

# **Medium- & Long-term Prospects for Advancing US-Georgia Security Cooperation**

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Capstone Project

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## **Acknowledgements**

This subject of my research has been a central focus of my studies at the Fletcher School as part of my broader concentration on international security and Euro-Atlantic relations. Before joining Fletcher, I have extensively worked on topics related to US-Russia relations, NATO and Georgia's foreign policy within a context of the country's integration into NATO and the European Union. At this point, my hope is to engage professionally in some of the policies I have proposed in this research, after graduating from Fletcher.

On this note, I owe special thanks to my Adviser, Professor Richard Shultz, for his highly valuable advice and guidance throughout the research process. I would also like to extend my kind appreciation to the Russia and Eurasia Program at the Fletcher School for their generous support to my research-related travel to Tbilisi, Washington D.C. and Moscow. All this help have provided me with unique first-hand expertise, diverse professional opinions and continued feedback, which was instrumental for producing this final product.

## **Executive Summary**

This paper is designed to explore opportunities for enhanced security cooperation between the United States and Georgia in the medium and long-term perspectives. To achieve its objective, the analysis includes micro and macro levels of approaches to help its audience better understand strategic as well as tactical pieces of US-Georgia partnership. On this path, this research looks at legal and political frameworks as well as a wider geopolitical context. Moreover, the work examines strategic interests and objectives of both countries, current state of affairs, brief history and potential openings for US-Georgia relations. Importantly, the analysis also walks a reader through Russia's role in the process and key barriers that the United States and Georgia need to overcome jointly to strengthen their bilateral cooperation.

Two key questions this research paper intends to address are: 1. To what extent can the United States and Georgia advance their security cooperation in the medium and long-run? 2. What is Russia's role in this process?

The reason for crafting this paper at this given period pertains to providing short and medium-term flexibility and responsiveness for American and Georgian policy community as well as other relevant stakeholders to increase the capability and readiness to address evolving security concerns and threats in the South Caucasus and Black Sea<sup>1</sup> regions. In addition to coping with challenges, this research offers policy recommendations for the United States and Georgia to explore a number of opportunities to elevate their partnership to a higher level.

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<sup>1</sup> The European Union defines the Black Sea region as the six littoral states, (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia Turkey and Ukraine) as well as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova. Notably, there is no sole, universally agreed definition of what countries constitute the Black Sea region.

## **Introduction**

At the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their diplomatic relations, the United States and Georgia have developed strategic cooperation based on shared values and interests including but not limited to socio-economic, political and security areas.

The US-Georgia partnership has been outstanding, especially after the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, when the country became a role model for American policy of democratic transformation in the world. In April 2008, the United States with its European allies championed a final declaration at the NATO Bucharest Summit promising Georgia along with Ukraine eventual membership into NATO. However, Russia has viewed US-Georgia cooperation as challenging to its national security and foreign policy interests and shortly after Bucharest, carried out massive cyber-attacks followed by its full-scale invasion of Georgia in August 2008. Importantly, after the World War II, this was the first attempt to redraw the European map by force. For Russia, the invasion was aimed at containing United States' policies, including NATO enlargement, in the wider Black Sea area as well as in Eastern Europe at large.

Regardless these dramatic developments, the United States and Georgia further advanced their cooperation, especially in the security field. The post-war cooperation was marked by signing The US-Georgia Charter on Strategic Cooperation, in January 2009.

For the United States, Georgia represents a dependable ally in the Black Sea and South Caucasus regions, where US interests in energy, trade, security and political cooperation are vital. On the opposite, Russia continues to view US-Georgia cooperation in less constructive terms, citing it as hostile toward Kremlin's own strategic objectives. This includes expansion of Russia's Eurasian Union, checking NATO's further enlargement thus keeping Georgia as part of its so-called 'zone

of privileged influence.’ Notably, an overwhelming majority of Georgian citizens support cooperation with the United States and integration into Western institutions as opposed to embracing pro-Russian policies.

Broadly speaking, Russia’s hostile behavior toward Georgia gained higher geopolitical significance for the United States and the West, when Moscow illegally annexed Crimea in 2014 and embarked on waging hybrid warfare<sup>2</sup> against the United States and its European allies. More recently, the United States has recognized that Russia used hybrid warfare tactics, including disinformation campaigns and unmarked soldiers, in Crimea and its subsequent conflict in South-Eastern Ukraine; cyber-attacks against Ukraine’s critical infrastructure have also been attributed to Russia.<sup>3</sup> Most importantly within the American discourse on hybrid warfare, the United States asserts that Russia’s GRU-led cyber operation influenced the results of the 2016 US Presidential elections.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Russia’s hybrid capabilities have been likely employed in the pro-Brexit campaign<sup>5</sup> and supporting anti-EU candidates in the recent French

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<sup>2</sup>In his testimony at the RAND Corporation, Christopher Chivvis refers to the Russia’s “hybrid warfare” as “Moscow’s use of a broad range of subversive instruments, many of which are nonmilitary, to further Russian national interests.” According to Chivvis, Moscow seeks to employ hybrid warfare achieve several objectives: a) divide and weaken NATO; b) subvert pro-Western governments; c) create pretexts for war; d) annex territory; e) ensure access to European markets on its own terms. See: Christopher S. Chivvis, “Understanding Russian,” Product Page, 2017, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT468.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Chivvis, “Understanding Russian.”

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Brennan CBS News December 12, 2016, and 11:25 Pm, “U.S. Has High Confidence Russian Intelligence Agency Hacked DNC, DCCC,” accessed December 12, 2017, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/us-has-high-confidence-russian-intelligence-agency-hacked-dnc-dccc/>.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Booth et al., “Russia Used Hundreds of Fake Accounts to Tweet about Brexit, Data Shows,” *The Guardian*, November 14, 2017, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/14/how-400-russia-run-fake-accounts-posted-bogus-brexit-tweets>.

elections.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, reports also indicate that Russian actors may have hacked Germany's Bundestag and been involved in supporting Catalan separatist groups in Spain.<sup>7</sup> Finally, there is a reasonable degree of confidence that Russia attempted to organize a coup against the government of Montenegro in 2016 to impede the country's NATO membership.<sup>8</sup>

All these events confirm that Russia's geopolitical ambitions are not solely directed at Georgia, but gaining a great power status at the expense of diminishing US role in the world. Thus, US-Georgia cooperation especially in the security field very well fits into this wider geopolitical context, where US interests are vital.

Enhanced US-Georgia security cooperation will ensure Georgia's participation as a full operational partner within NATO and will strengthen deterrence against aggressive actions by Russia or from other sources in the Black Sea and South Caucasus regions. Since Georgia's role to the security and stability of the region is pivotal, it is in vital US interest to advance its positions in the area through its strengthened partnership with Georgia.

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<sup>6</sup> Laura Daniels, "How Russia Hacked the French Election," POLITICO, April 23, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-election-2017-russia-hacked-cyberattacks/>.

<sup>7</sup> Vasco Cotovio and Emanuella Grinberg CNN, "Spain: 'Misinformation' on Catalonia Vote Came from Russia," CNN, accessed December 13, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/11/13/europe/catalonia-russia-connection-referendum/index.html>.

<sup>8</sup> E. W. B. Archives, "Stoltenberg: Attempted Coup in Montenegro - Argument for NATO Membership," *European Western Balkans* (blog), March 14, 2017, [https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2017/03/14/\\_\\_\\_trashed-4/](https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2017/03/14/___trashed-4/).

