

# UGSPN ANNUAL REPORT 2024



## FOREWORD

It is with great pride that we present the annual report of the Security, Policy, and Nationalism Research Center (UGSPN). This report serves as both a reflection of the year's endeavors and a testament to the intellectual vitality of our researchers and contributors. As a center dedicated to exploring the intersections of security, policy, and nationalism, we have navigated a year marked by national, regional, and global challenges that underscore the relevance of our mission.

This year, our scholars have produced an impressive body of work, ranging from insightful blog posts to in-depth research articles and policy analyses. These contributions have tackled critical issues, including the evolving geopolitical landscapes, the impacts on national and international security, and the enduring



**Natia Kaladze**

Dean of the School of Social Sciences

The University of Georgia

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complexities of identity and sovereignty in a rapidly changing world. Each piece reflects the Center's commitment to rigorous scholarship, thoughtful analysis, and a profound understanding of the historical and contemporary forces shaping our region and beyond.

During these years, the Center expanded its role as a hub for dialogue and exchange. Through conferences, public seminars, workshops, and collaborations with academic and policy institutions, we have strengthened our engagement with a diverse array of stakeholders. These efforts have enriched our understanding and fostered connections that are vital for addressing the pressing issues of our time.

Georgia, at the crossroads of democracy, continues to inspire our work and reminds us of the importance of dialogue, resilience, and adaptability—qualities that resonate deeply in our research and outreach.

As you learn from the pages of this report, we hope you find inspiration in the depth and breadth of the contributions. We are grateful to our researchers, partners, and supporters who make our work possible. Together, we strive to illuminate pathways toward understanding and addressing the critical issues that define our era.

Thank you for your continued interest and support. We look forward to another year of impactful research and meaningful engagement.

This year marks the pivotal moment in the history of the Georgian nation as it is in the very existential struggle for European future, democracy and stable development. The authoritarian regimes, while co-operating globally, intensified their attacks on civil society, rule of law and the democratic institutions. If this was not enough the entire nations are in danger of losing sovereignty, freedom and statehood. Ukraine's heroic fight for its physical survival as a nation is a brutal reminder for the democratic rest of the World, that security, democracy and freedom are not given, und must be protected. Europe, its institutional embodiment such as the EU, along with other institutional frameworks (NATO, OSCE etc.) are in an energetic search for an effective formula for future security, stability and prosper development. However, other global challenges as well as regional developments show a serious risk of escalatory developments in various regional as well as within the state context, turning the quest for the universal formula even more challenging.

The Security, Policy and Nationalism research center (UGSPN) at the University of Georgia tried to capture all the important global, regional and national processes in 2024 that due to their unique characteristics and relevance deserve a proper analysis and causal explanation. Whether the full-fledged research reports (e.g. resilience measurement tool, defence model 2030 for Georgia, far-right radicalization of youth), or papers analyzing institutional deficits of NATO and hybrid warfare tactics of Russian special services, the UGSPN-research team tried to deliver most important insights and conclusions to contribute to policy solutions and if needed to initiate further the relevant concept development efforts.

The UGSPN annual report is a collection and manifestation of the mentioned analytical efforts.

Hence, readers will surely find the topic they think is of particular interest and relevance.

Enjoy!



**Dr. Shalva Dzebisashvili**

Chairman of the advisory board

The University of Georgia

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# **GEORGIA'S DEFENCE MODEL - A CRITICAL CHOICE IN A RISKY ENVIRONMENT**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION:

The report reviews the current situation in the areas of Georgia's defense and security policy planning, provides a comprehensive analysis of the main problems in these areas, taking into account both internal and external factors, and offers insights and recommendations on these issues to address shortcomings, including in the form of an optimal defense model.

### SIGNIFICANT TRENDS IN MODERN WARFARE:

Modern wars and especially those that have taken place or are taking place in our region (Azerbaijan vs Armenia and Russia vs Ukrainian) have demonstrated new trends of warfare. This is related to the use of modern technology and military materiel, combat training and other important aspects. It is clear that these new trends should be considered when planning the defense policy and more broadly national security policy.

### OPERATIONAL VISION AND REQUIRED COMBAT CAPABILITIES:

Detailed analysis of the operational picture in case of possible large-scale military aggression against Georgia allows us to determine the objectives of the Georgian Armed Forces more accurately. In line with this assumption are defined the required number of the Armed Forces, its proper structure and material-financial resources required for transformation.

### FORCE STRUCTURE, COMMAND, AND DEFENSE CAPABILITIES (MAXIMALIST VS. REALISTIC MODELS):

Based on the generated maximalist model, a huge difference is demonstrated between material-technical, financial, or other resources identified by the maximalist model and today's reality. The realistic model, in turn, offers a reasonable compromise be-

tween financial capabilities and minimum necessary defense/combat potential required for deterrence of aggression and, in case of failing to avoid war, ensure country's effective defense and retention of sovereignty over the currently controlled territories.

### DEFENSE POLICY AS PART OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY, INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS, AND DEMOCRATIC CONTROL:

Defense policy is one of the most important components of the overall national security policy, which must be implemented under strong inter-agency coordination. The national security system currently in place requires substantial reform in terms of separation of powers, enhancement of legislation, improvement of coordination and monitoring mechanisms, and including those of the Parliament.

