequate regulations, tariffs and procedures, and the active involvement of US and European companies represent geopolitical investments, not merely infrastructure projects.

➤ PRUDENT STRENGTHENING OF DEFENSE

It is essential to increase defense spending commensurate with existing challenges and to set clear priorities: professional military education, command and control systems, air defense, mobility, resilience, and comprehensive reform of the security sector. Ukraine has clearly demonstrated that a society supported and trained by partners is most effective at resisting aggression.

CLOSING REMARKS

In view of the existing challenges, it is essential to return Georgia to the international agenda as quickly as possible; to make maximum use of the rare open opportunity for EU integration; and to participate actively in both existing and new security formats being initiated by European countries, with a view to ensuring Georgia's security over the long term. Georgia must, as quickly as possible, reclaim its status as the region's leading country with European values; restore strategic relations with the EU, with countries that unconditionally support Georgia in Europe, and with the United States of America. We must not forget that despite the rapidly changing realities of the region, Georgia's role from a security perspective will always be decisive. Naturally, this must be accompanied by full consolidation of society within the country, the swift implementation of fundamental reforms, and a sharp improvement in the welfare of the population.

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