## **Brief History of US-Georgia Security Cooperation**

The United States established diplomatic relations with Georgia in 1992 following Georgia's 1991 independence from the Soviet Union. Since then, Georgia made remarkable advances in fighting corruption, developing democratic institutions, and contributing to global security.<sup>9</sup> On this path, Georgia has been a champion of US policy of democracy promotion launched after the 9/11. The United States is committed to assisting Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration process by bolstering Georgia's democratic institutions and reforms process. The United States has also been a staunch supporter of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, including Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region, currently occupied by Russia.<sup>10</sup>

The US-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership, signed on January 9, 2009 spells-out the importance of bilateral relations between the United States and Georgia.<sup>11</sup> One of the key areas of the U.S.-Georgia strategic cooperation pertains to defense and security field.<sup>12</sup> A continuation of the Charter is the US-Georgia Memorandum on Deepening the Defense and Security Partnership, signed in June 2016, which states that the United States should expand joint

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<sup>9</sup> Zviad Adzinbaia, Interview with Temuri Yakobashvili, Former Ambassador of Georgia to the United States, February 24, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> "Georgia," U.S. Department of State, accessed March 14, 2018, //2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5253.htm.

<sup>11</sup> "United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership," U.S. Department of State, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/121029.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> "United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership."



exercises, promote military exchanges, pursue further training opportunities, and expand regional security cooperation with Georgia.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, US Marine forces have provided significant assistance to Georgian Armed Forces to support Georgia's contribution to the NATO-led missions in Afghanistan. The United States and Georgia regularly carry out multinational joint exercises such as Agile Spirit and Noble Partner.<sup>14</sup>

The general timeline of US-Georgia security cooperation looks as follows:

In 2002, the United States supported the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP). After 9/11, as part of US counterterrorism policies around the world, Georgia received assistance from the US to confront domestic terrorism threats in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge, a narrow valley in a region neighboring Chechnya.<sup>15</sup> In 2005, Georgia Sustainment and Stability Program (GSSP) launched. This training and equipping program assisted Georgian troops to prepare for deployments in Iraq after the US-led the invasion in 2003. Throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom, Georgia was a committed partner to the United States contributing over 7,800 troops to the mission. Notably, at the time of the Russian invasion in August 2008, Georgia was a second largest troop contributor in Iraq after the United States.<sup>16</sup>

In 2005, bilateral US-Georgia Defense Consultations were established. This format was launched

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<sup>13</sup> "Advancing Georgian-U.S. Security Cooperation after the Trump Transition," accessed March 20, 2017, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13422-advancing-georgian-us-security-cooperation-after-the-trump-transition.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Luke Coffey, "NATO Membership for Georgia: In U.S. and European Interest," The Heritage Foundation, accessed March 28, 2018, </defense/report/nato-membership-georgia-us-and-european-interest>.

<sup>15</sup> Personal interview with a high ranking person from the Ministry of Defense of Georgia, January 10, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Coffey, "NATO Membership for Georgia."

as a principal mechanism to advance ways of strengthening US–Georgia bilateral relations.

Meetings within this framework are held annually and center on assisting Georgia’s reforms at the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces.<sup>17</sup>

In 2017, at the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations, the United States and Georgia concluded a General Security of Information Agreement (GSOIA). The GSOIA agreement marked “a major milestone in security cooperation between the United States and Georgia” that advances intelligence sharing between the two countries and enables future agreements of such kind. It also aims to increase the Georgian military’s interoperability with NATO countries’ armed forces and services.<sup>18</sup>

In May 2017, the US Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017, which inhibits the US government from financially assisting governments that have recognized the Russian-occupied Georgian territories of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia as independent states. According to the document, US executive directors at each international financial institution shall vote against any assistance by such institution (including any credit, loan, or guarantee) to any program that runs counter to Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.<sup>19</sup>

At this point, the American–Georgian relationship, especially in the security and political areas has prospered under the Trump administration. In the summer of 2017, Vice President Mike

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<sup>17</sup> Coffey.

<sup>18</sup> “United States and Georgia Sign General Security of Information Agreement,” U.S. Department of State, accessed March 30, 2018, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/05/270754.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Cook, “Text - H.R.244 - 115th Congress (2017-2018): Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017,” webpage, May 5, 2017, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/244/text>.

Pence paid an official visit to Georgia, among two NATO member states, Estonia and Montenegro. Throughout the visit, Pence referred to the Russian military presence in the Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia as an “occupation and expressed US support to Georgia’s NATO membership.”<sup>20</sup>

In November 2017, the United States announced its major and historic sale of Javelin anti-tank missiles to Georgia. The package encompassed 410 missiles and 72 launch units.<sup>21</sup> Under the Obama administration, Georgia attempted for several years to get Javelins, but with no success. In addition to Javelins, the United States also agreed to refocus military cooperation on improving the territorial defense capabilities of the Georgian Armed Forces, which will greatly increase Georgia’s self-defense capabilities and improve resilience against potential foreign military incursions.

## **Interests of the United States in Georgia**

Georgia’s importance for the United States can be divided at least in three major areas:

**Strategic Location:** Georgia is a key US ally in the wider Black Sea and South Caucasus regions. It sits at a critical geographical and cultural crossroads and has demonstrated itself to be strategically significant for economic and military reasons for centuries.<sup>22</sup> In addition, as a key energy transport route from the Caspian to America’s allies in Europe, Georgia provides a strong

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<sup>20</sup> “Pence Conveys U.S. Support For Georgia In Visit To Tbilisi,” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed March 30, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/pence-us-baltic-nations-georgia/28651230.html>.

<sup>21</sup> “US Approves Long-Sought Sale of Anti-Tank Missiles to Georgia,” accessed March 30, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/s/us-approves-long-sought-sale-of-anti-tank-missiles-to-georgia>.

<sup>22</sup> Personal Interview with Luke Coffey, Director, Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy at the Heritage Foundation, February 23, 2018.

basis for advancing US national interest in the region.<sup>23</sup> For instance, for the past several years, Georgia has modernized main airports and port facilities, which is principally important while talking about the Black Sea region and its military and economic potential. Furthermore, strategic pipelines such as the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC), the Baku–Supsa pipeline, and the upcoming Southern Gas Corridor – all transit Georgia besides significant rail lines like the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway, which was recently inaugurated.<sup>24</sup>

Importantly, it is in US interests to be more active in the development of the new East-West transport corridors, where Georgia plays a pivotal role. Even though Georgia is a territorially small country, it is destined to become a hub linking European and Asian economies to one another.<sup>25</sup> Currently, Georgia is building a deep-water port at Anaklia, on its Black Sea coast. Anaklia, with a depth of 17 meters, will be able to accommodate large Panamax and Postpanamax container vessels, each carrying up to 10 000 TEU.<sup>26</sup> The \$2.5 billion worth project, being constructed by the Anaklia Development Consortium, will be operational by 2020. In addition, a Seattle-based leading American company SSA Marine will operate the Anaklia port.<sup>27</sup> This project will further solidify Georgia’s commercial and strategic value for the United States.

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<sup>23</sup> “Georgia | U.S. Agency for International Development,” accessed March 27, 2018, <https://www.usaid.gov/georgia>.

<sup>24</sup> Coffey, “NATO Membership for Georgia.”

<sup>25</sup> Donald Rumsfeld, “America’s Vital Interests Are at Stake in Georgia,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 23, 2016, sec. Opinion, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/americas-vital-interests-are-at-stake-in-georgia-1479861103>.

<sup>26</sup> “Anaklia Port – Georgia’s Key to the New ‘Silk Road’ of the 21st Century,” FrontNews, accessed March 30, 2018, <https://frontnews.eu/news/en/9871>.

