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Charity Registration Number: 208223

**Russia and Eurasia Programme Paper REP PP 2012/01**

# Georgia: *National Security Concept* versus National Security

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August 2012

Published in association with Center for Social Sciences, Tbilisi

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## SUMMARY POINTS

- Political messaging overpowers strategic analysis in Georgia's National Security Concept. Despite having some strengths, it also contains many weaknesses, including disregard of important risks, misunderstanding of threats and generation of unrealistic expectations, which leads to overlooking real obstacles and creation of unnecessary friction with other states.
- A major strength of the Concept is the recognition that security is not only about military and diplomatic affairs but also about the wider context of economic development and interdependence, energy vulnerability, and modes of domestic governance.
- The weaknesses of the National Security Concept are both of an internal and external nature. Internally, economic problems (the sustainability of the growth plan, poverty and unemployment, concerns over personal and family well-being, distribution of economic gains) and political concerns (popular disenchantment and disengagement from the political process) are not given proper consideration. Externally, Georgia's reliance on international economic processes and the volatility of the Caucasus have not been sufficiently addressed, while there is little in the Concept to suggest attempts at improvement of relations with Russia or more realistic appreciation of the desire and ability of the West (the EU and NATO) to commit itself to Georgia's security and development.
- The main characteristics of Georgia's strategic environment are linked to its weakness and small size; a serious internal challenge of maintaining cohesion coupled with a persistent internal displacement problem and significant political instability; its unstable immediate region (the North Caucasus); peripheral significance to the West and heavy dependence on the global economy.
- A significant reallocation of state resources towards poverty alleviation and employment generation, ensuring free and fair elections, investment in the revival of agriculture, and a foreign policy focused much more on solving security issues with immediate neighbours will lead to a more viable security concept and ultimately a more cohesive and stable Georgian republic.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The appearance of a revised version of Georgia's National Security Concept in January 2012, replacing that adopted in 2005, provides a good opportunity to examine the country's official thinking on security and to assess its approach to its internal and external security environments.<sup>1</sup>

National security concepts are usually based on the analysis of values and interests and of internal and external security threats and challenges, leading to authoritative definition of policy priorities. Georgia's National Security Concept follows the standard pattern closely. A description of the country's security environment is followed by discussion of national values and interests. It then turns to threats, challenges, and opportunities, before concluding with a listing of priorities.

Beyond their presumed utility in policy formulation, national security concepts have a communicative function. They are useful in informing the public of the nature of government thinking on the question of security. This thinking, and the direction of security policy, matter not only to Georgian citizens but also to other states. They can reassure or alarm Georgia's friends, and can exacerbate or foster improvement in relations with adversaries.

Georgia's Concept also provides a window into analysis of the security problems of small states in rough neighbourhoods facing large, occasionally hostile, neighbours. The Georgian case is also a rare contemporary example of illegal aggression by a major power (Russia). Finally, Georgia is a good case through which to examine how globalization and interdependence affect the security *problématique* of small states.

National security concepts may also serve as a platform for partisan politics, where a government appropriates national security in order to strengthen its own internal political position and to weaken that of its adversaries. To the extent that national security concepts are partisan, they are unlikely to serve as an objective and useful guide to state security policy, since they conflate the interests of the regime with those of the country.

This paper argues that political messaging overpowers strategic analysis in Georgia's National Security Concept. Although the Concept has much to recommend it, a number of significant risks are not included or are minimally considered, while some threats are misconstrued. The major policy orientation of the concept (integration with the EU and NATO) ignores numerous serious constraints. It is entirely appropriate for a national security concept to identify and promote the aspirations of the state and its people. However, it is a mistake to ignore or to underplay the real obstacles that the state faces in its pursuit of those aspirations. Focusing on goals that are unlikely to be achieved in the short or medium term distracts attention from more immediate challenges and from objectives that are achievable. It may also raise unrealistic expectations among the public. Finally, it may generate unnecessary friction in relations with partners, as well as with less friendly states.

The paper first discusses the background conditions of Georgian national security planning. It then identifies a number of positive aspects of the concept. The main part of the analysis focuses on five problematic issues. One is the possibility of internal instability, which is largely absent in the concept. Another is security aspects of globalization and interdependence. The third concerns threats in the Caucasian region, notably the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and instability in the Northern Caucasus. The fourth issue is the threat from Russia. The final focus is Georgia's westward orientation.

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Georgia, *National Security Concept of Georgia*, 2012, <http://nsc.gov.ge/files/files/National%20Security%20Concept.pdf>.

## 2. THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Writing a national security concept is difficult for any government. It is particularly challenging for Georgia. Its post-Soviet existence as an independent state is short and troubled. The country is small, weak and dependent. It sits in a rough neighbourhood.

Georgia has a serious internal challenge of maintaining cohesion. The question of managing minority relations is complicated by a recent history of inter-ethnic violence involving the Ossetian and Abkhaz minorities. Georgia's arrival as an independent state was accompanied by the *de facto* secession of South Ossetia and then Abkhazia in 1990–93. Each produced a small civil war in which the Georgian government was defeated. The violence provoked extensive and enduring Russian intervention.

The two conflicts generated a massive and persistent internal displacement problem, and a lingering sense of grievance on the part of those displaced. They also had serious effects on Georgia's economic and political development. Almost 20 years of mediated negotiation have produced no resolution of these conflicts. Small-scale violence continued in both regions after cease-fires were agreed. Large-scale hostilities resumed in 2008, culminating in the Russian invasion of Georgia. Georgia was again defeated. The country is considerably further away from resolving these conflicts now than it was 15 years ago, not least because the Osset and Abkhaz authorities and Russia consider the issue of status to have been resolved through secession and recognition of the two territories as sovereign states.<sup>2</sup>

Georgia's post-Soviet experience has also been marked by significant internal political instability. There have been two regime changes since independence: the removal of Zviad Gamsakhurdia in 1991–92, and the removal of Eduard Shevardnadze in 2003. Both transfers of power were accompanied by significant popular unrest. The first involved violent clashes in Tbilisi and was followed by unrest in Mingrelia. The second was peaceful. Neither regime change was constitutional. The approach of parliamentary and presidential elections in 2012–13 has raised concerns about the revival of political violence.<sup>3</sup>

Two of Georgia's neighbours, Armenia and Azerbaijan, are locked into an intractable conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>4</sup> The balance of power between these two states is unstable and there is a prospect of a renewed war between them.

On Georgia's northern border, the Northern Caucasus regions of Russia have experienced significant instability and conflict since 1994. At times this has spilled across the border into Georgia. There is no indication that instability in these regions is diminishing. The apparent Russian victory in Chechnya was followed by increases in violence in neighbouring areas and by terrorist incidents in central Russia.<sup>5</sup> Given that these regions border Georgia, the Russian government is unavoidably sensitive to developments in Georgia and to Georgia's policy towards the Northern Caucasus.

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2 Russia is joined by Venezuela, Nauru, Tuvalu and Nicaragua in recognizing the breakaway territories.

3 See the remarks of Irakli Alasania, as cited in 'Georgian Dream Links State Audit Agency's Moves to Ivanishvili's Citizenship Case', *Civil.ge*, 16 March, 201, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24563>.

4 This conflict concerns the Armenian majority region of Nagorno-Karabakh located in western Azerbaijan. Tensions between local Karabakh elites and Azerbaijan's government led to the outbreak of civil war in 1988. Armenia intervened in behalf of its co-ethnics. Russia assisted the Armenian side. By 1994, *de facto* secession had been achieved and the districts of Azerbaijan separating Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia in the west and Iran in the south had been cleared of Azerbaijani forces as well as the local population. A cease-fire was mediated by Russia in 1994. See Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

5 When Russia emerged out of the USSR, Chechnya (previously an autonomous republic within the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic) attempted to secede and create an independent state. Russian forces attacked the rebel republic in 1994. The first phase of the war lasted until 1996, when the two sides suspended hostilities. War resumed in 1999 after a number of terrorist attacks in Russia that the Russian government attributed to Chechens. By 2004, Russian forces and their local collaborators had suppressed the secessionist government and imposed a fragile stability in Chechnya.

Georgia's neighbourhood is overshadowed by Iran, Russia and Turkey, each of which is nervous about the others' activities in the Southern Caucasus. These regional powers find themselves at odds over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in particular. Although a cease-fire was achieved in 1994, low-level violence has persisted. In the event of a renewal of war, there is a risk of competitive intervention producing a wider conflict, with substantial potential consequences for Georgia.

The extent to which the policies of neighbouring major powers can threaten the survival of Georgia was evident in the 2008 war. After a resurgence of violence in South Ossetia, Russia attacked Georgia and occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As noted above, several weeks later the Russian government recognized them as sovereign states.<sup>6</sup> Internationally sponsored negotiations to resolve these questions (the 'Geneva Process') have yielded no progress.

At the intersection between the regional and the global, the growing tension between Iran and the United States over the former's nuclear programme highlights the possibility that developments in the vicinity of the Caucasus have the potential to draw in the world's remaining superpower. Given Russia's historically close and profitable relations with Iran and its discomfort over Western military presence in the Caucasus, such a development could produce significant problems in US–Russian relations. It could also involve problems for Georgia since the logical route for supply of the Russian base in Armenia is across Georgia.

Moving beyond the sub-regional and regional environments, Georgia is peripheral to the vital interests of major European and Euro-Atlantic states, and their institutions (the EU and NATO), except to the extent that events in Georgia can complicate Western relations with Russia. Georgia's marginality in the strategic calculations of Western states and their sensitivity to Russia limit Georgia's capacity to use cooperation with the West to balance against Russia.

Finally, Georgia's reliance on official development assistance, remittances, foreign direct investment, tourism and commodity imports makes the country heavily dependent on the global economy. It is vulnerable to global economic instability as well as to budget retrenchment in Western capitals. This vulnerability is enhanced by Georgia's high dependence on food imports.