### CONCLUSION:

The current national defence system and capabilities are inadequate given the geopolitical, security and military challenges (threats) that require a number of necessary urgent steps to be done. Not least, for the continuous development of the defence and security area a non-partisan, systemic approach is needed that will be based on a clear legislative and institutional frame.



## INTRODUCTION

This document was prepared by the Security, Policy and Nationalism Center (UGSPN) at the School of Social Sciences of the University of Georgia. Within the project, a comprehensive analysis of Georgia's security and defense area was carried out, based on which the security challenges and institutional failures facing the country have been considered and two competing models of rational defense formulated and recommended. The first (1) model is fully tailored to the needs of the security and defense system without any presumption of the resources (especially financial) limitation; and the second (2) model is a relatively realistic one based on the financial capabilities and constraints of the country.

Development of optimal defense system models naturally envisages review (analysis) of other security areas and institutions that are linked to defense objectives and evaluation of the process of national security policy planning. Accordingly, the document critically reviews the role and functions of the Parliament in the area of defense policy, as well as the authority of the National Security Council, President and the Defense Council under the President, and current mechanisms of interagency coordination. These models contain the analysis of existing and desired combat capabilities of the Defense Forces, as well as a clear picture of the structure and composition of forces, which is followed by calculations of relevant material and financial resources and description of the transformation process in a specific timeframe. The document also has practical significance, since it may serve as a working document for internal inter-party discussions, as well as for the development and improvement of their political programs.

Structurally, the document is divided into three sections. The first section is entirely dedicated to the review of the desired models of the Defense Forces. The review begins with the formulation of the threats and challenges facing the country, and global processes relevant to the context of regional security. The next phase lays out the vision of the future of warfare, and on its basis, the requirements for operational and

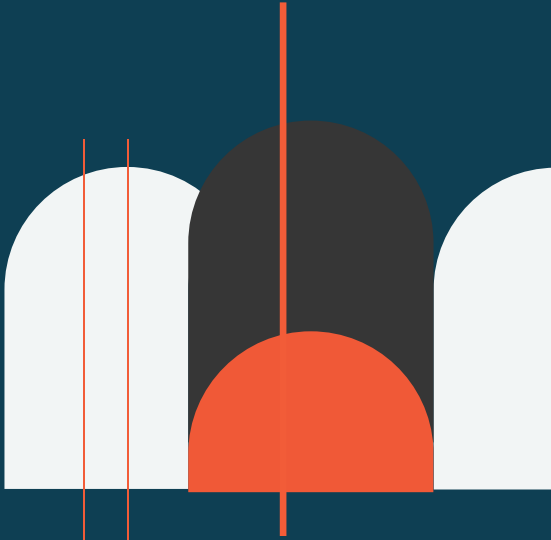
combat capabilities are formulated. Following this, the document eventually reviews in detail the desired structure of the Defense Forces (including an alternative variant), its capabilities and equipment, staffing, logistics and infrastructure, including budgetary calculations for the period set for the transformation of forces. The second section of the document reviews the institutional arrangement of defense and security - functional efficiency of the Parliament, Minister of Defense, General Staff, NSC, Defense Council and President, which is essential for security and defense policy, its planning and democratic oversight. The third section reviews interagency cooperation in the area of security and defense, which is critical for effective response to military and other types of crises. This primarily implies coordinated action of the Georgian Defense Forces with other agencies to ensure the protection of critical infrastructure, response to natural disasters, protection of border and maximum security along the occupation line (ABL).

Based on the purpose of the document, recommendations are formulated in all three sections and cover a wide range of measures (agency and structure, legal, finances and resources, doctrine, etc.). In case of their fulfillment, it is possible to achieve the stated objectives: 1. Substantial institutional enhancement of the security and defense sphere/system of Georgia; 2. Rapid development of the Defense Forces and enhancement of combat capabilities, adequate for the combat objectives; 3. Significant increase of efficiency in interagency coordination and joint response to various types of crises.

Additional value of the document is the section, which clearly outlines the political responsibility for the implementation of the recommendations and the subsequent financial costs. This is extremely important for making it clear to the political spectrum what real danger the country may face if the recommendations outlined in the document are not implemented or only partially implemented.

*SECTION I*

**GEORGIA'S SECURITY ENVIRONMENT -  
MAIN TRENDS AND THREATS**



# GEORGIA'S SECURITY ENVIRONMENT - MAIN TRENDS AND THREATS

This chapter reviews important processes and trends for Georgia's security both globally and regionally. In this context the main military and non-military threats and anticipated risks for the country are analyzed. Identifying and reviewing these processes and various types of threats is important for defining the aspects that have played and will play in the future a crucial role for the security of our country. At the same time, it is possible to plan adequate steps in the relevant areas of international or domestic policy and prepare to maximum extent for neutralization of these threats and risks.