<sup>27</sup> “US Will Help Georgia Build Deepwater Port of Anaklia,” frontnews.eu, accessed September 22, 2017, <https://frontnews.eu/news/en/9471>.

Georgia has also offered its territory, logistic capabilities and infrastructure for the transit of NATO forces and cargo to Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup> The country also provides a serious obstacle to the flow of jihadist terrorists from other parts of the ex-Soviet Union to the Middle East.<sup>29</sup> In addition, Georgia has a strong potential to play a central role in the strategies of NATO's future initiatives for securing the Black Sea against Russian aggression and ensuring freedom of navigation in international waters.

**Dependable Ally:** After 2008, Georgia has transformed its military and has been unwavering to support global security. The country contributed thousands of troops to US-led operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and hundreds of peacekeepers to the Balkans and Africa.<sup>30</sup> It is not well-known that at the time of the 2008 Russian invasion, Georgia had the second-largest number of troops in Iraq after the United States.<sup>31</sup> In 2012, when many NATO states “were rushing for the door in Afghanistan”, Georgia added hundreds of troops to the mission and maintained more than 2,000 troops serving in some of the deadliest places in the country, and arguably, in the world, in the Kandahar and Helmand provinces.<sup>32</sup> On a per capita basis, Georgia has suffered the most

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<sup>28</sup> Personal Interview with Batu Kutelia, Former Ambassador of Georgia to the United States, January 13, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> John Tefft, U.S. Ambassador to Georgia, “Importance of Continued Military Engagement with Georgia,” Wikileaks Public Library of US Diplomacy (Georgia Tbilisi, June 18, 2009), [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09TBILISI1123\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09TBILISI1123_a.html).

<sup>30</sup> NATO, “NATO Secretary General: Georgia Is Moving Closer to the Alliance,” NATO, accessed April 16, 2018, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_132139.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_132139.htm).

<sup>31</sup> Robert Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> Personal Interview with Luke Coffey, Director, Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy at the Heritage Foundation.

casualties in combat missions.<sup>33</sup> Currently, Georgia is the largest non-NATO contributor to the NATO mission with 870 troops in Afghanistan.<sup>34</sup>

**Shared Values:** Georgia has demonstrated its sound democracy, pluralistic society and unwavering commitment to the values of the transatlantic community. Georgia is a beacon of stability in a very challenging and sometimes highly dangerous region of the world. The United States should be rewarding this and encouraging others to model themselves of Georgia.<sup>35</sup>

Georgia's democratic path is an example for the entire region. Following its declaration of independence in 1991, Georgia has been facing westward. Especially, after the 2003 Rose Revolution, successive administrations in Georgia have consistently pursued an agenda of liberalizing the economy, minimizing bureaucracy, fighting corruption and organized crime as well as contributing to regional and international security.<sup>36</sup> Importantly, Georgia in Europe also represents the idea that each country has the sovereign right to choose its own path, including internal and external affairs. Thus, it is in America's interest that Georgia remain on this path.<sup>37</sup>

Although the threat of Soviet communism is gone, Russia has engaged in strong subversive measures to undermine the credibility of America's commitment to Europe as well as

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<sup>33</sup> "Georgian Soldier Killed In Afghanistan," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgian-soldier-killed-in-afghanistan/28658473.html>.

<sup>34</sup> NATO, "Georgia: Now the Top Non-NATO Troop Contributor in Afghanistan," NATO, accessed April 1, 2018, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_101633.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_101633.htm).

<sup>35</sup> Personal Interview with Luke Coffey, Director, Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy at the Heritage Foundation.

<sup>36</sup> Personal Interview with Gela Bezhuashvil, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, January 8, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

transatlantic unity and Western democracies.<sup>38</sup> After invading Georgia in 2008 and subsequently annexing Crimea and occupying Ukraine's Eastern provinces in 2014, Russia demonstrated that European borders are still subject to adjustment by force. Such a posture of Russia challenges vital US interests in wider Euro-Atlantic area.

### **Georgia's Pro-Western Path: From the Rose Revolution On**

Following the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, the country was transformed from the brink of a failed state into a success story of democratic development in the wider post-Soviet and Black Sea area. This major event was described by *The Economist* as “mental revolution”, emphasizing Georgia's substantial shift from its Soviet past to European values and structures.<sup>39</sup> Within a couple of years after the new leadership led by Columbia Law School graduate Mikheil Saakashvili changed Eduard Shevardnadze's unpopular government, some-major structural reforms were carried out. The changes encompassed substantial liberalization of economy, building new, corruption-free police and education system. In addition, brand new security institutions, rapid modernization of infrastructure and democratic institutions laid a substantial foundation to a new country of Georgia. Most importantly, the shift occurred in the minds of the Georgian people who grew more ambitious and Westward looking.<sup>40</sup> As of 2010, Georgia was

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<sup>38</sup> The White House, “National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” December 2017.

<sup>39</sup> “Georgia's Mental Revolution,” *The Economist*, August 19, 2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/16847798>.

<sup>40</sup> “From Popular Revolutions to Effective Reforms: A Statesman's Forum with President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia,” *Brookings* (blog), November 30, 2001, <https://www.brookings.edu/events/from-popular-revolutions-to-effective-reforms-the-georgian-experience/>.

one of the least corrupt countries in Europe and as the World Bank described, one of the pioneering states in the world in terms of ease of doing business.<sup>41</sup>

While initially welcomed by Russia, the consequences of the Rose Revolution, which accelerated Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic course, hardly pleased the government in Moscow, who had de-facto control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Tskhinvali Region), the regions, where Russia was supposed to guarantee peace and support ultimate resolution of the conflict.<sup>42</sup> Since Georgia's successful institutional reforms were applauded by the EU and the United States, Georgia's approximation process with the Euro-Atlantic institutions was further reinforced. In fact, the Western support was well-demonstrated by frequent high level visits to Tbilisi, among which was President George W. Bush. His arrival to Tbilisi in 2005 (first US President to ever visit Georgia) was considered an indication of Georgia's central role in the wider region as an icon of America's democracy promotion policy.<sup>43</sup> The White House and European support reached its pinnacle when the Bush administration along with the UK and the majority of Eastern European allies championed Georgia's NATO membership at the NATO Bucharest summit in 2008. Even though Georgia was not given NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP) due to Germany's objections, the country was promised its ultimate membership into the Alliance.<sup>44</sup> While such a decision was meant to maintain business relations with Russia, Moscow's fear that

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<sup>41</sup> The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, "Doing Business 2010," 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>43</sup> "Bush Hails Georgia as 'Beacon of Liberty,'" the Guardian, May 10, 2005, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/may/10/georgia.usa>.

<sup>44</sup> NATO, "Bucharest Summit Declaration - Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008," NATO, accessed April 25, 2017, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_8443.htm).



Georgia's ultimate membership would threaten its post-Soviet ambitions to restore the lost empire somehow, led it to act aggressively.<sup>45</sup> In 2008, Russia invaded Georgia, occupied Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region, which Moscow shortly after declared as independent states and maintains military bases on the ground until today.<sup>46</sup>

In 2009, Georgia along with Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus joined the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative established by the European Union. The EaP aims at building a common area of shared democracy, prosperity, stability and increased cooperation with EU neighbors.<sup>47</sup> This format significantly helped Georgia advance its EU aspirations through various practical tools and cooperation frameworks. By such mechanisms, the country, which had emerged as a fastest-growing democracy among the other post-Soviet countries, redefined its foreign policy course as 'the return to Europe.' On this path, Georgia has already abandoned the term "post-Soviet", given the term's elusive nature to permanently label countries as underdeveloped and quasi-democracies.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ariel Cohen Robert E. Hamilton, "THE RUSSIAN MILITARY AND THE GEORGIA WAR: LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS" (STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE, June 2011).