In short, Georgia faces:

- a domestic situation with significant security risks;
- regional instability that carries significant potential costs;
- a significant regional power threat;
- an unwillingness of Euro-Atlantic actors to take significant risks when, as in 2008, Georgia falls out with Russia; and
- significant vulnerability to global economic risk.

Devising a national security strategy is, consequently, a crucial and urgent task for Georgia, in which there is little margin for error and the potential costs of error are considerable.

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<sup>6</sup> For an account of antecedents to the war, see International Independent Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, September 2009, <http://www.ceiig.ch/Report.html>.

### 3. STRENGTHS OF GEORGIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY CONCEPT

One strength of Georgia's National Security Concept is the clear recognition that security is not only about military and diplomatic affairs (high politics). The Concept embeds discussion of military and conventional strategic threats in a wider context of economic development and interdependence, energy vulnerability and modes of domestic governance.

Concerning the latter, the Concept's early sections on values and interests stress the desire of Georgians to 'establish democratic order, economic freedom, a social state governed by the rule of law, [and] to ensure human rights and freedoms', and the government's commitment to 'strengthening the country's democratic achievements by continuing reforms' that 'further the development of the state's democratic institutions'.

This emphasis establishes a clear democratic standard according to which the government can be held accountable both domestically and internationally. This commitment is reassuring, given the country's past performance in this respect. Georgia's international partners will scrutinize the parliamentary (2012) and presidential (2013) elections in terms of its own declared commitment to freedom and democracy. As US President Barack Obama noted in January 2012: 'I want to express my appreciation for the work that's been done in the past, but also anticipating fair and free elections; the formal transfer of power that will be taking place in Georgia, which I think will solidify many of these reforms that have already taken place.'<sup>7</sup> US Ambassador Designate Richard Norland noted in his March 2012 Senate confirmation hearing that the conduct of the elections would be a 'litmus test' for Georgia's NATO aspirations.<sup>8</sup>

There is a risk that, if Georgia falls short of its own commitment to democracy, support for it in the EU and the United States will diminish.<sup>9</sup> Georgia's recent performance on major democracy indicators provides reason for concern here and indicates how much has yet to be achieved.<sup>10</sup> Key performance measures will include media access for the opposition, limits on the use of state resources to increase the government's electoral prospects, and the extent to which opposition parties are permitted to organize and campaign without hindrance.

Another aspect of domestic governance is majority-minority relations. The National Security Concept stresses that the protection of the rights of minorities, as well as their inclusion in the nation's life, are key elements in the pursuit of a democratic, rule-of-law governed society. The country has experienced significant difficulty in defining its national identity as organic or civic in character. The reliance of Georgia's first post-independence president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, on organic nationalism ('Georgia for the Georgians') was an important ideological factor contributing to early ethnic conflict.<sup>11</sup> In this context, the unambiguous recognition of the rights of minorities and their place in Georgian society manifests welcome progress in state- and nation-building. The commitment is reflected in Georgia's cooperation with the OSCE's High Commissioner for National Minorities and acceptance of Council of Europe benchmarks on protection of minority rights. The government has worked to harmonize national legislation with international standards and has supported significant infrastructural investment by foreign donors in the

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7 'Obama Meets Saakashvili', *Civil.ge*, 31 January 2012, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24399>.

8 'US Ambassador-Designate to Georgia Lays Out Priorities', *Civil.ge*, 22 March 2012.

<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24584> President Mikheil Saakashvili has recognized these concerns.

'Saakashvili: Elections an Important Test for Georgia', *Civil.ge*, 28 February 2012, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24495>.

9 An early American indicator of possible linkage between US assistance and conduct of elections appeared in a draft bill submitted to Congress by Congressman James McDermott in March 2012. Although it is unlikely that the bill will pass, it provides an indication of possible consequences of the failure to respond to the expectations of Western partners. See H.R. Bill 4258 'Republic of Georgia Democracy Act of 2012', <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c112:H.R.4258>.

10 Freedom House data show a 'democracy score' for Georgia of 4.53 in 2002 and 4.86 in 2011. The scale goes from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free). Georgia is deemed partly free, but its performance is worsening. David Aprasidze, 'Georgia,' in Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2011*, [http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline\\_images/NIT-2011-Georgia.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/NIT-2011-Georgia.pdf).

11 For a similar view, see Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, Vol. 1, p. 13.



south-central region of Samtskhe-Javakheti, which borders Armenia and is largely populated by ethnic Armenians. The government is also developing Georgian-language programmes for resident Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities in south-central and south-eastern areas. On the other hand, some studies suggest that economic opportunities remain disproportionately low for the Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities.<sup>12</sup>

Concerning Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the National Security Concept refers in very general terms to the possibility of their broad autonomy in the negotiation of a settlement restoring Georgia's territorial integrity and domestic jurisdiction. It also notes that 'it is important to have contact with citizens of Georgia living in the occupied territories and to integrate them into the political, economic, social, and cultural processes of the country'.<sup>13</sup>

Since contact with the *de facto* authorities in these regions is not mentioned, one might infer that it is deemed not to be in Georgia's national interest. This approach is paralleled in the country's national strategy and action plan on the occupied territories, in which the focus is on people-to-people contact, and relations with the *de facto* governments of the two regions are ignored.<sup>14</sup> This is consistent with the government's view that their leaders are illegitimate foreign puppets imposed by Russia.

This approach is understandable, given that the Abkhaz and Osset authorities are in rebellion against Georgia, their claim to statehood is not recognized by Georgia or by the international community, and they are occupied by a foreign power. But it is not a particularly promising basis for productive negotiation, as is evident in the lack of progress in the Geneva Process.

Concerning the international environment, the National Security Concept embraces a commitment to the pursuit of security through international law and multilateral institutions. It also states a commitment to mutual security. It directly and constructively addresses the 'security dilemma' by stating that 'one's security cannot be strengthened at the expense of another state'.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, this constitutes agreement in principle with one of the central propositions of the 'Medvedev Plan' for European security architecture, namely that states should not strengthen their own security to the detriment of the security of other states.<sup>16</sup>

A final positive aspect of the National Security Concept is its emphasis on peace and the peaceful resolution of disputes. This is a refreshing contrast to Azerbaijan, which reserves its right to use force to end the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh in the event that negotiations fail, or to Russia, which refuses to pledge to abstain from using force in its relations with Georgia, claiming that it is not a party to Georgia's internal conflicts.

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12 See Jonathan Wheatley, *The Integration of National Minorities in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli Regions*, ECMI Working Paper No. 44, September 2009, pp. 8–9, [http://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx\\_ifpubdb/working\\_paper\\_44\\_en.pdf](http://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx_ifpubdb/working_paper_44_en.pdf).

13 *National Security Concept*, p. 6.

14 See Government of Georgia, *State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation*, 27 January 2010, <http://www.civil.ge/files/files/SMR-Strategy-en.pdf>. See also the *Action Plan for Engagement*, 6 July 2010, <http://www.civil.ge/files/files/AP-en.pdf>. The plan does mention the need for a status-neutral mechanism for engagement with the authorities of the two regions to facilitate societal and economic interaction. However, both documents focus on direct people-to-people ties between the two regions and the rest of Georgia, sidelining the *de facto* authorities. The State Minister for Reintegration recently emphasised the importance of confidence-building measures between populations of the two sides. See 'State Minister for Reintegration: Efforts Intensifying for Engagement Strategy', Civil.ge, 13 March, 2012, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24550>. In none of these instances is there any obvious effort to provide incentives for secessionist authorities to explore cooperative options.

15 *National Security Concept*, p. 4. The 'security dilemma' refers to the proposition that the attempt to strengthen one's own security may generate compensating actions on the part of other states that result in the deterioration of one's own security. In this respect, unilateral efforts to increase security can be self-defeating. See John Herz, 'Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma', *World Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1950.

16 See President of Russia, 'The Draft of the European Security Treaty', 29 November 2009, Articles 1, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3., <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/news/275>.

## 4. PROBLEMS OF GEORGIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY CONCEPT

For all its strengths, Georgia's National Security Concept displays a number of shortcomings. These are both of an internal and of an external nature.

### Internal instability

#### *The economic dimension*

Surprisingly for a country that has had two unconstitutional transfers of power since it regained independence, there is only cursory discussion of the risk of internal political instability in the National Security Concept. The secessionist regions are discussed at some length, as are minority issues, but internal security risks involving the Georgian majority are not addressed.

The potential grievances of Georgians concern the economy, and also the political and judicial systems. Concerning the economy, the concept notes Georgia's commitment to 'prosperity' as a fundamental value and the 'pursuit of prosperity' as a 'fundamental human right'. This is linked to recognition that 'stable long-term economic growth' is a national interest and 'one of the top priorities of Georgian national security policy'.<sup>17</sup> The concept also identifies low economic growth as a security challenge, in that it could reduce state revenue while increasing unemployment, possibly leading to social tension.<sup>18</sup> Georgia's economic growth has been reasonably good over the last five years. It stood at 12% in 2007, before declining steeply in 2008–09, owing to the combined effect of the war and the global economic crisis, and then recovering since 2009 with growth rising again towards 7%.<sup>19</sup>

One question arising is whether this growth is sustainable. Georgia's growing external debt and chronic trade deficit, discussed below, give pause for thought. Even if current levels of growth can be sustained, this may not address issues of poverty and unemployment. This will depend on whether the gains are concentrated, dispersed through higher employment, or redistributed through social policy and progressive taxation. Both poverty and unemployment are comparatively high in Georgia. In agricultural areas, the interruption of trade with Russia has had a substantial negative effect. Georgia has relatively high income inequality (a Gini coefficient of 0.394 in 2007 and 0.412 in 2008). Although there is some confusion in the data on poverty, the rate is relatively high.<sup>20</sup>

There is a high and possibly growing level of popular concern over personal and family wellbeing. Many believe that the trend line for Georgia on these indicators is negative.<sup>21</sup> A 2012 survey indicated that poverty and unemployment were the most significant concerns of the population by a wide margin.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *National Security Concept*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> World Bank Data Indicators, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG>.