## MILITARY THREATS:

### ▶ Major military threat

Russia, as a giant and revisionist force, still has the ambition and resources to restore full control over Georgia, for which it resorts to both conventional and hybrid warfare. The intensity of the threat deriving from Russia is influenced by its military intervention in Ukraine, in which Russia engaged its main resources.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, both the sentiment of the Russian political elite and the military resources of the Kremlin do not allow us to assume that the threat of the Russian military aggression has been removed from the agenda. Even more, we must assume that after the end of hostilities in Ukraine, Russia will still have the capability to mobilize a substantial military force against Georgia. In addition, in order to compensate for the potential defeat on the Ukrainian front, the political will in Moscow may be ripe to carry out a successful military campaign in Georgia.

### ▶ Other types of military threats

In parallel to direct military aggression, or apart from it, a real threat is posed by the so-called "proxy" forces (occupation regimes in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region) that may dispatch subversive groups infiltrating from the occupied territories of Georgia into the territory controlled by the Government of Georgia with the aim of acting against law enforcement agencies, administrative institutions, and critical infrastructure, as well as intimidating and killing the population.

The ongoing process of borderization is closely related to the threat of resumption of military aggression as well as the threat of hybrid actions, which, in addition to the seizure of new territories and the abduction of Georgian citizens, might be directed towards the country's critical infrastructure, demonstrating the utter need for adequate infrastructure arrangements (and responses) along the occupation line (ABL) for the security of the country.

Handover to the de-facto separatist authorities of additional weapons, including relatively modern ones, would contribute to the aggravation of the problem of the occupied territories, which will not only increase the military capabilities of the separatist regimes, but will also substantially complicate effective control over illegal trafficking of weapons and ammunition. And the latter is especially dangerous in the context of using UAVs, as well as portable anti-aircraft missile launchers for sabotage and terrorist purposes.

<sup>1</sup> Asami Terajima, Military intelligence: More than 420,000 Russian soldiers deployed across occupied territories, The Kyiv Independent, 2023. <https://kyivindependent.com/military-intelligence-more-than-420-000-russian-soldiers-deployed-across-occupied-territories/>

Despite the resolution of the Karabakh issue by Azerbaijan, the threat of escalation of the military conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia about the Zangezur corridor problem remains relevant to some extent, in which Iran and Turkey may engage.<sup>2</sup> This will not only worsen the political and economic (transport, trade) picture in the region, but may also result in the invasion of Georgia by the Russian troops under the pretext of the land corridor demand toward Armenia.

If the Russian central government is weakened, this may cause reemergence of instability spots and renewed armed conflicts in the North Caucasus, which will inevitably have impacts of different types on Georgia, including increase in the threat of entry of various armed and criminal groups into the territory of Georgia.

Due to the Iranian nuclear program, a large-scale military conflict with the participation of the United States and Israel may be expected, followed by a myriad of negative processes and threats for the countries of the South Caucasus, including Georgia.

## THREATS OF NON-MILITARY NATURE

This subsection describes the tendencies and threats that include various (non-military) areas, create conducive ground and enhance a damaging effect of the hybrid warfare and cause harm for political and economic stability, as well as security and development of the society.

- ▶ The very fact that Georgia belongs to the category of weak states due to lack of resources, inadequate level of development of institutions and

political elite makes it more vulnerable to various threats. The policy planning process in Georgia has been largely inconsistent, and in recent years this process has been completely disrupted further aggravating the overall situation.

- ▶ Pro-Russian propaganda is intensified in the country, which is aimed at disrupting the consensus on country's Western integration and strengthening pro-Russian sentiments.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the influence of pro-Russian propaganda is reinforced by the degree of involvement of such influential actors as the Georgian Orthodox Church and the so-called conservative groups.

- ▶ Recently, the frequency of cyber-attacks against strategic and other important infrastructures/facilities has increased, which poses a threat of their disruption and puts the issue of security of these facilities on the agenda.

- ▶ Along the increased activity of Russian and Chinese companies in Georgia, the scale of corruption has noticeably increased, which additionally casts doubt on the work carried out and especially (on the quality of) the construction of the strategic critical infrastructure.

- ▶ Russia intensifies the resumption/opening of transit traffic through Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region, which, if realized, will be damaging for the image of Georgia in the eyes of its Western partners, but will also increase the dependence of country's economy on Russia (thus enhancing the leverages of Moscow's political influence) and further complicate the prospects for restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Anna Ohanyan, Azerbaijan's Armenian 'Corridor' Is a Challenge to the Global Rules-Based Order, Foreign Policy, 2023. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/11/02/azerbaijan-armenia-zangezur-corridor/>

<sup>3</sup> A Russian informational operation in Georgia against the European Union, ISFED, 2023 .

<https://www.isfed.ge/eng/blogi/ganakhlebuli-rusuli-sainformatsio-operatsia-saqartveloshi-evrokavshiris-tsinaagmdeg->

<sup>4</sup> Бжания: Сухуми готов возобновить железнодорожное сообщение, если Тбилиси согласится, Sovo News, 2023.