<sup>46</sup> "Russia Lays Ground for South Ossetia Annexation," accessed March 31, 2017, <http://new.civil.ge/clarion/news/2/1406/eng>.

<sup>47</sup> "Eastern Partnership - EEAS - European External Action Service - European Commission," EEAS - European External Action Service, accessed December 7, 2017, [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/419/Eastern Partnership](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/419/Eastern%20Partnership).

<sup>48</sup> "PM Kvirikashvili: Georgia Is No Longer a Post-Soviet Country," Georgia Today on the Web, accessed December 9, 2017, <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/6655/PM-Kvirikashvili%3A-Georgia-Is-No-Longer-a-Post-Soviet-Country>.

## Russia's Strategy and its Interests in Georgia

### *Georgia Under Russia's Broad View*

Russia's updated national security strategy adopted in December 2015 emphasizes Russia's status as a leading world power (*derzhava*) in order to "maintain strategic stability and mutually beneficial partnerships in a polycentric world."<sup>49</sup> The document distinguishes the post-Soviet space from the Euro-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific regions and refers to it as the Eurasian "region" or "space."<sup>50</sup> Russia also states that the West exerts a negative influence on Russian national interests and proclaims that an "anti-constitutional coup d'état" supported by the United States and the EU, has led Ukrainian society to an armed conflict and caused a "deep split." In addition, the strategy clarifies that bilateral and multilateral relations with CIS countries<sup>51</sup>, as well as the "Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia" – territories that the international community recognizes as part of Georgia - constitute one of the key areas of foreign policy for the Russian Federation.<sup>52</sup>

A significant segment of Russia's strategy focuses on reasons for confrontation rather than potential solutions to disagreements between Russia and the West.<sup>53</sup> In fact, the document assesses the so-called "Islamic State" terrorist organization as a secondary concern, compared to alleged threats from the U.S. and NATO. Russia has likewise developed a 'hybrid' warfare

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<sup>49</sup> "Russian National Security Strategy – Full-Text Translation," December 2015, <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> "Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)," <http://www.cisstat.com/eng/cis.htm>.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

strategy, otherwise known as the Gerasimov Doctrine.<sup>54</sup> This doctrine outlines how Russia can destroy and subvert states using non-military means. Gerasimov refers to the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian and other non-military measures to pursue Russia's adversaries.<sup>55</sup>

In achieving its strategic objectives vis-à-vis the West, Russia incorporates a broad concept of information and hybrid warfare, which includes intelligence, counterintelligence, deceit, disinformation, electronic warfare, debilitation of communications and navigation support, psychological pressure, degradation of information systems and propaganda.<sup>56</sup> These 'asymmetrical capabilities' have been deployed to sway Eastern Europe's security as well as Georgia's Western integration along with Ukraine's.

## **2008: Russia-Georgia War**

On August 7, 2008, President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili used military force against the Russian forces in the Tskhinvali region<sup>57</sup> of Georgia, a separatist enclave, supported by the Russian Federation after the dismantlement of the Soviet Union. Saakashvili stated that the

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<sup>54</sup> M. Galeotti, "The Gerasimov Doctrine" and Russian Non-Linear War', *In Moscow's Shadows*, 6 July 2014.

<sup>55</sup> Samadashvili, Salome. *Muzzling the Bear: Strategic Defence for Russia's Undeclared Information War on Europe*. Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2015.

<sup>56</sup> David J. Smith. 2014. "www.atlanticcouncil.org/." *Atlantic Council*. 01 14. Accessed 01 27, 2017. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/russian-cyber-policy-and-the-war-against-georgia>.

<sup>57</sup> The former autonomous district of South Ossetia (Tskhinvali Region) is located on the southern side of the Central Caucasus. It borders to the north on the Russian Federation, to the east on the Kazbegi and Dusheti, to the south on Kaspi, Gori, Kareli and Khashuri, and to the west-Sachkhere and Oni districts. See more at: [http://gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=ENG&sec\\_id=222](http://gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=222)

Georgian citizens residing in the region as well as the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity were endangered by Russia. Having this in mind, Saakashvili believed that as President of the country, he had to act, in order to defend Georgia from the foreign aggression.<sup>58</sup>

Saakashvili and his national security team, based on the intelligence and previous developments, argued that Russia had invaded Georgia in order to pursue its strategic and geopolitical objectives.<sup>59</sup> More precisely, as Ariel Cohen and Robert Hamilton argue, the Vladimir Putin-Dmitry Medvedev administration and Russia's defense establishment formulated far-reaching goals for invading Georgia. It included effectively terminating Georgian sovereignty in Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia by solidifying control of the pro-Moscow separatist regimes in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region, thus denying Tbilisi control over these territories in perpetuity.<sup>60</sup> Russia also planned to expel Georgian troops and the remaining Georgian population from the two secessionist enclaves and prevent Georgia from joining NATO.<sup>61</sup> Such a move by Russia would probably send a strong signal to other post-Soviet states, such as Ukraine, that the pursuit of NATO membership may result in dismemberment and a military invasion.<sup>62</sup> Saakashvili believed that Russia's strategy posed a significant risk to Georgia's statehood and his government had no other option but to act.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Saakashvili, Mikheil, interview.

<sup>59</sup> Parliament of Georgia. 2010. Investigation of the Military Aggression and other Acts of Russia Against the Territorial Integrity of Georgia. Investigative Report, p. 28-38.

<sup>60</sup> Cohen, Hamilton. p. viii.

<sup>61</sup> Ariel Cohen Robert E. Hamilton, "THE RUSSIAN MILITARY AND THE GEORGIA WAR: LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS."

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Saakashvili, Mikheil, interview by Georgian Broadcaster.

Russia had several geopolitical objectives to accomplish in the 2008 war, which included de-facto annexation of Abkhazia, toppling Georgia's democratically elected government, and - perhaps most important to Russian grand strategy - preventing NATO enlargement in the former Soviet space.<sup>64</sup>

Georgia responded to Russia militarily. Saakashvili understood that the Georgian army could not deter Russia for a long time; however, given that Georgia's territorial integrity and the lives of civilians in the Tskhinvali region were at stake, Saakashvili believed that by the military action, his administration would win time in order to make other kinds of maneuvers.<sup>65</sup> He defined these "maneuvers" as engaging the international community, specifically Europe and the United States, in the process, in order to "save the Georgian statehood."<sup>66</sup>

The Russian invasion and Georgia's response to it produced a war, which was later described by Ronald Asmus, former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs as "A Little War That Shook The World."<sup>67</sup> As a result of the 5-day war, 413 Georgians died; 166 of them were military, 16 policemen and 220 civilians. The number of wounded from the Georgian side made up 2234 persons. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were 192 000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) registered as a result of the Russian-Georgian conflict.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Cohen, Hamilton, p.iii.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 5-20 min.

<sup>67</sup> Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World*.

<sup>68</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNHCR Global Report 2008, Georgia, June 2009, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4bd8009c0.html> [accessed 5 December 2016]

## Russia-Georgia: Current State of Play

Since the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, the two countries do not have diplomatic ties. Following the Russian invasion and its recognition of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region (South Ossetia) as independent countries, accompanied by Russia's intensive military build-up on the ground, Georgia passed a legislation qualifying Russia's presence on the two Georgian provinces as a foreign occupation.<sup>69</sup> Russia currently occupies 20 percent of Georgia's sovereign territory, including Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region, considering both territories to be falling within "Moscow's zone of privileged interests," and has thus deployed several military bases there.<sup>70</sup> Russia envisions Georgia within the context of its Eurasian Union project which aims to advance Russia's leadership in Eurasia.