<sup>20</sup> For example, 'World Bank Data: Georgia' reports the percentage of the population below the national poverty line as 24.7%, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/georgia>. The bank's country data profile (updated February 2011) reports that 55% of the population fall below the national poverty line. 'Georgia at a Glance', [http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/geo\\_aag.pdf](http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/geo_aag.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> A September 2011 CRRC/NDI poll of popular attitudes in Georgia suggested that concerns over jobs and inflation came well ahead of territorial integrity (which attracted the same level of concern as poverty): 67% of respondents considered themselves to be unemployed. Comparing the employment situation in September 2011 with January 2008, the survey suggests that 73% of respondents considered the situation to be the same (40%) or worse (33%), while 19% considered it better. 86% considered rising prices/inflation to be worse. 50% considered poverty to be worse. NDI, 'Public Attitudes in Georgia: Results of a September 2011 Survey Carried Out for NDI by CRRC', September 2011, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/68185489/NDI-Media-Version-October-2011>.

<sup>22</sup> Unemployment came first at 75%, poverty second at 68%. Third was relations with Russia, at 43%. Interestingly, the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia attracted 25% as a concern. Nana Sumbadze, *Electoral Profile: Report of the Survey* (Tbilisi: Institute for Policy Studies, 2012), pp. 69–73.



By and large, political consequences of socio-economic issues are related to whether people can achieve a reasonable quality of life, whether the trend in their personal circumstances is consistent with their expectations, and whether their situation is improving or declining relative to other groups in society. In other words, it is not only growth, but also how the gains from growth are distributed, that counts in the analysis of the politico-economic dimension of domestic security.

To some extent, emigration can act as a safety valve for Georgia, reducing the intensity of potential political risks from poverty and unemployment. It may also help to alleviate economic difficulties through remittances (see below). A 2008 International Organization for Migration (IOM) report indicated that the cumulative total of emigrants from Georgia was 1.03 million people in 2005. The population of Georgia in the same year was 4.47 million.<sup>23</sup> Emigration continues. Although the National Security Concept notes an increase in the number of returnees, Georgia has a comparatively high negative net migration rate, projected at -6 per thousand people from 2010 to 2015. The IOM lists 'a high outward migration motivated by a lack of economic opportunities at home' as first among Georgia's migration challenges.<sup>24</sup>

This is not good news for the country. As the National Security Concept notes, positive demographic development is important for economic development and growth.<sup>25</sup> The emigrant population is drawn disproportionately from younger, more economically vibrant sectors of the population.

#### *The political dimension*

These somewhat discouraging socio-economic data are accompanied by widespread scepticism concerning the political process in Georgia. On the positive side, the initial reforms of the administration of President Mikheil Saakashvili with respect to corruption and law enforcement are widely appreciated. Moreover, survey data suggest that increasing numbers of Georgians believe that their country is, or is becoming, a democracy, and that the policies of the government are more or less consistent with perceptions of their own interests. A substantial plurality of the population appears to approve of the president's performance.

However, survey data also suggest a belief that members of parliament do not reflect or pursue the interests of their constituents. Polling data also indicate significant unawareness of recent major changes in electoral law.<sup>26</sup> Findings such as these suggest substantial popular disengagement from the political process. That impression is confirmed by turnout figures in recent elections. For example, in the Telavi by-election in the autumn of 2011, 34% of eligible voters showed up. In the previous year, 46% of those eligible voted in the Tbilisi mayoral and city council elections. Whether as a result of apathy, expectation of government victory or distrust of the process, many Georgians apparently do not believe that the exercise of their democratic franchise is worthwhile.

The combination of political alienation with economic distress can and does produce instability in the country.<sup>27</sup> Post-Rose Revolution instances include the mass demonstrations of November 2007, the demonstrations on Tbilisi's Rustaveli Avenue and on Freedom Square in the spring and summer of 2009, and the violent suppression of demonstrations in front of parliament in May 2011. The combination of economic distress and political alienation also provides opportunities for hostile states that may wish to interfere with Georgia's internal politics.

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23 International Organization for Migration, *Migration in Georgia: A Country Profile 2008* (Geneva: IOM, 2008), pp. 9, 19, [http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/Georgia\\_Profile2008.pdf](http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/Georgia_Profile2008.pdf).

24 See International Organization for Migration, 'Georgia: Facts and Figures' (n.d.), <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/georgia>

25 *National Security Concept*, pp. 10, 27.

26 24% of respondents expected that their majoritarian member of parliament would represent their interests. 58% of respondents were simply unaware of recent electoral reforms in the country (with 19% responding that they did not know whether they were aware or not). NDI, 'Public Attitudes in Georgia', note 20.

27 S. Neil MacFarlane, *Post-Revolutionary Georgia on the Edge?*, REP BP 2011/01 (London: Chatham House, March 2011).

Predicting socio-political instability is difficult. Societies experiencing difficult socio-economic conditions can tip over into crisis very quickly, particularly when the population doubts the legitimacy of the political and electoral processes. This is what happened in Georgia in 1991–92 and in 2003, as well as in Ukraine in 2004, Kyrgyzstan in 2005 and 2010, and more recently in the Arab Spring. In short, socio-economic and political conditions create a risk of domestic disorder in Georgia. Assessing the level of that risk is difficult, but the potential impact is high.

The recent position of the government of Georgia, to judge from the National Security Concept and associated statements, is to pretend that this risk does not exist, to suggest that opponents are agents of foreign enemies, and to use the levers of power to deflect internal challenges. When the issue of political instability or conflict arises in public discourse, it is summarily dismissed.<sup>28</sup>

From a national security perspective, this is problematic. From the regime's political perspective, however, it makes sense. The Georgian government frames the country as successfully reforming, being dynamic and investor-friendly. Recognition of risks of socio-political instability rooted in poverty, unemployment and political alienation is inconsistent with the message that the government wants to send to both domestic and foreign audiences.

### Risk in the global economy

Georgia's economic challenges are related in considerable measure to interdependence and the country's place in the global economy. As noted earlier, the National Security Concept follows a broad definition of security, including economic issues. It links its stress on economic growth to the broadening of international economic ties, with particular emphasis on ensuring and developing Georgia's role as a transit country.<sup>29</sup> This is entirely appropriate for a country that depends heavily on flows of international investment, remittances, and development assistance.

The problem is that increasing involvement in the regional and international economy carries significant risk as well as opportunity. These include the vulnerability of Georgia to global inflation of the prices of goods on which it is particularly dependent. It is widely reported that 80% of food is imported. This reflects the government's neglect of the agricultural sector of the economy.<sup>30</sup> Almost all of Georgia's oil and gas comes from outside the country. Food and energy imports play an important role in its trade deficit (€2.7 billion), which amounted to approximately 25–30% of GDP in 2010.<sup>31</sup> Both food and energy prices at the global level are highly volatile. They played a significant role in Georgia's high inflation rates of 2010–11.<sup>32</sup> The country's performance on inflation has improved since mid-2011, in part owing to a reduction in the prices of these commodities. However, there is little surplus production globally of essential food commodities. The long-term price trend is positive. Global food prices are susceptible to market disruptions (e.g. drought and crop failure). Oil prices can be strongly affected by instability in major producing regions such as the Persian Gulf.

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28 When a leading opposition politician accused the government of establishing paramilitary groups in western Georgia and warned of civil war, the president dismissed these claims as 'immoral' and 'idiocy'. 'Saakashvili: Talk of Civil War is "Immoral" and "Idiocy"', *Civil.ge*, 17 March 2011, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24566>.

29 *National Security Concept*, pp. 5–6.

30 The state of Georgian agriculture is evident in sectoral data on the economy. In 1989, agriculture accounted for 23% of GDP. In 2009, it was 9.6%. World Bank, 'Georgia at a Glance', [http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/geo\\_aag.pdf](http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/geo_aag.pdf). In 2009, 47% of Georgia's population was rural.

31 Eurostat, 'Georgia', [http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc\\_113383.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113383.pdf).

32 See the data and analyses by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/al782e/al782e00.pdf>.

Remittance income plays a major role in sustaining families and communities. It also helps to balance out the trade deficit. It grew from \$695 million to \$806 million between 2007 and 2010.<sup>33</sup> The National Bank of Georgia reports further growth in 2011.<sup>34</sup> However, remittance income is particularly vulnerable to international economic instability, given the exposure of migrant workers to sudden negative changes in host states. In Georgia's case, the top three contributing communities are in Russia, Greece and Italy. As is discussed below, Russia's economic health depends on energy prices in the global market. Greece and Italy are both mired in the eurozone crisis.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is important in the modernization of Georgia's economy and contributes to economic growth. Investment flows also help balance out current account deficits. Before the 2008 war, FDI was growing well.<sup>35</sup> It then dropped substantially as a result of the war and the contemporaneous emergence of the global financial crisis and recession. Although some improvement is evident since, it has not recovered to pre-2008 levels and shows no sign of doing so.

In 2010, Georgia's international debt stood at around 80% of gross national income. Total debt stock grew by about 350% between 2007 and 2010. Slightly under half of the debt stock is public or publicly guaranteed.<sup>36</sup> Standard and Poor's rates Georgia's debt as stable, but in the speculative or non-investment BB-grade, which highlights speculative risk.<sup>37</sup>

Turning finally to official development assistance (ODA), grants and disbursements more than doubled in 2008. By 2010, ODA had declined by about 30% (from \$713 million to \$499 million).<sup>38</sup> Further decline is expected as the post-war package has expired, and given the pressure on donor aid budgets occasioned by continuing weakness in the international economy.<sup>39</sup> The risk is the effect of declining assistance on growth and on the situation of vulnerable sectors of the population.

Given the view of the government that continued growth is crucial to national security, one might have expected discussion of international economic risks in the concept, yet there is none. There is also no discussion of policy priorities to contain exogenous economic risk.