<https://sova.news/2023/10/22/bzhaniya-suhumi-gotov-vozobnovit-zheleznodorozhnoe-soobshhenie-esli-tbilisi-soglasitsya/>. Мария Захарова: мы прилагаем все усилия для открытия железной дороги из РФ в Армению через Абхазию, Sovo News, 2023., <https://sova.news/2023/06/28/mariya-zaharova-my-prilagaem-vse-usiliya-dlya-otkrytiya-zheleznoj-dorogi-iz-rf-v-armeniyu-cherez-abhaziyu/>

- ▶ The unfavorable social and political situation in the country, as well as the inadequate level of integration of individual ethnic and religious minorities into the Georgian society increase the risk of confrontation between different groups.<sup>5</sup> For escalation may be used Russian citizens present in Georgia, as well as radical groups whose influence has recently substantially increased.
- ▶ Since the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine, has significantly increased the number of people entering Georgia from Russia who have either already established themselves or are trying to establish themselves in Georgia. This may be a prerequisite for their use by the Russian special services against the country's critical infrastructure (sabotage).<sup>6</sup>

## GLOBAL TRENDS AND PROCESSES

This subsection describes the threats that, although independent of Georgia, arise in the light of trends in global politics and directly affect or may affect Georgia's security, which makes it necessary to take them into account in the policy planning process.

- ▶ The formation of Russia as a totalitarian state and China's growing confrontation with the West, as well as radical groups and the strengthening of authoritarian tendencies in some Western countries are conducive to the weakening of the positions of Western democracies and their primary institutions, NATO, and EU, which in turn has a negative impact on Georgia's security.<sup>7</sup>
- ▶ The possibility of the so-called secondary sanctions by the West may increase the likelihood of imposition of international sanctions against Georgia, especially in the context of intensified political and economic relations between Russia and Georgia.
- ▶ The Western countries demonstrate a high degree of distrust in Chinese technologies, and this has been reflected in relevant political decisions. In this context, Georgia's growing reliance on Chinese technologies is an additional negative factor in the process of complicated relations between Georgia and Western countries;<sup>8</sup>
- ▶ The acceleration of the development of new technologies puts on the agenda the necessity of their rapid
  - ▶ introduction and mastering, or in the opposite scenario, establishment of friendly relations of an appropriate format with powerful states possessing these technologies.
- ▶ One of the growing and unstoppable processes on a global scale is intensified fight for access to natural resources. Access to sufficient water resources belongs to this category and is therefore very important for Georgia as the country possesses a large part of the water resources in the South Caucasus.

<sup>5</sup> Emirejibi and Gabunia, Georgian Minorities: Breaking the Barriers on the Way to Integration, Carnegie Europe, 2021. [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Amirejibi\\_Gabunia\\_Georgia\\_Minorities\\_Georgian\\_Translation.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Amirejibi_Gabunia_Georgia_Minorities_Georgian_Translation.pdf)

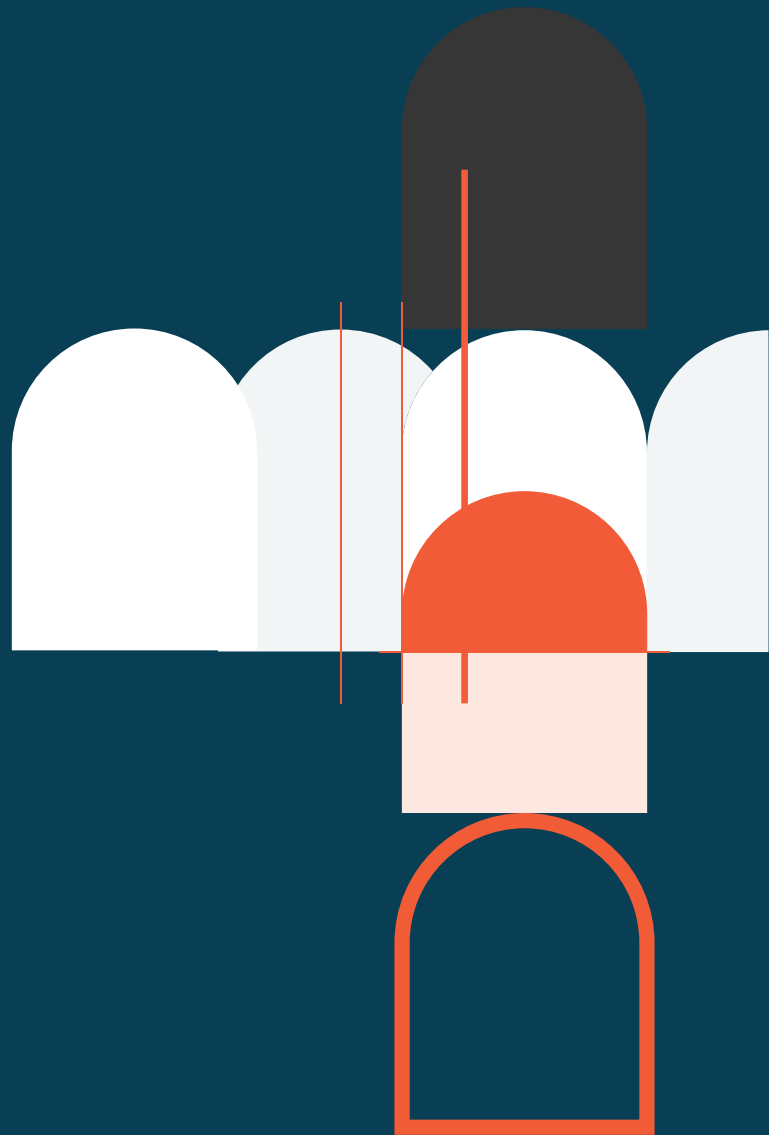
<sup>6</sup> 1,459,546 citizens of Russia crossed Georgian border in 2022 - MIA statistics, Tabula, 2023. <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/696241-2022-cels-sakartvelos-sazghvari-rusetis-1-459-546>