<sup>69</sup> “Law of Georgia on Occupied Territories,” ”საქართველოს საკანონმდებლო მაცნე”, accessed April 4, 2018, <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/19132>.

<sup>70</sup> Ariel Cohen, Robert E. Hamilton. 2011. The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications. ERAP Monograph, Strategic Studies Institute.

After 2008, Russia embarked on substantial militarization of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region and currently stations around 4,500-5,000 military servicemen in each region.<sup>71</sup> The Russian bases are armed with offensive capabilities, which includes multiple rocket launch systems (MLRS), long-range artillery as well as tanks. In addition, the Russian arsenal includes complex anti-access systems (A2/AD), namely S-300 antiaircraft missiles (NATO reporting name SA-10 Grumble).<sup>72</sup> Similar to Russia's military arrangements in Kaliningrad, the extensive A2/AD systems deployment is likely to be accompanied by the deployment of high-precision first strike missile systems, such as Tochka-U, short range ballistic missile systems (NATO reporting name is SS-21 Scarab).<sup>73</sup>

In 2011, the de-facto regimes of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali granted Moscow permission to function its military bases in both regions at least for 49 years.<sup>74</sup> Even though Russia's deployments violate the commitments of the Sarkozy-mediated 2008 cease-fire agreement with Georgia, Moscow claims the 'new reality' makes the agreement irrelevant and its troops operate in both regions under the of the "two states."<sup>75</sup> Russia's above-mentioned activities in Abkhazia

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<sup>71</sup> "Russia Lays Ground for South Ossetia Annexation."

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> "Implementation Review: Six-Point Ceasefire Agreement Between Russia and Georgia| National Committee on American Foreign Policy," *NCAFP | National Committee on American Foreign Policy* (blog), August 5, 2011, <https://www.ncafp.org/implementation-review-six-point-ceasefire-agreement-between-russia-and-georgia/>.

<sup>74</sup> "Russia Lays Ground for South Ossetia Annexation."

<sup>75</sup> "Georgia : The 6 Points Plan," France in the United States / Embassy of France in Washington, D.C., accessed June 26, 2017, <https://franceintheus.org/spip.php?article1101>.

and Tskhinvali fall within Moscow's declared aspiration to check NATO's enhanced operations in the Black Sea.

In addition to its conventional forces on the ground, Russia's hybrid tactics in Georgia include diplomatic, economic and media tools. At the diplomatic level, Moscow has been working actively to convince countries to recognize Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region as independent countries. Russia also acts to send a message to the United States and Georgia's European partners that any major moves pertaining to Georgia's NATO membership will be perceived as a threat to Russia's national security.<sup>76</sup> On economy, Russia has been determined to use Russian investments in Georgia as well as bilateral trade relations as a precondition to weakened or reversed Western course of Georgia.<sup>77</sup>

On the side of disinformation and propaganda, Russian-media and NGOs operating in Georgia have been disseminating false information throughout the country regarding Georgia's partnership with the United States and Europe as threat to so-called traditional values.<sup>78</sup>

According to the recent report prepared with the support of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, Russia's effort has targeted Georgia's western course to weaken and degrade it.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Sputnik, "Moscow: Growing Georgia-NATO Ties Threaten Regional Security," accessed April 16, 2018, <https://sputniknews.com/russia/201710121058149896-russia-nato-georgia-security-threat/>.

<sup>77</sup> "Russian Hybrid Tactics in Georgia - Foreign Policy and Security Impact," Institute for Security and Development Policy, accessed April 6, 2018, <http://isdsp.eu/publication/russian-hybrid-tactics-georgia/>.

<sup>78</sup> The German Marshall Fund of the United States; European Initiative - Liberal Academy Tbilisi, "Threats of Russian Hard and Soft Power in Georgia," 2016, <http://www.ei-lat.ge/images/doc/threats%20of%20russian%20soft%20and%20hard%20power.pdf>.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



Following 2011, Russia's Federal Security Bureau (FSB) and separatist forces in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali have been actively pursuing a policy of "borderization." This policy essentially comprises construction of illegal barbed wire and fences to further divide Georgian population living in adjacent areas of the occupied territories.<sup>80</sup> Russia and the local separatist forces have also installed "State Border" signs preventing those on the Georgian side of the Occupation Line from crossing the artificial line. There have been numerous instances, when ethnic Georgians living next to the barbed wire and fences have been kidnapped by the occupation forces for "violating state border."<sup>81</sup> In extreme situations, the FSB has taken even additional territory, including yards of private citizens, the moves that has been regarded as Russia's "creeping annexation."<sup>82</sup> In its research, The Heritage Foundation has found 56 incidents at 48 different locations of Russian borderization in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region.<sup>83</sup> The creeping annexation has been taking around Georgia's E60 highway, the main road linking the Black Sea to Azerbaijan. Importantly, borderization has included a one-mile long segment of the BP-operated Baku-Supsa pipeline into the Russian-occupied territory.<sup>84</sup>