In terms of national security, this omission is anomalous and potentially dangerous. However, again, it is good political framing. It is the government's interest and practice to sell Georgia as an economic success story. Highlighting the country's considerable international economic vulnerabilities would undermine the message.

## Caucasian issues

### *The Nagorno-Karabakh dispute*

Although they are clearly not a major priority for Georgia, the National Security Concept notes the importance of Armenia and Azerbaijan and of relations among them, as well as the dangers of regional spillover from a conflict between them.<sup>40</sup> This risk deserves further comment and

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33 World Bank Data Indicators, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT>.

34 'Georgia Remittances up 20.5% in 2011', Civil.ge, 12 February 2012, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24457>. The National Bank figures reported here are consistently higher than World Bank Data Indicators over the period in question.

35 See World Bank Data Indicators.

36 World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/georgia>.

37 Standard and Poor's, 'Sovereign Rating List', <http://www.standardandpoors.com/ratings/sovereigns/ratings-list/en/us/?subSectorCode=39>.

38 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 'ODA by Recipient: Georgia', [http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=ODA\\_RECIP](http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=ODA_RECIP).

39 Interviews in Tbilisi, November 2011.

40 *National Security Concept*, pp. 6, 9, 18.

policy guidance.<sup>41</sup> A regional conflict centred on Nagorno-Karabakh could inflict significant damage on the economy, jeopardize energy security, destabilize minority areas in the country and provoke further conflict with Russia.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have managed to maintain a shaky status quo over Nagorno-Karabakh since May 1994. However, the dispute and related issues of the occupied territories and internal displacement are volatile factors in Armenian and Azerbaijani domestic politics. There has been no clear movement towards a political resolution of the dispute and the balance of power between the two countries is unstable. The last five years have witnessed very rapid economic growth in Azerbaijan and an expansion of its defence spending. The Azerbaijani defence budget now reportedly exceeds Armenia's *total* state budget.<sup>42</sup> High levels of tension persist along the line of contact with frequent exchanges of fire and casualties. Inadvertent escalation is a significant concern.

In the event that Azerbaijan attempted to resolve the issue by force, Armenia would be likely to intervene. Armenia is linked to Russia through the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which commits members to come to the aid of other members facing a threat of aggression by a non-member, while Azerbaijan is not a member.<sup>43</sup> Russia and Armenia are also linked by an ambitious bilateral defence treaty.<sup>44</sup> In the event that hostilities involved attacks on Armenia, or if it were unsuccessful in an effort to defend Nagorno-Karabakh, there is a possibility that Russia would upgrade its assistance to Armenia. There is a lesser possibility that Iran's soft alignment with Armenia and its continuing difficulties in relations with Azerbaijan might tempt Tehran towards a similar upgrade. The combination raises questions about possible responses from Turkey. In other words, a worst-case analysis suggests that the bilateral dispute has some potential to become a wider regional dispute.

Although Georgia would presumably seek to remain neutral in a conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, possible Russian assistance to Armenia carries risks for it. Russia has made clear its intention to remain the dominant regional power in the Southern Caucasus, and Armenia is an important element of its strategic position in the region. Russian resupply of Armenia or the movement of Russian forces to Armenia is problematic by land since Georgia is closed to transit of Russian troops and equipment. Air resupply is difficult for the same reason: the most direct route for Russian air transport crosses Georgian air space, which is closed to Russian military traffic. Presumably Azerbaijani air space would also be closed to a Russian resupply effort. Under these circumstances, permission for transit through Turkey would be quite unlikely. The final option would be Iranian air space. Although the Iranians might be willing, it would be a very circuitous, inconvenient and expensive route.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Russian aircraft transiting Armenia's Megri Collar could be in range of Azerbaijani ground-to-air defence assets.<sup>46</sup>

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41 The lack of engagement with sub-regional issues in the concept is consistent with Kornely Kakachia's observation that 'Georgia pays little attention to areas outside the Western world, including the region where it is located'. 'Georgia's Identity-Driven Foreign Policy and the Struggle for Its European Destiny', *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, 37, 29 March 2012, p. 4.

42 SIPRI, Military Expenditure Data Base, <http://milexdata.sipri.org/result.php4>. For background see 'Azerbaijan: Baku Embarks on Military Spending Surge, Seeking Karabakh Peace', EurasiaNet, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62223>.

43 A text of the treaty is available at <http://www.odkb.gov.ru/b/azbengl.htm>. The commitment is contained in Article 4. However, Russian officials have sometimes argued that the CSTO defence guarantee applies to conflicts between a Commonwealth of Independent States member and a non-member, but not to conflicts between CIS members. Armenia and Azerbaijan are both members of the CIS. I am grateful to Roy Allison for this point.

44 The renewal of the bilateral agreement in 2010 includes provision for participation of Russian forces in the defence of Armenia. See 'New Russia-Armenia Defense Pact Finalized', Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty, 15 August 2010, [http://www.rferl.org/content/New\\_RussiaArmenian\\_Defense\\_Pact\\_Finalized/2128266.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/New_RussiaArmenian_Defense_Pact_Finalized/2128266.html).

45 On the other hand, the Iranians are very sensitive to the possibility of instability among the Azerbaijani minority in northwestern Iran, and they might well be reluctant to accept the likely negative consequences in their relations with Turkey if they went too far down the Armenian track.

46 The Megri Collar is a strip of territory between the main body of Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani exclave of Naxcivan and terminating at the border with Iran.

The quick solution to Russia's resupply problem of Armenia is Georgia. So the pressure would be on Georgia to allow ground and air transit. Parenthetically, such pressure might also emerge in the event of an attack on Iran by the likes of Israel and the United States.<sup>47</sup> Refusal by Georgia could trigger forceful action by Russia. On the other hand, acquiescence would reintroduce Russian troops into territory under Georgian government control and could seriously damage relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey. As the National Security Concept makes clear, Georgia's economic security depends to a degree on its success as a transit corridor between these two countries.

In short, the Nagorno-Karabakh question poses a low-probability but high-impact threat to Georgian national security. It should be a stronger focus of Georgian national security planning. That goes well beyond the concept's advocacy of 'maintaining regional stability' or emphasis on 'the importance of cooperation in the neighbourhood'.<sup>48</sup> It invites serious thought about how Georgia could avoid getting into a mess the origins of which lie completely outside its control, and how it would limit the damage in the event that the conflict heated up again.

### *The Northern Caucasus*

The North Caucasian regions of the Russian Federation bordering Georgia have been unstable since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This instability is rooted in long-standing antipathy between the Russian and Soviet governments and some of their Caucasian ethnic minorities, notably the Chechens. It also reflects the Islamic religious revival in the area. The outbreak of war in Chechnya in 1994 and its renewal in 1999 drew the support of radical Islamist fighters from the Middle East as well as the interest of Al-Qaeda. Security problems in the region are exacerbated by the dismal economic conditions of the North Caucasus and a large unemployed youth population.

Russia won the war in Chechnya through massive military superiority, the co-option of a portion of the Chechen political elite, and the brutality of Russian and Chechen government tactics. Most of Chechnya has been pacified, but the approach of both Russia and its local partners in Chechnya raise questions about how durable this outcome is.

Moreover, the Russian approach to the conflict provoked the spread of insurgent and terrorist action, notably to Ingushetia and Dagestan, destabilizing the Russian side of much of Georgia's north-eastern border. There appears to be no immediate prospect of a reduction in violence. As a prominent Russian analyst put it:

*The current 'simmering' civil war in the North Caucasus will not subside. The North Caucasus policy has reached an impasse; violence is a daily routine, with subversive acts, terrorist attacks, abductions and assassinations combined with Islamic radicalization. Terrorist attacks are a constant threat outside the North Caucasus [...] Armed clashes in the North Caucasus are reported on a regular basis, and a larger-scale unravelling is not improbable.*<sup>49</sup>

The volatility of the Northern Caucasus has had severe security implications for Georgia since independence in 1991. Abkhaz rebels were joined in their 1992–93 war by sizeable numbers of Chechens and other Northern Caucasian fighters. At the end of the 1990s, the Pankisi Gorge in eastern Georgia was used as a sanctuary by Chechen fighters in the second Russo-Chechen War. This in turn provoked Russian pressure on Georgia for joint border security provision and for the right of hot pursuit. On several occasions, Russian aircraft breached the Georgian border to attack targets in the area.

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47 This is clear in recent Russian General Staff contingency planning for the resupply of Russian forces in Armenia in the event of an attack on Iran. See Pavel Felgenhauer, 'The Russian Military Has an Action Plan Involving Georgia if Iran Is Attacked', *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 9: 68 (5 April 2012), <http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/>.

48 *National Security Concept*, pp. 6, 17.

49 Nikolay Petrov, 'Russia's Uncertain Future: Internal Dynamics and Possible Trajectories', in Adam Balcer and Nikolay Petrov, *The Future of Russia: Modernization or Decline?* (Warsaw: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, 2012), p. 103.



The conflicts in the Northern Caucasus are not resolved and the Russian government is deeply concerned by the security situation. It is possible that Russian pressure on Georgia, as well as insurgent efforts to use Georgian territory, will recur, with attendant risk for Georgia and in Georgian–Russian relations. The instability of the Northern Caucasus is a security problem for both countries. This suggests a mutual interest in resolving it.<sup>50</sup>

The National Security Concept has little to say about this risk. It notes the Russian ‘attempt to demonize Georgia among the population of the North Caucasus’<sup>51</sup> and, in the discussion of priorities, mentions the ‘need to deepen and develop relationships with the peoples of the North Caucasus’ in order to contribute ‘to the creation of an atmosphere of trust, peace, and stability in the Caucasus’.<sup>52</sup> The Russian government is excluded from this formulation. There is no consideration of the perspectives of the Russian government on this sensitive issue.