<sup>7</sup> Andrei Kolesnikov, Putin's War Has Moved Russia From Authoritarianism to Hybrid Totalitarianism, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2022. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/04/19/putin-s-war-has-moved-russia-from-authoritarianism-to-hybrid-totalitarianism-pub-86921> Democracy REPORT 2022, Autocratization Changing Nature?, The V-Dem Institute, 2023, [https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr\\_2022.pdf](https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Nakashima and Linch, Biden order proposes new restrictions on China tech investment, The Washington Post, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/08/09/china-ban-technology-biden-military/'Untrustworthy': US bans Chinese technology from Huawei, others, The Sydney Morning Herald, 2022. https://www.smh.com.au/world/north-america/untrustworthy-us-bans-chinese-technology-from-huawei-others - 20221126-p5c1gq.htm>

*SECTION II*

**SIGNIFICANT TRENDS IN MODERN  
WARFARE**



# SIGNIFICANT TRENDS IN MODERN WARFARE

This chapter reviews the specifics of recent and ongoing military hostilities. Based on the observation, the major tendencies (operational and tactical, as well as technological and resource-related) are defined as critical and most likely will not subside in the medium term. Based on the summary of these trends, the conclusions relevant to Georgia are summarized at the end of the chapter.

## “44 DAYS WAR” IN KARABAKH (2020 YEAR)

- ▶ The role of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), loitering munition and autonomous weapons systems has incredibly increased for gathering intelligence on the battlefield and improving situational awareness at all levels (tactical, operational), as well as for accurate and timely strikes. Consequently, the integration of UAVs into information gathering-processing-decision-making (C2-Command and Control) turned into a tangible “force multiplier.”
- ▶ The appropriate staffing of combat units, on the one hand, and high level of their combat training and equipment, on the other hand, turned crucial against the collapsed command of the Armenians who had neither military unit to fully cover a several directions, nor to fix the situation by deployment of the large number of reservists.
- ▶ The geography and terrain of the theater of combat operations remain important for determining the type and complexity of combat operations (e.g. on the northern front line of Karabakh, i.e. in the most mountainous section, the Azerbaijanis failed to have a breakthrough). Also, infrastructure and fortifications of defensive positions that are thoroughly prepared (from an engineering and technical standpoint) remain important.
- ▶ The significance of armored vehicles and tanks has not faded; however, the significance of combined action with artillery and accurate (timely)

artillery support has substantially increased. Also, the modern combat picture has put on the agenda the necessity of 360-degree reliable protection of armored vehicles and tanks with significant enhancement of crew’s situational awareness (including UAV support). Accordingly, the best suited role of tank and mechanized units in the context of defensive operations for a country with small resources seems to be an operational reserve to prevent adversary breakthroughs at critical sections.

- ▶ The importance of modern and precision missile, rocket and gun artillery fire has increased radically, which makes it absolutely possible to carry out precision strikes in the operational depth, especially in the absence or weakness of the air component. This once again underlines the importance of accurate and timely (real-time) operational intelligence.

## RUSSIAN AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE

- ▶ The large size of the country and operational depth is important; similarly important is a well-developed military industry. Continuous external military assistance has turned out to be crucial for conducting combat operations over a long period of time. War, among other things, also includes a battle of resources, and, therefore, a guaranteed supply of resources plays a crucial role in the war effort.
- ▶ Massive use and increased accuracy of artillery and missile systems in a short period of time coupled with the use of modern information technologies for command and fire support have a great effect on the battlefield. The advantage achieved in the combat situation awareness through the use of UAVs makes it possible to carry out fewer but more accurate and effective strikes, thus compensating for the scarcity of artillery ammunition.

- ▶ The dispersion and decentralization of military infrastructure and logistics (supply lines, stocks and warehouses) has become a necessary factor for the long-term combat operations.
- ▶ Once again has been observed the critical nature of uninterrupted connectivity and communication systems (e.g. Starlink) in the context of the adversary's strong Radio Electronic Combat (REC) systems operations, which have managed to partially suppress the GPS signal (neutralizing guided artillery and missile strikes).
- ▶ Geography and terrain still play a major role in carrying out appropriate type military activities and urban areas remain major resistance centers for conducting a wide range of combat operations (urban, air defense, artillery, special operations, etc.).
- ▶ Well-developed air defense systems drastically reduce the use of adversary aircraft; however, adequate supplies are crucial to maintain this advantage.
- ▶ Russia has a difficulty to carry out combined and joint operations, and due to the Russian and Soviet military command culture and other factors, it is not able to make effective use of the task-tailored battalion tactical groups. As a result, the Russian units experience heavy losses, but Russia is prepared to compensate for these losses with masses of soldiers and keep acting with the same approach.
- ▶ If the coast guard is active, Russia is unable to conduct naval landing operations, but is capable to carry out a naval blockade and bar entry to the friendly navy forces. At the same time, a high-level port infrastructure security is needed observed to prevent subversive groups landing from the sea.
- ▶ The moral-psychological state of fighters and the public (patriotic, fighting spirit) is critically important for a long-term warfare with the adversary having an advantage and ready to bear great losses.

## SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

- ▶ It is important for the army to have modern technical (especially individual) equipment, training and appropriate (professional) format, as well as the sufficient number of military personnel required for the accomplishment of combat objectives.
- ▶ It is necessary to introduce autonomous (unmanned) systems extensively and quickly at all levels of the defense forces (operational and tactical) and in the field (intelligence, communications, targeting, etc.), as well as the development of skills and technology to combat unmanned systems.
- ▶ It is important to decentralize fire support systems, as well as military logistics and supplies.
- ▶ For effective defensive operations, well planned and arranged fortifications defined in the general plan, adequately and well arranged for the situation, still play a major role.
- ▶ Urban centers, i.e. populated (city type) areas, represent a kind of natural fortification and remain the most effective space for resistance.
- ▶ The role of (precision) missile and artillery systems has increased even more in the absence of or inability to use aviation.
- ▶ The role of camouflage as well as night vision devices for effective conduct of combat in the appropriate environment has substantially increased.
- ▶ Investing appropriate financial resources in modernization and extensive implementation of technical innovations in the fields of fire support, command, control, communication, and intelligence (C3I) is particularly crucial for combat success.



*SECTION III*

**OPERATIONAL VISION AND REQUIRED  
COMBAT CAPABILITIES**



# OPERATIONAL VISION AND REQUIRED COMBAT CAPABILITIES

In this section of the document, the focus is made on understanding the main military threat, the ways of possible Russian large-scale military aggression, the main operational objectives of the adversary's military Task Force, and the units and weapons deployed. Detailed understanding of the operational picture and its specifics is extremely important for determining the response tasks of the Georgian Armed Forces and accordingly for identifying existing or necessary (to be acquired) combat capabilities, this ultimately the Armed Forces personnel number, structure and material-financial resources needed for transformation. Naturally, this chapter will present only a summary version of detailed review in the form of key conclusions.

## OPERATIONAL VISION

- ▶ Large-scale military aggression by its essence will be aimed at changing in Georgia's political course, regime (leadership and structure) and the entire political system for the purpose of restoring the Russian imperial space and ultimately suppression of the Western influence in the region.
- ▶ To achieve this goal, considering the specifics of the Georgian geography, a group of 100,000+ troops will be deployed, which will include the first echelon combat units, as well as support and other types of units, including supply and technical provision units.
- ▶ Combat will take place on land, on the coastline and in airspace. The main operational objectives of the Russian military group will include rapid isolation/blockade of the capital Tbilisi, rapid capture of the coastline and port cities, blockade of maritime traffic and space, rapid control of the border sections with Turkey and Azerbaijan, cutting of the transport corridor to Armenia and control of key transport and communication hubs, as well as critical infrastructure.
- ▶ While Russia will try to end its military operation (aggression) as quickly as possible, the very political decision to launch the aggression means that the Kremlin will be willing to allocate sufficient time up to 6 + months for the operation completion and its active phase (high-intensity hostilities).
- ▶ The Russian Task Force will actively use naval landing troops (up to 2,000 men) to seize the port infrastructure, as well as multiple airmobile tactical groups (by helicopters) to sow chaos in public and block entry to important facilities and transport hubs throughout the country (airports, border points, traffic sections, municipality centers, energy facilities, etc.).
- ▶ In contrast to the hostilities in Ukraine, the Russian aviation will be used incomparably intensively and massively due to the small size of the Georgian territory and the fragility of air defense (AD). Therefore, it is expected that despite significant initial losses, the Russian aviation will operate until the complete destruction of the Georgian AD and then proceed with the destruction of the military targets and civilian facilities throughout the country.
- ▶ The main military strike force of Russian ground units will traditionally be represented by the concentrated use of armored vehicles and tanks (up to 500 tanks and 2,500+ armored vehicles) and large amounts of artillery against Georgian units, as well as massive use of cruise and operational-tactical missiles to destroy military, governmental and critical infrastructure. The Russian mountain combat brigades will be used to capture mountainous terrain areas in Western and Eastern Georgia.

## **DEFENSE FORCES COMBAT CAPABILITIES AND TECHNOLOGICAL ASPECTS**

For accomplishment of military objectives, the aspect of quality is of special significance for the Defense Forces of Georgia, in which a crucial factor is a high quality of modern/innovative military technologies and their use. A high number of manpower, even if it is equipped with an adequate number of military weapons and equipment, will not convert into combat quality without the integration of modern high technology standards. And as modern reality has repeatedly demonstrated, the outcome may be fatal. Since the potential adversaries are not treading water and are continuously attempting to introduce new technologies, Georgia's task will similarly be not to lag behind in this technological competition and by blending cost and effectiveness factors technologically develop military capabilities and multiply lethality. This chapter presents a general assessment of innovative military technologies and focuses on the need to intensively introduce/use modern technologies in specific fields, considering the characteristics of the military-operational environment of Georgia.