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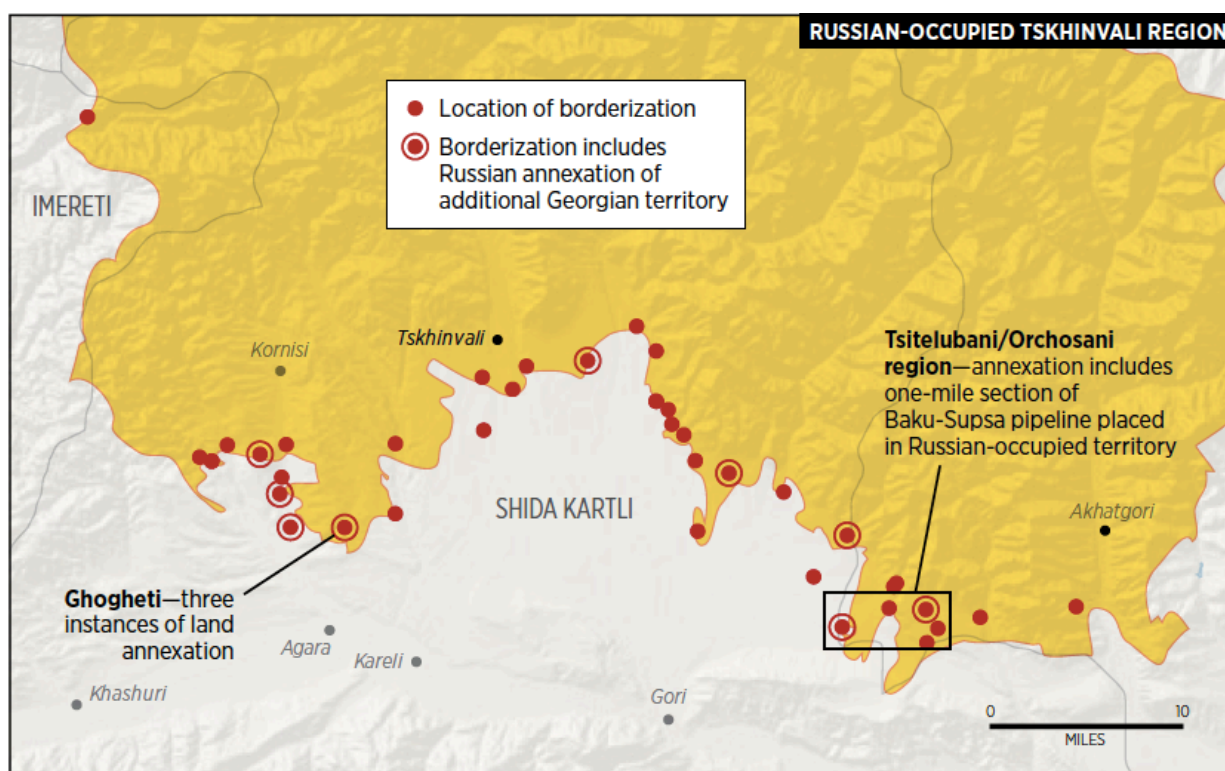
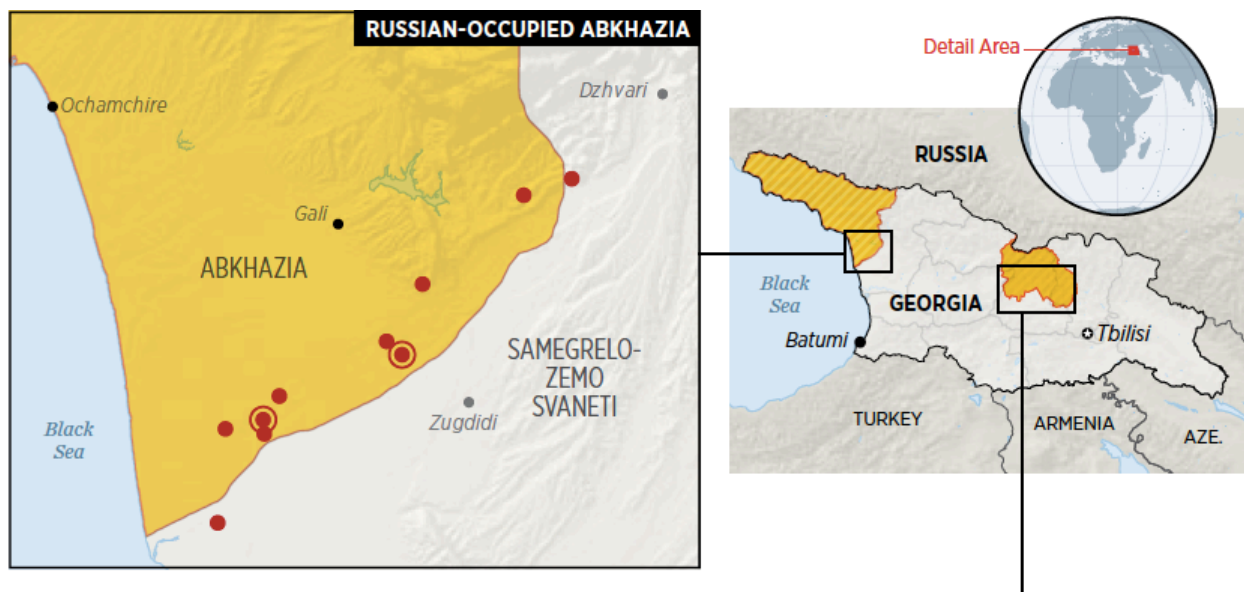
<sup>80</sup> Andrew Higgins, "In Russia's 'Frozen Zone,' a Creeping Border With Georgia," *The New York Times*, October 23, 2016, sec. Europe, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/24/world/europe/in-russias-frozen-zone-a-creeping-border-with-georgia.html>.

<sup>81</sup> "Death of Georgian Citizen Archil Tatunashvili in South Ossetia," *U.S. Embassy in Georgia* (blog), February 26, 2018, <https://ge.usembassy.gov/death-georgian-citizen-archil-tatunashvili/>.

<sup>82</sup> Roland Oliphant, "EU Condemns Russia over 'creeping Annexation' of Georgia," July 16, 2015, sec. World, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/georgia/11745510/EU-condemns-Russia-over-creeping-annexation-of-Georgia.html>.

<sup>83</sup> Coffey, "NATO Membership for Georgia."

<sup>84</sup> "Georgia Says Russia Violating Sovereignty with Border Markers," *Reuters*, July 13, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-russia-border/georgia-says-russia-violating-sovereignty-with-border-markers-idUSKCN0PN1VO20150713>.



**NOTE:** Locations of borderization incidents and boundaries of Russian-occupied territories are approximate.

**SOURCES:** Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Heritage Foundation research.

SR199 heritage.org

### ***Georgia and the Black Sea: Future Trends***

Russia's interests in the Black Sea are crucial for Moscow's regional power projection. Since 2012, with its Black Sea Fleet amphibious ships and the naval base at Novorossiysk, Russia supplied military equipment to Tartus military installation in Syria, to back the Assad regime. With that move, Russia's Black Sea Fleet proved instrumental for Moscow's continued presence in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>85</sup>

By 2020, Russia plans to spend over \$151 billion on upgrading its navy, including the Black Sea Fleet. Succeeding in such a policy will further increase Russia's power projection capabilities within and outside the region thus challenging NATO's Black Sea member as well as partner countries and the Alliance's freedom of operation in the region.<sup>86</sup> Importantly, Abkhazia occupies major part of Georgia's Black Sea coastline and for Moscow, it's strategically important for exerting pressure on Tbilisi. Georgia's continued joint military training in the Black Sea with US and NATO allies is also perceived as a challenge by Moscow for its superior role in the region.

At this point, there is no tangible indication that Russia is going to cease its efforts aimed at weakening democratic development and Western policies in Georgia and the wider Black Sea region. At the same time, Russia will most likely continue to advance its positions in the South Caucasus and Black Sea as well as Central Asian countries. On this path, Russia is likely to rely

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<sup>85</sup> STEVEN HORRELL, "A NATO Strategy for Security in the Black Sea Region" (Atlantic Council, 2016).

<sup>86</sup> Janusz Bugajski and Peter B. Doran, "BLACK SEA RISING Russia's Strategy in Southeast Europe," 2016.

on its conventional forces (such as its bases in Georgia, Ukraine and Armenia (Gyumri) as well as asymmetric tools of borderization, propaganda and cyber.

At the same time, the United States and its European allies, including Georgia, have been determined to further enhance their policies of democratic development as well as security cooperation. As for Georgia, its successive governments have been loyal to the country's Western course. Georgian government officials reiterate that NATO and EU membership as well as enhanced bilateral cooperation with the United States remain top priorities for Georgia's foreign and security policy.<sup>87</sup>

To address emerging and existing challenges and threats, it is in the interests of the United States and Georgia to advance bilateral security partnership. Similarly, US-Georgia strategic cooperation can be strengthened by exploring the following options and policy recommendations. These proposals can be distinguished by their relevance and innovativeness to provide short and long-term resilience as well as flexibility for the American and Georgian policy communities.

## **Recommendations and Areas of Potential Cooperation**

**Move from Partner to Ally Status:** Current US-Georgia relationship is based on strategic partnership, which is mutually beneficial for the two countries; however, more options can be explored bilaterally. Granting Georgia an ally status would further incentivize Georgia's dependability for the United States in regional as well as global security and political

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<sup>87</sup> Personal Interview with Mikheil Janelidze, Foreign Minister and Vice Prime Minister of Georgia, January 10, 2018.

cooperation. Such a move would be politically and practically feasible for the United States and serve its medium and long-term interests in the Black Sea, South Caucasus and Central Asia.