Georgia has a stated policy of improving relations between itself and neighbouring peoples in the Northern Caucasus. But from the perspective of its national security, it needs to take into account the likely reaction of the Russian government, since these areas are within Russian domestic jurisdiction. Much Georgian policy in the Northern Caucasus appears to be designed to irritate the Russians. The visa-free regime that Georgia declared with respect to citizens of North Caucasian subjects of the Russian Federation would not have reduced Russian concern.<sup>53</sup> Nor would Georgia’s decision to target Russian-language broadcasting on these areas, or, for that matter, the Georgian parliament’s recognition of Russian genocide against the Circassians.<sup>54</sup> The April 2012 draft of Georgia’s State Strategy for the Northern Caucasus goes further, calling for the establishment of the truth on ‘ethnic cleansing, deportation, and genocide’ in the region and support for ‘legal research of crimes committed against the peoples of the North Caucasus in international organizations’.<sup>55</sup> From a Russian perspective, these activities have been construed as hostile interference in a highly sensitive domestic political issue.<sup>56</sup>

## Russia

Discussion of the Northern Caucasus leads to the problem of Russia in Georgian strategy and the treatment of Russia in the National Security Concept.

### *The asymmetry of power*

The most obvious dimension of the problem is the deeply asymmetric distribution of power between the two countries. Russia has a population roughly 30 times and a GDP roughly 100 times the size of Georgia’s. Russia’s defence spending is again roughly 100 times that of

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50 The potential risk to Georgia of an Islamized Northern Caucasus and the mutuality of interest are acknowledged in Tornike Sharashenidze and Ivan Sukhov, *Russia and Georgia: Searching the Way Out* (Tbilisi: GFSIS, 2011), pp. 23–4, 45. See also George Khelashvili, ‘Georgian Perceptions of the North Caucasus and of U.S.–Russian Relations’, PONARS Eurasia Policy Memorandum No. 148 (May 2011), p. 5.

51 *National Security Concept*, p. 9.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

53 In March 2012, the Georgian government extended visa-free status to all citizens of Russia.

54 Sharashenidze and Sukhov note the negative impact of recognition of Circassian genocide on Russia–Georgia relations, p. 46.

55 See ‘Georgia Develops State Strategy on North Caucasus’, *Civil.ge*, 1 May 2012, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24714>.

56 For a flavour of Russian sensitivity on this point, see Vladimir Dzutsev, ‘Georgian Policy toward the North Caucasus Causes Concern among Russian Experts,’ *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 9: 81, 30 April 2012, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=39308&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=13&cHash=13ca329dc9e100e6915283849fa2d732](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=39308&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=13&cHash=13ca329dc9e100e6915283849fa2d732).



Georgia.<sup>57</sup> Its military industrial complex produces top-line offensive and defensive weapons systems, and Georgia has difficulty in securing similar capacities through import.

Russia experienced a deep crisis in the 1990s. Its economy imploded. Inflation exploded, eliminating the value of savings. Unemployment and poverty grew exponentially to very high levels. The government lost control over many key economic assets through criminalized privatization processes and could not cover its financial liabilities, leading to a default in 1998. Effective policy-making in central government was extremely difficult, given tensions between the executive and the Duma. Large-scale corruption was the most obvious element of a degradation of law and order and privatization of force. The central government lost control of the affairs of Russia's regions. It fought a war in Chechnya and lost. That defeat reflected the advanced state of deterioration of Russia's armed forces.

Many longer-term issues remain. Demographic trends remain weak, because of low birth rates, high mortality rates and emigration.<sup>58</sup> The economy is vulnerable, given its excessive dependence on raw material exports and the weakness of diversification. Substantial social distress remains among vulnerable groups, particularly outside the major economic centres. The country remains highly corrupt and has an abysmal human rights record.<sup>59</sup> As noted already, it has serious internal security issues in its southernmost regions.

However, Russia has made significant progress in reconsolidation since 2000. Political fragmentation was replaced by a 'vertical of power', subordinating the legislature to the executive and the regions to the centre. Despite the distortions and weaknesses in its economy, Russia has respectable growth and has moved into the upper middle income category in the World Bank classification.<sup>60</sup> Debt has been controlled. The Russian government is reinvesting in the military, with a focus on force projection. Open war in Chechnya ended in Russian victory. The 2011 and 2012 Russian elections, while displaying growing discontent with Vladimir Putin's political system, also highlighted the substantial remaining strength of the ruling circle.

In Georgia, one frequently encounters statements that Russia is collapsing, that it has no future, that it is about to explode, or that Putin is finished in official discourse.<sup>61</sup> This appears to be wishful thinking. Russian history suggests that Russia is quite resilient in bouncing back from periods of crisis. There is no evidence that collapse or substantial further decline is imminent.<sup>62</sup> Even if there were, that would not be reassuring in terms of Georgian security, since declining powers are often quite aggressive.

### *Options for threatened small states*

Small states that have large and threatening neighbours have several strategic options. Realist theory suggests that states can balance (align against threats) or bandwagon (accommodate or align with the threatening state).<sup>63</sup> Of these two possibilities, balancing is the preferred choice of the weaker state. They can also attempt to sit on the fence (seeking to retain as much policy autonomy as possible). Or they can try to hide (avoiding alignment altogether through neutrality).<sup>64</sup> All of these options have been attempted by various states in the former Soviet

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57 The latter figure is calculated by multiplying the percentage of total GDP spent on the military by the total GDP. The two countries devote approximately the same percentage of GDP to military expenditure. See World Bank data tables, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS/countries>.

58 The Russian population has been declining for some time. However, the rate of decline has fallen from -0.5% to -0.1% since 2003. See World Bank data tables, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.GROW/countries>.

59 For a useful summary, see Philip Hanson, James Nixey, Lilia Shevtsova and Andrew Wood, *Putin Again: Implications for Russia and the West* (London: Chatham House, 2012).

60 World Bank, 'Data: Russian Federation', <http://data.worldbank.org/country/russian-federation>.

61 For a recent example, see 'Saakashvili: Russia Has No Future under Current Leadership', *Civil.ge*, 5 March 2012, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24520>.

62 As Hanson notes, it is misleading to suggest that the Russian economy is in decline or doomed to decline. Hanson et al., *Putin Again*, p. 20.

63 Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. vi-x.

64 See Paul Schroeder, 'Historical Reality versus Neo-Realist Theory,' *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1994.

Union. Turkmenistan, a declared neutral, is the most obvious hider. Azerbaijan is perhaps the most successful fence-sitter. Kazakhstan has quite clearly pursued a bandwagoning strategy in relations with Russia. The Baltic republics are balancers, seeking to develop relations with the EU, NATO and the United States to augment their limited capacities to defend themselves against Russia.

The development of the strategic situation since 1991 has effectively removed hiding and fence-sitting as options for Georgia, which leaves balancing or bandwagoning.<sup>65</sup>

#### *The development of the bilateral relationship*

The combination of a massive power imbalance, the reconsolidation of the Russian polity and the increasingly hegemonic quality of Russian policy towards its neighbours pose a significant potential strategic challenge for Georgia. The development of relations between the two countries since independence has done little to allay the potential risk. Relations have been problematic for the entire period.

Evidence of involvement by Russians in the country's two early secessionist wars is strong. Under Eduard Shevardnadze, Georgia made considerable efforts to accommodate Russian preferences while retaining policy autonomy. However, after the initial stage of the post-Rose Revolution government, relations have dramatically worsened. Russia's regional objectives under Putin directly contradict those of Saakashvili's Georgia. Russia seeks to regain or retain preponderance in the region and to limit external strategic engagement there. Its government has made clear its belief that the former Soviet space constitutes a 'zone of special interest' in which it can legitimately claim special rights.<sup>66</sup>

Georgia sees its future in the West through membership of institutions such as NATO and the EU, and through bilateral strategic engagement with the United States. In short, it has chosen a balancing option. It rejects its place in the Russian regional design.<sup>67</sup> Personal relations between Saakashvili and Putin have been abysmal since mid-2004. Russia's attack on, and dismemberment of, Georgia in 2008 was both a symptom of the profound rupture in bilateral relations and a cause of further estrangement.

#### *The National Security Concept's discussion of Russia*

In the National Security Concept's sections on the security environment and on threats, risks and challenges, Russia is listed first.<sup>68</sup> This is reasonable; in current circumstances, Russia is a real and significant threat to Georgia. That is in part a result of Russian preferences, and in part a consequence of Georgian policy choices. The Concept's characterization of the Russian threat makes discouraging reading for those who hope for improvement in relations between the two countries. It leaves an impression of ineradicable enmity and complete Russian responsibility for this. The possibility that Georgian policy or behaviour might have contributed to the situation is absent.

First comes mention of Russia's aggression against Georgia in 1921, leading to 70 years of Soviet occupation. The Concept ignores the fact that for much of the period the Soviet Union was ruled by a Georgian, Joseph Stalin. While Commissar of Nationalities, he and his Georgian colleague, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, organized the defeat and occupation of Georgia against the wishes of Lenin.<sup>69</sup>

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65 There has, however, been some post-2008 discussion of the neutrality option and the 'Finland variant' in Georgia.

66 See, inter alia, Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, Chatham House Papers (Oxford: Blackwell/Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2007); and Mette Skak, 'Russia's New 'Monroe Doctrine'', in Roger Kanet, ed., *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

67 For discussion, see S. Neil MacFarlane, 'Colliding State-Building Projects and Regional Insecurity in the Post-Soviet Space: Georgia versus Russia in South Ossetia,' *Journal of Comparative Social Research* 27 (2010).

68 *National Security Concept*, pp. 3, 7–8.

69 See Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp.224, 235, 236. Pipes emphasizes Ordzhonikidze's role, but also links Ordzhonikidze to Stalin.