### **COMMAND AND CONTROL (C2)**

The digitalization of the battlefield significantly reduces the time for intelligence obtaining, processing, analyzing, making an appropriate decision, and executing that decision. If earlier it would take months, days, or hours in the best case, currently it takes minutes and seconds. The response to a maneuver, fire, new positions arrangement, or supplies is instantaneous. Consequently, the arrangement of a single secure network of command-and-control system, which is continuously updated with the necessary information, and which is accessed by relevant level units, ensures the advantage of possessing a comprehensive battlefield picture. This advantage gives the opportunity to successfully conduct combined and joint operations at the desired time and sections. Ideally, in the unified network all levels starting from the squad-platoon-company level and up to the battalion-brigade-corps level should be integrated. Obviously, one of the main foundations of this network will be an uninterrupted and secure communication system for unit interaction. At the same time, intensive use of modern technologies should be the focus guaranteeing full protection of this network and successful REC operations.

## **INTELLIGENCE TECHNOLOGIES**

The development of technical capabilities for operational intelligence has been on the rise in recent decades, and if compared to space/satellite technologies, UAVs have become an inexpensive and affordable alternative. By many parameters (flexibility in use, less dependency on weather, operability, variety, inexpensiveness, and affordability) their capabilities surpass those of the space satellites. Full integration of reconnaissance drones into the intelligence system substantially enhances the command-and-control system, i.e. an improved and advantageous battlefield image. Their role in spotting targets for rocket and artillery fire or aviation strikes is also very significant. And if we consider Georgia's geographical terrain and the need for the Georgian army to have an advantage in possession of the battlefield picture, equipping the units at all levels with UAVs vehicles to obtain comprehensive and continuous intelligence is one of the top priorities.

### **FIRE SUPPORT (GUN AND ROCKET ARTILLERY SYSTEMS)**

It is extremely important to use the latest technological advances in appropriate ammunition and targeting for precision and rapid strikes in operational depth. In addition, in order to neutralize the main sources of adversary fire support, the Georgian units must have radars and stationery and mobile surveillance points (equipped with optical and radar systems), including remotely controlled points, for counter-battery fire. It is critically important for the Georgian Defense Forces to intensively use striking drones, especially on tactical and operational levels. Due to the high cost of missile systems, their vulnerability and complexity of replenishment, the UAVs in Georgia's case, may perform their function, and especially at the tactical level (and then in operational depth) this gives an opportunity to gain a fire superiority over the adversary on the battlefield, which must be used unconditionally.

### **TECHNOLOGICAL FACTORS OF AIR DEFENSE**

Due to geographical limitations and characteristics of the Georgian theater of combat operations, it is possible to arrange a much more effective air defense system (per areas or zones) especially against piloted and unmanned aerial vehicles by using comparatively inexpensive technologies (e.g. guided modules). State-of-the-

art technological advances should also be used in the enhancement of the air defense for the strategic centers of gravitation, command points, maneuver units and critical infrastructure. This does not exclude the use of or technological upgrade to existing and obsolete systems.

#### **TANKS AND ARMORED VEHICLES, DIRECT FIRE AND MOBILITY**

The role of tank units at the battlefield in Georgia will be represented as an operational reserve of mechanized forces to enhance the direct fire during counterattacks. Accordingly, the qualitative aspect of the tank fleet shall be significantly increased. First of all, this implies its Western origin, as well as a significant improvement of its protection against strikes by anti-tank ammunition and unmanned aerial vehicles (i.e. from above). The full integration of both the tank and other types of armored vehicles into the joint combat network greatly increases the degree of coordination, use and lethality.

It should be noted that Georgia's geographical terrain in some places allows the use of remote-control technology (modules) for direct fire in specific sectors (fortified points or areas), which, on the one hand, puts the adversary under continuous fire, and on the other hand, significantly saves human resources. Especially at the tactical level, every unit, including reconnaissance units, should have effective means of operating and fighting (engaging) at night. Equipping the Georgian units with thermal visors and other necessary technical capabilities is one of the crucial factors for gaining superiority in combat.

Equally important is to ensure secure mobility of units using minimal technological resources, which, on the one hand, reduces the vulnerability of units under artillery fire and, on the other hand, increases the chances of successful maneuvering.

#### **PASSIVE CONCEALMENT AND ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGIES**

Modern technologies and especially the massive use of UAVs or spectrum radars heighten the requirements for concealment tasks (including in the thermal spectrum). Accordingly, any combat position, bunker or larger

scale fortified system should meet the increased requirements for modern concealment and engineering technologies. At the same time, the correct and thoughtful engineering arrangement of defensive positions doubles the ability of the unit to fight and resist a force superior in personnel, weapons, or precision munition.

#### **TECHNOLOGIES, SUPPLY AND MEDICAL SUPPORT**

The life and health of each soldier is a priority and therefore everything possible should be done to save a soldier's life on the battlefield. Putting aside moral and ethical considerations, this is very important from a pragmatic point of view as this approach bolsters morale. Introduction of the latest field (e.g. nano) technologies at both individual and unit levels are essential. In addition, rapid evacuation of the wounded remains relevant, for which are needed appropriate land (Armored Medical Evacuation Vehicle) and aerial (Medevac Helicopters) vehicles, autonomous UGV (Unmanned Ground Vehicles) systems, as well as special UAVs, which may ensure rapid supply of the wounded fighters with first medical kits and even evacuation of the severely wounded. Naturally, it is necessary to deploy in-patient medical facilities near fortified areas and points (defense centers) and equip these in-patient medical facilities with modern equipment. It is extremely important to integrate UAVs into military logistics and supply systems.