On this path, continue and increase political presence in Georgia, especially following Vice President Mike Pence's visit in the summer of 2017. This visit could be followed by a presidential and regular Cabinet-level visits, such as Secretary of Defense and others, to further enhance bilateral cooperation in political, economic, defense, energy and cultural fields.

American foreign policy has been historically based on the principle of four Ps - Power, Peace, Prosperity, and Principles. Increased cooperation with Georgia would meet with these criteria.

**Strengthen Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence Cooperation:** Build on the General Security of Information Agreement (GSOIA), which includes intelligence sharing between the two countries and enables future similar agreements. Support Georgia's intelligence institution by training and advanced capabilities. This will increase resilience and operational capacity of Georgia to ensure effective policy decisions on key challenges and threats pertaining to occupied territories, terrorism and Russian hybrid warfare. The United States and Georgia have mutual interests in pursuing this policy in the short and medium-run.

**Support Launching NATO Center of Excellence in Georgia:** Work with NATO and its members to establish a NATO-Certified Center of Excellence on Black Sea Security in Georgia.<sup>88</sup> This center could advance NATO–Georgia cooperation and further emphasize the significance of the Black Sea region for European security, especially NATO's pledge at the

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<sup>88</sup> Coffey, "NATO Membership for Georgia."

2016 Warsaw Summit to increase its engagement in the region.<sup>89</sup> The Center of Excellence serve as a robust tool to concentrate on key challenges and threats in the Black Sea. Currently, NATO's Baltic members cover three key areas: cyberspace (Estonia), energy security (Lithuania), and countering propaganda (Latvia). The Black Sea Center of Excellence in Georgia would easily meet the criteria set by NATO to provide an area of expertise that is not already found within the Organization. Georgia's location and unique experiences in the Black Sea region would provide a high value support to NATO's broader Euro-Atlantic security efforts.<sup>90</sup>

### **Establish a Logistical Center for Potential Contingencies in the Black Sea and Beyond:**

Support opening of a logistical center in Georgia for potential contingencies for NATO and the United States for Black Sea maritime operations. In addition to being a dedicated and capable partner of the United States, Georgia can provide valuable logistical access to operations in Afghanistan.<sup>91</sup> The current US administration has been pressuring Pakistan to cease its continued support for the Taliban and affiliated groups. A result of this approach may be Pakistan cutting ground and air resupplies transiting the country to Afghanistan. Alternatively, using a Georgia-Azerbaijan transit route could provide one of the shortest and most cost-effective options to circumvent both Pakistan and Russia. Significantly, it would reduce US reliance on Moscow and

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<sup>89</sup> NATO, "Warsaw Summit Communiqué - Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw, 8-9 July 2016," NATO, accessed April 10, 2017, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm).

<sup>90</sup> Allied Command Transformation, "Centres of Excellence," accessed April 8, 2018, <http://www.act.nato.int/centres-of-excellence>.

<sup>91</sup> HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE, "TESTIMONY OF ADMIRAL JAMES G. STAVRIDIS, UNITED STATES NAVY COMMANDER, UNITED STATES EUROPEAN COMMAND BEFORE THE 112TH CONGRESS," February 29, 2012, [https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/congress/2012\\_hr/120229-stavridis.pdf](https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/congress/2012_hr/120229-stavridis.pdf).

Islamabad for transporting military cargo in and out of Afghanistan.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the logistical center could focus on the Black Sea and US-NATO operations beyond the region, such as Afghanistan.

**Utilize Georgia's Trade and Economic Potential:** Extend further political and diplomatic support to Georgia's Anaklia port and encourage large-scale American investments in Georgia. This will enhance Georgia's political, economic and security environment and strengthen bilateral links between the two countries. At a strategic level, increased American economic presence in the Black Sea will provide additional tools to compete with China's Belt and Road project as well as advance security and political influence in the area.<sup>93</sup>

**Provide Political Support for the Southern Gas Corridor Project:** This project serves to play a significant role in diversifying Russian gas flows to Europe and will run through Georgia and the Balkans. The United States provided diplomatic support to Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan Pipeline construction in the 1990s.<sup>94</sup> By this effort, which would have minimal financial costs, the United States would further build its leverage with Russia, help energy security and economy of Georgia and other European countries.

**Support Georgia Improve its Air-Defense Capabilities:** Deterring Russia from taking additional military action in Georgia can hardly be ensured without a legitimate defensive force opposing it. In fact, such a force would not pose an offensive threat to neither Russia nor

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<sup>92</sup> Personal Interview with Luke Coffey, Director, Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy at the Heritage Foundation.

<sup>93</sup> Civil.ge, "Jeffrey Mankoff: Western-Integrated Georgia Is in U.S. Interests," 11 Apr.'18, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=31013>.

<sup>94</sup> Columns, "Southern Gas Corridor," TAP, accessed April 13, 2018, <https://www.tap-ag.com/the-pipeline/the-big-picture/southern-gas-corridor>.

Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions.<sup>95</sup> In addition to the recently supplied anti-tank weapons (Javelins), air defense systems would further amplify Georgia's self-defense capacity within the notion that every country has the right to self-defense. Increased US assistance to Georgia would also stimulate US-Georgia efforts on counterterrorism, regional security, and other diplomatic, defense, and non-military security issues.

**Further Support Georgia's De-Occupation Policy:** Maintain and expand the Consolidated Appropriations Act, which prevents US Financial assistance to governments that recognize independence of the Russian-occupied Georgian territories of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. Besides Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Nauru have recognized the two regions. The Act enables the United States to revoke the assistance unless they change their recognition policy toward the Georgian regions.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, Georgia could actively cooperate with the United States to agree on a package of conditional economic sanctions, which will automatically activate in case of Russia's potential annexation of either Abkhazia or/and the Tskhinvali region. Given Russia's ongoing creeping annexation and borderization, such a move is likely and the United States and NATO should make it clear to Russia that another forceful change of European borders will trigger additional sanctions on Russia.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> "Importance of Continued Military Engagement with Georgia."

<sup>96</sup> In 2016, USAID provided \$12 million to Venezuela, for government and civil society programs; Nicaragua received \$55 million in support of government and civil society as well as conflict prevention and resolution sectors as well as health. While Nauru being less depended on US assistance, under the Oceania Maritime Security Initiative, the US provides Nauruan law enforcement officials with security and supports ship-rider missions, enabling them to ride aboard U.S. Navy and Coast Guard vessels.

<sup>97</sup> Coffey, "NATO Membership for Georgia."



**Push for Georgia's Accelerated Accession:** One way to pursue Georgia's speedy membership into NATO could be pursued by temporarily amending Article 6 of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty.<sup>98</sup> The ongoing concern pertains to a notion that Georgia's NATO membership would automatically trigger NATO-Russia conflict over the occupied regions. To eliminate this argument, NATO could invite Georgia to join by revising Article 6 of its founding Treaty (which outlines territories falling under NATO's Article 5). This would provisionally exclude Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region from Article 5 protection. Such a policy has a precedent, when Turkey and Greece joined the Alliance. Importantly, such a move by NATO would not mean Georgia or the alliance questioning Georgia's territorial integrity. This will be a measure, which should last until Georgia's territorial disputes are peacefully resolved. And, NATO membership is widely considered to be one of the strong means of Georgia's peaceful unification in the long-term.<sup>99</sup> The 2017 membership of Montenegro has been NATO's demonstration of its open door policy, which enables qualified aspirant countries to join the alliance. At this point, the question remains why Georgia cannot join while Montenegro, where NATO accession support was significantly lower than in Georgia, eventually joined.<sup>100</sup>

**Ensure that Membership Action Plan (MAP) is not a Precondition for Georgia's**

**Membership:** As NATO officials have made it clear, Georgia has all practical tools to join

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<sup>98</sup> NATO, "The North Atlantic Treaty," NATO, accessed May 6, 2017, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm).