Concerning the 1990s, the Concept appears to blame the secessionist movements in Georgia on Russia's support for 'aggressive separatist movements.' It asserts that, once the conflicts began, Russian military forces participated directly 'together with local criminal groups'.<sup>70</sup> This formulation ignores the grievances that the Ossets and the Abkhaz had against the Georgian government of the day, the ill-considered Georgian decision to attack Abkhazia in 1992, as well as widespread criminal behaviour and violations of human rights by Georgian irregular fighters in both conflicts.

The National Security Concept goes on to characterize the 2008 war as a further act of military aggression, which it was. However, it fails to discuss the policies and actions of the Georgian government itself in facilitating this aggression, not least the initiation of large-scale hostilities in South Ossetia. The Concept cites the EUIFFC report as evidence of Russian violation of international law, but ignores the other side of the EU Commission's narrative concerning Georgian responsibility for triggering the crisis.<sup>71</sup>

The Concept's selective rendering of the history of Georgian–Russian relations is followed by discussion of a number of specific risks and challenges related to Russia. One is terrorism, with Russia highlighted as a funder, trainer and facilitator of terrorist attacks in Georgia.<sup>72</sup> Since 2009, the government has consistently emphasized terrorist incidents and Russia's responsibility for them. A number of cases have gone through the courts and defendants have admitted their Russian connection. Given that the handling of these cases by the police and procuracy has not been transparent, and that the courts have a poor record of judicial impartiality, the evidentiary value of the results is difficult to ascertain.<sup>73</sup> No independent corroborating evidence exists. The incidents themselves have been minor, involving small bombs and few casualties, or devices that did not explode.

The Georgian government displays little genuine concern about the issue. If Russia were a terrorist threat, one might expect serious visa control with respect to Russian citizens, yet the government has adopted a visa-free regime for Russians. The government might also be sensitive to Russian control over infrastructural assets related to Georgia's security. However, as the minister of the interior made clear in May, the government welcomes Russian investment, including state investment, in key infrastructural assets, saying that 'money has no smell'.<sup>74</sup>

More broadly, the National Security Concept suggests that Russia is unwilling to accept Georgia's existence as an independent state, and that it desires to 'turn Georgia into a failed state,' to prevent it from pursuing its Euro-Atlantic choice, and to 'forcibly return Georgia into the Russian political orbit'.<sup>75</sup> It thus transforms the specific disagreements and worsening relations between the Putin and Saakashvili administrations into an existential structural threat.

This is important. If the current state of relations is the product of policy choices or policy errors by both sides, then it might be changed through the adoption of different policies. If the problem is structural, then change in Georgian policy would not have any effect. Here it is worth mention

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<sup>70</sup> *National Security Concept*, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> The Independent Fact-Finding Mission's 'Report on the Conflict in Georgia' notes that Georgian shelling began the larger-scale conflict, and goes on to say that the conflict was the 'culminating point in a long period of increasing tensions, provocations and incidents'. It considers the forceful intervention of Russia into Georgia's self-determination disputes to have been unlawful. It also suggests (in my view incorrectly) that Georgia's attack on Tskhinvali constituted aggression, even though it occurred within Georgia's own territory. In any case, the analysis makes clear that, in the view of the commissioners, the blame is shared by both sides. See pp.10–13, 15, 19.

<sup>72</sup> *National Security Concept*, pp. 8–9.

<sup>73</sup> Opposition leaders claim that the government itself arranges such incidents. See 'Alasania Sees Georgian Authorities Hand in Zugdidi Bomb', *Civil.ge*, 4 May 2012, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24728>. There is no clear way for outside analysts to assess the evidentiary merits of either the government or the opposition position on these matters.

<sup>74</sup> 'Money Has No Smell: Russian Investments Welcome', *Civil.ge*, 27 April 2012, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24702>. This presents an ironic contrast with the government's claim that the fact that opposition leader Bidzina Ivanishvili made his money in Russia indicates that he is a Russian stooge.

<sup>75</sup> *National Security Concept*, p. 8.

that, in the early days after the Rose Revolution, relations between Putin and Saakashvili were quite good. The Russian government assisted Tbilisi with the reintegration of Ajara into Georgia and seemed to be taking a constructive role in negotiations on South Ossetia. At the time, Georgia's new president noted that, unlike Shevardnadze, he was a good friend to Russia, that Putin had the eyes of an honourable man, and that he would seek to maintain a pragmatic and positive relationship.<sup>76</sup> The South Ossetia negotiation foundered in 2004 when Georgia attempted to impose customs control in and around South Ossetia. The shift in Putin's perspective on Georgia was also part of a general hardening in Russian foreign and security policy *vis-à-vis* NATO and the West's role in the post-Soviet space, triggered not least by the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, but also by further NATO eastward enlargement.

These examples suggest that the state of relations between Georgia and Russia is not structurally hostile, but is policy-, process- and personality-dependent. There have been fairly positive moments and deeply negative ones. Despite the tenor of the Georgian government's analysis of security threats, it is quite happy to encourage the Russian state to buy Georgian assets. Moreover, the capacity of other states in the region such as Azerbaijan to conduct independent foreign policies suggests that Russia can accommodate itself to the sovereignty of neighbours within fairly broad limits.

Taking the discussion of threats, risks and challenges related to Russia as a whole, the National Security Concept leaves the impression that Georgia is an innocent victim of long-standing Russian imperialism and that Georgian policies and actions had nothing to do with the way the relationship has evolved. It also appears to foreclose the possibility of meaningful efforts by Georgia to improve the bilateral relationship.

Although the empirical/analytical merits of the Concept's characterization of the threat from Russia and the risks attending that threat may be questioned, the political value of this image for the Georgian government is clear. In the domestic arena, a strong enemy image can be used to justify the concentration of power at the expense of democratic process. It also helps in the debate with the opposition. To the extent that this image is accepted by the public, it is likely to support the government in the face of a foreign threat to Georgia's survival, as happened after Georgia's defeat in the 2008 war. Those opponents who suggest exploring the possibility of accommodation with Russia can be caricatured as naïve or, worse, as creatures of Russia. Such accusations are frequent in Georgian political discourse.<sup>77</sup>

Consideration of Russia in the Concept's listing of the priorities of national security policy is consistent with its treatment of the security environment and threats, risks and challenges. Again Russia comes at the front, along with the issue of occupation. In the discussion of ending occupation, the Concept emphasizes the need to strengthen the Georgian diplomatic position with international organizations and Western states. It stresses Georgia's unilateral commitment to the non-use of force and its desire to resolve the issue peacefully. It states Georgia's flexibility on the possibility of autonomy for the two regions in the context of a settlement.<sup>78</sup>

Concerning policy priorities towards Russia itself, the emphasis is on increasing the involvement of the international community to influence the Russian position. The Georgian position on what Russia must do is unequivocal: adopt a non-aggression obligation, agree on non-deployment of military forces on Georgia's sovereign territory without its consent, and withdraw forces already based there. Withdrawal of Russian forces would be followed by the deployment of 'international peacekeeping/police forces' as well as extending the EUMM's monitoring activity into the occupied territories.<sup>79</sup>

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76 Oleg Osetinskii, 'Mikhail Saakashvili: Shevardnadze vseгда obmanывal Putina,' *Izvestia*, 12 April 2004, <http://www.izvestia.ru/news/289012>.

77 For a recent example of association of opposition leaders with Russian interference, see 'Saakashvili: 'We Live in the Epoch of Revival,' *Civil.ge*, 11 January 2012, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24345>.

78 *National Security Concept*, pp. 11–12.

79 *Ibid.*

The National Security Concept does briefly consider the possibility of improvement of relations with Russia, but only in the context of 'de-occupation' and Russian respect for the territorial integrity of Georgia.<sup>80</sup> That is to say, for Georgia to pursue normalization, Russia would need to make concessions unilaterally – to give up its gains from the 2008 war. The odds that Russia, the victor, would abandon its positions in return for normalization are low as it has no need to do so.

There is also little indication that international pressure would be sufficient to achieve de-occupation. Four years of Western criticism of Russian actions, support for the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity and non-recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have had no discernible effect on the Russian position. For the most part, Georgia's Western friends seem quite happy to agree to disagree with Russia on this matter and to pursue their everyday relations with the Russian government despite this lack of movement (see below).

Perhaps with these considerations in mind, the Concept suggests the desirability of regime change in Russia towards a democratic government that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbours.<sup>81</sup> This seems tendentious in a national security policy document, given that Georgia has no means of affecting Russia's political development. Moreover, it is not obvious that a democratic government in Moscow would reverse Russian policy on Georgia. Doing so would render such a government vulnerable to attack by nationalists and also by those elements of the state security bureaucracy with a stake in the outcome in Georgia.<sup>82</sup>

For the same reasons, it is improbable that a democratic Russian government would accept the concept's proposition that Georgian integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions would strengthen Russia's own security as well as the security of the Caucasus. Recent evidence suggests the opposite on the last point; Georgia's quest for entry into NATO was one important factor contributing to Russia's aggression.<sup>83</sup>

In short, there is little in Georgia's National Security Concept that would lead one to expect a significant improvement in relations with Russia and consequent mitigation of threat. As noted above, the alternative to accommodation with Russia is balancing against it. Given the lack of balancing options in the region for Georgia, its focus has been the West.

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80 Ibid, p. 13.

81 Ibid, p. 12.

82 In this context, Shevtsova notes a January 2011 poll in which 78% of Russians expressed support for Russia's return to status as a great empire. Hanson et al., *Putin Again*, p.14.

83 For corroborating comment by Russia's president, see Brian Whitmore, 'Medvedev Gets Caught Telling the Truth,' Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, 22 November 2011, [http://www.rferl.org/content/medvedev\\_gets\\_caught\\_telling\\_the\\_truth/24399004.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/medvedev_gets_caught_telling_the_truth/24399004.html).



## 5. RELATIONS WITH THE WEST<sup>84</sup>

Georgia's turn to Europe and the Euro-Atlantic area reflects strategy and power politics, as well as an identity narrative. Membership of NATO carries a fairly clear, although infrequently tested, security guarantee.<sup>85</sup> Membership of the EU carries an implicit guarantee of mutual assistance in the event of attack.