<sup>99</sup> Coffey, "NATO Membership for Georgia."

<sup>100</sup> "NATO Membership for Montenegro but Not for Georgia," Carnegie Europe, accessed April 13, 2018, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=62197>.

NATO.<sup>101</sup> The Annual National Program (ANP) and the Substantial NATO–Georgia Package (SNGP), amplified by the NATO–Georgia Commission and strong cooperation make the necessity of MAP irrelevant. On this path, Georgia should make it clear that it is no longer seeking alliance membership through MAP and work with the United States to clarify this issue in a final declaration at the 2018 Brussels Summit.

The above-mentioned potential moves by the United States and NATO as well as Georgia would remove Russia’s de-facto veto on NATO enlargement and enable Georgia to join the alliance in an accelerated manner.

**Make Sure that at the Brussels Summit NATO Devotes Sufficient Attention to the Black**

**Sea:** One way this could be done is issuing a separate Summit Communiqué on the Black Sea given the particular significance of this region. In this document, the allies could support the Black Sea littoral countries (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine) to launch a regional maritime program with the United States European Command. It will advance the parties’ capacity to exercise maritime domain awareness, possibly through training, exercises and modernization of their naval vessels.<sup>102</sup> Alternatively, or as a complement, propose increasing air missions in the Black Sea. NATO’s boosted air operations in the area would provide enhanced presence over the waters of the Black Sea, circumventing the constraints of the Montreux Convention<sup>103</sup> put on maritime forces of non-littoral states. Black Sea Air Policing Mission,

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<sup>101</sup> “Stoltenberg: Georgia Has All Practical Tools to Become NATO Member,” Georgia Today on the Web, accessed April 13, 2018, <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/5297/Stoltenberg%3A-Georgia-Has-All-Practical-Tools-to-Become-NATO-Member>.

<sup>102</sup> “NATO’s 2018 Summit,” accessed April 11, 2018, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/natos-2018-summit>.

<sup>103</sup> “1936 CONVENTION REGARDING THE REGIME OF THE STRAITS,” 1936, <http://www.anistor.gr/english/enback/s973.htm>.

similar to the Baltic Air Policing, was originally initiated by Bulgaria.<sup>104</sup> NATO's Black Sea air missions could also include Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), Airborne Warning and Control Systems, and/or Ground Surveillance missions.

**Elevate the Level of the NATO-Georgia Commission:** along with the United States, the Georgian government could employ proactive diplomacy to convince its European allies to hold NATO–Georgia Commission meeting at the heads-of-state or government level, instead of a foreign-ministers level. While expecting proper appreciation of progress Georgia has made, such a move will send a strong signal to the Georgian citizens that Georgia is a valuable partner to the alliance, with an ultimate perspective of becoming its formal member. One of the tangible deliverables of the commission could be qualifying Russian military presence in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region as occupation. Such a paragraph would strengthen Georgia's de-occupation policy and solidify US-NATO positions to approach Russia comprehensively in their current tense relationships.

**Include Georgia into the Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP):** The United States and Georgia could work together to include the Georgian troops to the US-led multinational battalion in Poland. The Georgian military has a strong track-record of operating with American and NATO troops. At this point, no non-NATO troops have joined the EFP and given strong Polish-Georgian ties and Georgia's prior service in the NATO Response Force, joining the EFP would be a realistic objective to pursue. Russia may regard this as a provocation; however, the United

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<sup>104</sup> Lithuania Tribune, "Bulgaria Considering Air Policing with Turkey and Romania Due to Increase in Russian Flights Near Borders," Atlantic Council, accessed July 11, 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/bulgaria-considering-air-policing-with-turkey-and-romania-due-to-increase-in-russian-flights-near-borders>.

States could easily communicate to its allies that the effort is defensive and has not antagonizing nature as such.

**Pursue US-Georgia Free Trade and Visa Free Agreements:** The topic of establishing US-Georgia free trade regime has been actual for the last several years and is being discussed on bilateral meetings currently. Importantly, existing EU-Georgia the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) and visa free regime would serve as a positive precedent to convince US policy and decision makers. Such a framework would advance bilateral trade relations as well as people-to-people contact, cultural exchanges and political cooperation, as spelled out in the US-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership.<sup>105</sup> The free trade and visa free agreements would also demonstrate that the United States is a central player in the region and rewards its reliable allies.

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<sup>105</sup> “United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership.”

## Key Findings

- The United States is committed to assisting Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration efforts by bolstering Georgia's democratic institutions and structural reforms.
- Washington has been a staunch supporter of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, including Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region.
- Georgia and the United States can explore at least 15 policy options and new areas of potential cooperation in the short and medium-term perspectives to enhance their bilateral security partnership.
  - Most of the potential policies will require close and persistent collaboration by utilizing but not limited to diplomatic, economic and military resources.
- Increasing US-Georgia bilateral cooperation can be based on at least three key pillars: 1. Georgia's geostrategic location and its significance for the United States; 2. Shared values of Georgia and the United States; 3. Positive track-record of dependable alliance.
- US-Georgia bilateral relations have significantly progressed under the Trump administration. Two of the key parts of this progress have been marked by a major sale of Javelin anti-tank missiles to Georgia; And, passing of the Consolidated Appropriations Act (2017) by the US Congress, which prohibits US foreign aid to countries opposing Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
- Russia has significant resources to deploy (also present on the ground) in Georgia to interrupt the country's NATO integration. This interruption may also impact, but not likely prevent, enhanced US-Georgia security cooperation.

- While Russia being a significant factor for Georgia's delayed membership into NATO, it is not a key limitation for advancing US-Georgia security cooperation; rather, such a limitation may be budgetary constraints on either US or the Georgian side. For instance, pursuit and maintenance of advanced air defense weapons requires substantial financial investments, which may be a central limitation of pursuing such a policy.
- Increased security cooperation with the United States can increase chances of restoring Georgia's territorial integrity and ultimate membership into NATO.
- Following the 200 Rose Revolution in Georgia, the country moved out of Russia's sphere of political influence toward the West by democratic transformation and substantive reforms.
- Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 had a clear objective to prevent NATO enlargement via Georgia. Following Moscow's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and attempt to discredit US and European democracies, the Georgia invasion has been viewed as part of Russia's wider geopolitical aspirations to disrupt US-led liberal world order.

## **Conclusion**

Bilateral security cooperation between the United States and Georgia enjoys strong legal, political and strategic basis. Given common US-Georgia interests, shared values and a necessity to develop long-term strategic partnership, advancing bilateral security cooperation has robust potential. Importantly, one of the questions that this paper initially posed concerned to whether Russia was a key barrier for advancing US-Georgia security cooperation. After studying a significant amount of literature, legal documents as well as exploring expert opinion, we could conclude that while Russia is being a significant factor for Georgia's delayed membership into NATO, it is not a central limitation for advancing US-Georgia security cooperation. Rather, such a limitation may be pertaining to political decisions or budgetary constraints on either American or Georgian side.

Enhanced US-Georgia partnership will strengthen Georgia's ability to ensure speedy development in economic, political and security fields as well as strengthen its prospects of territorial integrity and integration into the Western institutions. On the other hand, this policy will provide medium and long-term benefits for the United States in promoting its strategic interests in the South Caucasus, the Black Sea and Europe at large.

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