The National Security Concept is very clear on this orientation in Georgian policy, and on the country's aspiration to NATO accession and integration into the EU, in both the interests and the priorities sections.<sup>86</sup> As already noted, a key priority in addressing the threat from Russia is bringing the diplomatic resources of these institutions to bear in pushing Russia to change its policy towards Georgia.

The question arising is whether the potential partners are willing to undertake a commitment to Georgian security in the face of a Russian threat. The weakness of the West's commitment was evident in its failure to defend Georgia against Russia's aggression in 2008. Nor did the West punish Russia for its violation of Georgian territorial integrity and its contempt for international law concerning the aggressive use of force. The principal effect on Western policy of Russia's attack on Georgia was to push major Western states and their institutions to try to reset their relations with Russia on a more positive footing.

### NATO

Georgia has insistently sought a Membership Action Plan (MAP) and places a high priority on eventual membership. It has deployed troops in Iraq and Afghanistan in the hope of enhancing its image as a producer of security. At its April 2008 Bucharest Summit, NATO committed to Georgia's eventual membership. This was followed in September 2008 by the establishment of a NATO–Georgia Commission as a consultative forum to 'help Georgia achieve its goal of membership in NATO' and to design practical cooperation to that end.<sup>87</sup>

However, in the face of clear opposition from Germany and others, NATO rejected an American proposal that Georgia should receive a MAP. There is no evidence that these countries have changed their minds since. Arguably, the 2008 war enhanced NATO concerns about admitting Georgia. The likelihood of the granting of a MAP, let alone membership, to Georgia is low in the near term. This was evident in NATO's decision in early 2012 that their meeting in Chicago in May would not be an 'enlargement summit'.<sup>88</sup>

The Obama administration, in contrast with its predecessor, is not enthusiastic about quick action towards Georgian membership. On the other hand, it has no reason to reverse the 2008 Bucharest fudge on 'eventual' membership. In any event, it is not pushing the issue. Germany has never been enthusiastic, while the other 'old Europe' allies are quiet. That leaves the onus of championing Georgia's membership on NATO's new members, which constitute the weakest political grouping in the alliance.

The official reasons for delay are clearly stated: concerns over democratic development (notably over elections), judicial reform and security-sector reform.<sup>89</sup> In all these areas, NATO calls for further progress. Among unstated reasons is the obvious reluctance to take on Georgia's security vulnerabilities, comprising not least the unresolved civil disputes in Abkhazia and

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<sup>84</sup> I am indebted to Roy Allison for his comments on an early draft of this section.

<sup>85</sup> See Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm).

<sup>86</sup> *National Security Concept*, pp. 6, 15–17.

<sup>87</sup> NATO, 'NATO–Georgia Commission', [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_52131.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_52131.htm).

<sup>88</sup> The summit did recognize that Georgia was an 'aspirant' state. The fact that Bosnia was placed in the same category suggests that the move to membership will take a long time.

<sup>89</sup> As already noted, key players in NATO link progress towards closer relations and possible accession to Georgian performance in upcoming elections. See the remarks of NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen in Tbilisi in November 2011, 'NATO Tells Georgia 'Keep Up Reform Momentum'', *Civil.ge*, 9 November 2011.



South Ossetia and the occupation and militarization of these regions by Russia. In addition, in the context of clear Russian rejection of NATO enlargement into its backyard, a number of member states (for instance Germany) are concerned about the potential impact of admitting Georgia on their bilateral relations with Russia.

In short, although Georgia may view NATO membership as a means of addressing the Russian threat, a number of NATO states are likely to view the mitigation or removal of the Russian threat to Georgia through improvement in bilateral relations as a prerequisite for Georgian membership.

## The EU

The constraint from Russia on European engagement with the former Soviet region and with Georgia is less substantial with regard to economic relations than to military ones. Fitful Russian efforts to construct a unified economic space in parts of the former Soviet region are, of course, in tension with deepening EU engagement with the countries concerned. There have been occasions when Russia has sought to obstruct the EU in the region, as for example with the negotiation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between the EU and Ukraine. As one analyst put it: 'Moscow has repeatedly sought to prevent this development, seeking instead to cement the economic and political bonds holding together the Russia-centric "post-Soviet space".'<sup>90</sup>

However, in the context of Russian aspirations regarding regional economic integration, Georgia is a small fish. Moreover, trade is one thing and military alliance is another. Although the Russian government may be hostile to deepening EU engagement with the region, that hostility is much less intense than Russia's opposition to NATO enlargement.

As such, there is less risk that EU member states would damage their relations with Russia to any significant degree through greater engagement in the region. The Georgian relationship with the EU is growing and deepening, not least through the Neighbourhood policy and the Eastern Partnership.<sup>91</sup> However, that is unlikely to produce membership any time in the foreseeable future – for multiple reasons.

One is the EU's ongoing difficulty in 'digesting' the last round of new members, and the attendant enlargement fatigue. A second is the difficulty the EU faces in its relations with Hungary, an earlier successful candidate, which appears to be slipping backwards in areas such as central bank autonomy and judicial and media independence.

A third is the reluctance of the Georgian government to move towards the *acquis communautaire* on issues such as the labour and competition codes. Another is continuing EU concern over Georgia's democratic development. The meeting of EU foreign ministers in February 2012 welcomed Georgia's reform efforts to date, but stressed the importance of further democratic progress, stating the EU's intentions to monitor closely the 2012–13 electoral cycle.<sup>92</sup>

Moreover, Georgia is neither the only nor the most significant candidate for EU accession. The priority in the enlargement process goes to the Western Balkans. Croatia has been offered membership. Next on the list are Macedonia and Albania. Serbia is also an issue. The list is capped by the extremely problematic candidacy of Bosnia-Herzegovina, leaving aside Kosovo, on which the EU members are split concerning recognition.

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90 Jeffrey Mankoff, 'What a Eurasian Union Means to Washington', *The National Interest*, 19 April 2012, p. 2, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/what-eurasian-union-means-washington-6821>.

91 In December 2011, the Georgian government succeeded in securing the EU's agreement to open formal negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. The government hailed the decision as a huge leap forward in integration with Europe. It is worth noting, however, that Ukraine's DCFTA negotiation with the EU took three years to bring to a successful conclusion in 2011.

92 As cited in 'EU to 'Closely Monitor' Developments Ahead of Elections', *Civil.ge*, 27 February 2012, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24491>.

Farther afield, there is the perennial question of Turkey. Turkish EU accession is impeded by continuing concern over democratic development and human rights. The issue of the Armenian genocide also figures largely. Underlying these specific concerns is a reluctance to take in a member of Turkey's size and level of economic development, and cultural resistance in some member countries to the accession of a large Muslim state.

In the best of circumstances, these issues will take years to sort out and enlargement is currently a secondary issue for the EU. The difficulties of getting over the 2008 financial and economic crisis, as well as the current crisis in the eurozone take much higher priority. Any solution to these problems will require treaty changes that again will take time to achieve. In the meantime, indicators suggest that the EU may be slipping back into recession.

For all these reasons, and also the dubious military, strategic, and security capacity of the EU, it would be unwise for Georgia to rely on Europe as an answer to its security challenges.

## The United States

A third possibility is the United States. During George W. Bush's second term, the prospect of deepening security cooperation with the United States appeared promising. To the Bush Administration, Georgia was a poster child of successful democratic reform. The two presidents developed a reasonably close personal relationship. The Georgian government skilfully deployed its 'soft power,' building a wider US domestic constituency supportive of its political and economic development and attentive to its security concerns. Georgia received one of the highest per capita shares of US development assistance.

But when American support was urgently needed in the 2008 war, it did not arrive. Former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice recounts a discussion of possible responses to the Russian invasion in the National Security Council that was brought up short by National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley: 'I want to ask a question. Are we prepared to go to war with Russia over Georgia?'<sup>93</sup> There were, of course, many other steps the United States could have taken to punish Russia (such as pulling back on its support of Russian membership of the World Trade Organization or sanctions of various sorts) but it did not take them.

The consolation prize for Georgia was the United States–Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership.<sup>94</sup> This defines agreed principles and covers a large numbers of areas of cooperation, including the enhancement of defence cooperation. However, it contains little on specific actions, nor any general commitment to Georgian security.

The Obama administration appears to be less enthusiastically committed to Georgian security and development.<sup>95</sup> Its failure to satisfy Georgian expectations (for example in weapons sales) is clear. Although when meeting President Saakashvili in Washington in January 2012 President Obama spoke of deepening defence cooperation, the specific implications of that promise remain unclear. There is no evidence that it involves transfers of the higher-end defence capabilities that Georgia seeks.<sup>96</sup> Despite the US–Georgia Charter and continuous American rhetorical reassertion of commitment to Georgia, the likelihood that the United States would make a significant material commitment to Georgian security is minimal.

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93 Condoleezza Rice, *A Memoir of My Extraordinary Ordinary Family and Me* (New York: Random House, 2010), pp. 688–89.

94 Text available at <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/121029.htm>.

95 Interviews in Washington, November 2011.

96 The Obama administration has consistently resisted Georgian requests for anti-air and anti-tank capability. The recently adopted Defence Authorization Bill contains a clause (1242) requiring the administration to 'normalize' its defence relations with Georgia. The president responded by noting that he did not consider this to be mandatory since, in his view, it intruded into the executive's constitutional authority to manage foreign policy. Discussion in the Strategic Partnership Commission in June 2012 produced agreement on air surveillance, air defence and coastal surveillance, as well as assistance in the upgrade of Georgian utility helicopters. 'US to Consider Georgia's Request to Buy Defense Articles and Services', Civil.ge, 15 June 2012, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24892>.

This more tepid US perspective on relations with Georgia has many sources. One is the close connection of Georgia to domestic opponents of the Obama administration. A second is the emphasis on the need to 'reset' relations with Russia. The United States, although endorsing Georgia's position on territorial integrity and illegal occupation, is in practice unwilling to allow disagreement over Georgia to interfere with more significant issues in the US–Russian relationship (arms control, nuclear proliferation, North Korea, Iran etc.).

A third is the US financial and economic crisis, and the consequent inward turn of policy focus. The most recent congressional budget negotiations suggest that one consequence will be a significant downsizing of the American armed forces and reduction in US force projection capability. This is related to a rebalancing of American national security policy towards East Asia and away from Europe, evident in planned force reduction in Western Europe and the recent deployment of US Marines to Australia.

A fourth is the American public's cooling towards international activism, a consequence of the financial and human cost, and ambiguous results, of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. In the 2010 Chicago Council on Global Affairs survey on public attitudes towards international affairs, 79% of respondents felt that the United States was playing the role of world policeman more than it should. The survey also displayed pessimism about prospects for success where the United States employed military force, and a preference for keeping out of conflicts where vital interests were not threatened.<sup>97</sup> Parenthetically, although Georgia was not discussed specifically, the survey clearly indicates that the 2008 war had no significant impact on public views of relations with Russia. Responses indicate little concern about Russia, and 81% of those surveyed thought that the state of Russian-American relations was neutral or good.<sup>98</sup>

In addition to its problematic domestic economic and social situation, the United States has a very crowded security agenda, which includes the continuing threat of terrorism, the increasing assertiveness of China in East Asia, the ongoing consequences of the Arab Spring, the deepening crisis over Iran's nuclear programmes, concern over problems in the Eurozone and continuing difficulties with Russia.

In short, there is little evidence to suggest that the United States is willing to take significant risks or to accept significant costs in balancing against Russia in Georgia.

To summarize, reliance on integration with Western institutions and on strategic agreements with significant Western states to ensure national security is a high-risk strategy for Georgia. It overestimates the capacity and will of the country's potential partners to deliver, and it underestimates the opposition of the region's major power.

On the other hand, the framing narrative on the West in the National Security Concept and in foreign and security policy makes good political sense for Georgia's leaders. It supports the government's modernizing future-oriented narrative in domestic politics. It legitimizes the ruling group and delegitimizes its opponents, who are accused of being mired in the past and beholden to the Russian enemy.

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97 Chicago Council on Global Affairs, *Global Views 2010. Constrained Internationalism: Adapting to New Realities* (2010), pp. 40–55, [http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/UserFiles/File/POS\\_Topline%20Reports/POS%202010/Global%20Views%202010.pdf](http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/UserFiles/File/POS_Topline%20Reports/POS%202010/Global%20Views%202010.pdf).

98 *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.

## 6. GEORGIA'S STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

The discrepancy between what the Georgian government wants from the West and what Western states and their institutions are willing to give it reflects a gap between how Georgians perceive the strategic significance of their country and the Caucasus and how the region is perceived in the West. It is widely believed in Georgia, and to some extent elsewhere in the Caucasus, that the region is of fundamental strategic importance to the Euro-Atlantic security community. Reasons cited include energy security, the importance of the region as a conduit for logistical support of European and US forces in Afghanistan, and the potential utility of the region as a platform for action against Iran, should that be deemed necessary.

However, although the region is a significant energy producer and exporter at the margin, its place in the global energy equation is modest. Caspian oil transiting Georgia makes up around 1% of supply in the global market. Gas exports from the region are dwarfed in significance by those from the Persian Gulf and Russia. Caspian sources may have substantial potential for further growth, but the gradual efforts to adapt to climate change, coupled with low economic growth and price increases, are reducing the rate of increase in demand for hydrocarbons in European markets.

New extraction technologies for shale gas may also be reducing import demand in developed markets in Europe and North America. Higher energy prices make previously uneconomic sources (e.g. Canada's tar sands) economically feasible. Finally, the export of oil and gas from the Caucasus is not obviously dependent on maintaining the status quo there. To take an extreme scenario, if Russia 'took over', there is no obvious reason why it would stop the flow.

Concerning logistical support for Western operations in Afghanistan, this is a perishable asset since NATO and the United States have a projected exit in 2014. The lively discussion is not about the logistics of supporting troops in Afghanistan, but how and through where to manage their withdrawal. It seems likely that additional facilities will become available in Russia.<sup>99</sup> The need for secure logistical alternatives through the Caucasus is diminishing.

With respect to the worsening relations between the United States and Europe on the one hand, and Iran on the other, it is not certain that a suitable coalition to address the problem could be built, given economic constraints and also public unwillingness to embark on new military action so soon after Iraq and Afghanistan. The likelihood that the United States and its allies might get involved in a land war in Iran is very small indeed. Again, the prospective need for logistical support through the Caucasus is therefore probably low.

There are two more likely Iranian contingencies in the event of a decision to use force. The first is naval and air action if Iran attempts to close the Straits of Hormuz. Whether Iran would attempt this is doubtful. It would be economically suicidal, given its dependence on export through the Straits. Moreover, the Iranians are aware that the United States has the capacity to reopen the Straits by force. That would involve naval and air operations for which the Caucasus would be irrelevant. The second option is military action to degrade Iranian nuclear enrichment facilities. Again this would involve air attacks. Whether such operations would succeed is an open question. In any event, there would be no need to rely on access to the Caucasus in order to carry them out.

Further, it is not obvious that the states of the Caucasus (including Georgia) would want to be involved. Assisting such operations would deeply alienate the Iranian government.<sup>100</sup> If Azerbaijan were involved, it might cause retaliation against an important Georgian partner.<sup>101</sup> The potential costs of commitment arguably exceed any potential gain.

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99 'Lavrov Backs US using Ulyanovsk Base', *The Moscow Times*, 15 March 2012, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/mobile/article/lavrov-backs-nato-using-ulyanovsk-base/454728.html>.

100 For a discussion of local concern about Iranian retaliation in the Caucasus in the event of an Israeli attack on Iran, see 'The Iran Conflict Comes to the Caucasus', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 17 February 2012, [http://www.rferl.org/content/iran\\_azerbaijan\\_caucasus\\_georgia\\_assassinations/24487468.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/iran_azerbaijan_caucasus_georgia_assassinations/24487468.html).

101 Azerbaijan recently denied reports that it had agreed to provide facilities for Israeli strike aircraft. 'Azerbaijan Denies Giving Israel Airbase Access', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 29 March 2012, [http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan\\_denies\\_giving\\_israel\\_air\\_base\\_access/24531187.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan_denies_giving_israel_air_base_access/24531187.html).

In short, the region is not a critical focal point for Western interests and strategy. Relying on its supposed centrality as a basis for engaging the West would be unwise. The effort to pursue the relationship with NATO in particular worsened Georgia's relations with the country that poses its most significant strategic threat. The balancing option is a weak one, given Russia's preponderance in the regional balance of power and the reluctance of the West to commit.

## 7. CONCLUSION

How one evaluates Georgia's National Security Concept depends on whether one considers it as a basic document underpinning policy, or as an effort at political framing. Is it about the security of Georgia and its people? Or is it about the promotion of the political objectives of the governing elite?

As a guide to security policy, the Concept displays a number of problems. It omits or underemphasizes significant threats (e.g. the possibility of internal instability, global economic risk, and risks attending regional conflict). It misconstrues others (e.g. Russia). It places an emphasis on balancing with the West, which is unrealistic given the limits to Western commitment to Georgia.

Several recommendations follow from a comparison of the strategic situation facing Georgia in the Caucasus with the treatment of that situation in the Concept. Concerning risks of internal political instability, a significant reallocation of state resources towards poverty alleviation and employment generation would enhance Georgia's internal security. Ensuring that the next round of elections is free could have a similar effect; genuine democratic processes can provide a safety valve for socio-economic distress. In addition, it would sustain Georgia's relations with Western partners. These would be significantly damaged by further departure from democratic principles.

Turning to international economic risk, further investment of state resources in the revival of the agricultural economy would reduce Georgia's dependence on imports of commodities with volatile prices, as well as reducing the trade deficit and alleviating poverty.

The analysis of risk in Georgia's immediate environment suggests that more diplomatic and analytical effort should be devoted to security issues involving Georgia's neighbours in the Southern Caucasus. In the Northern Caucasus, Georgia lacks the means to exploit effectively Russia's vulnerabilities. Given the recent history of Georgian–Russian relations, the effort to do so carries significant risk. Georgia should, therefore, de-emphasize the more contentious aspects of its strategy towards the Northern Caucasus.

The Northern Caucasus is one element of the larger bilateral relationship with Russia and the West. The policy of estrangement from Russia and balancing with the West is a high-risk option. Georgia is unlikely to get what it wants from the West. The effort to do so alienates Russia. In this context, gradual normalization of relations with Russia is a more prudent approach. This does not mean retreat from Georgia's aspirations towards the EU and NATO. It means situating these aspirations in a broader multi-vectored Georgian foreign and security policy and a more regionally focused policy.

On the other hand, as an effort to frame political debate in Georgia or promote an attractive image of Georgia to international partners, the National Security Concept clearly has political utility for the government. For example, the treatment of Russia in the concept serves the ruling party's strategy of legitimizing its own position, and delegitimizing the opposition. The enthusiastic rhetorical embrace of democracy conforms to European and American expectations on governance. The treatment of national minority issues conforms to the narratives of engaged international organizations. The omission of analysis of the potential for internal instability (rooted in socio-economic variables) among the population as a whole serves the effort to paint Georgia as an attractive place for investors. The same is true of the omission of discussion of international economic risk.

However, the security policy function of the Concept and its role in a framing narrative for the government in terms of internal and external audiences are in tension. To the extent that the latter overpowers the former, the utility of the concept as a basis for the development of security policy and strategy is diminished. To the extent that national security concepts serve as the foundation for security policy rather than as instruments in domestic political debate, they require clear-headed and objective analysis. The price of getting security policy wrong in places like Georgia can be high.



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