#### **INDIVIDUAL EQUIPMENT**

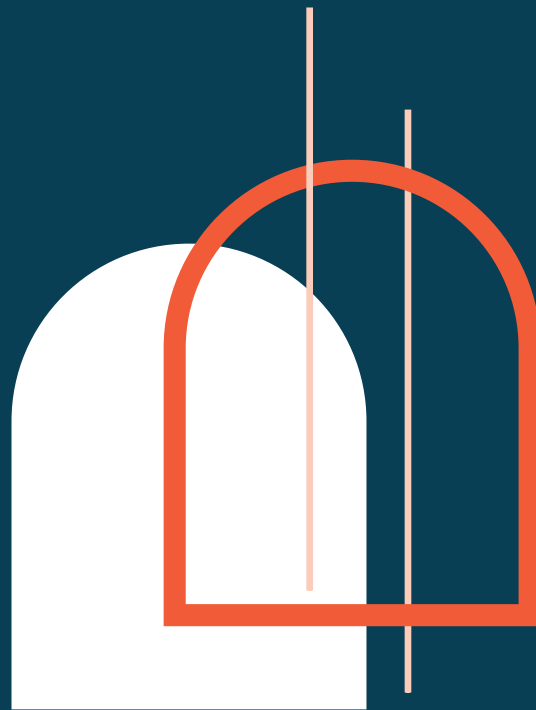
Considering the quantitative factors of the adversary, the individual equipment of any member of the Defense Forces should be substantially superior and significantly exceed individual equipment of a potential adversary in all components.

#### **NATIONAL MILITARY INDUSTRY FACTOR**

Due to a high probability of inevitable destruction of large industrial centers, it is rational to consider the decentralized placement of production facilities, which will repair military equipment based on existing stocks and, in limited manner, using simple technologies, produce basic ammunitions and other materiel.

*SECTION IV*

**FORCE STRUCTURE, COMMAND AND  
DEFENSE CAPABILITIES**



# FORCE STRUCTURE, COMMAND AND DEFENSE CAPABILITIES

Defining clearly and understanding fully operational objectives of the Defense Forces is a basic and necessary prerequisite for determining combat capabilities of the Defense Forces units and, consequently, the structure of the forces, the types and number of units, and command system broadly. This section of the document reviews two models of the structure of forces (capabilities) - maximalist and realistic; their variation reflects the difference in quality of country's defense capabilities that allows to make relevant (primarily political) conclusions.

## MAXIMALIST APPROACH: FORCE STRUCTURE AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

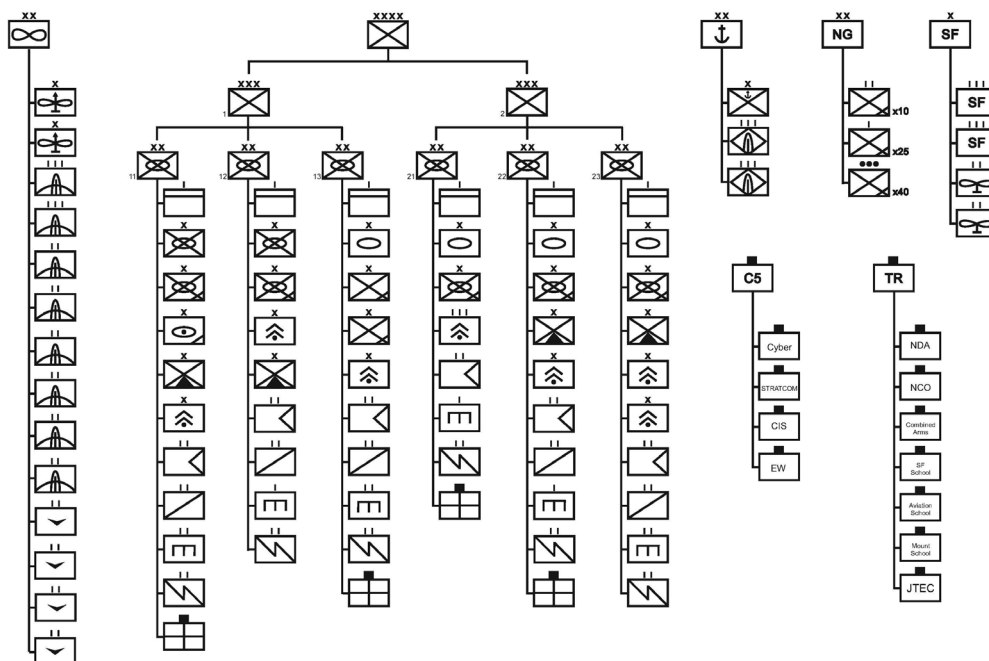
A maximalist/optimistic approach, which, regardless of country's current resources and financial constraints, presents the most optimistic picture of combat capabilities, structure, and command of forces. This structure reflects the best composition of the Defense Forces

of Georgia, relevant combat capabilities, command system and geographical distribution (see figure below) for the full neutralization of currently existing military threats and full and unconditional fulfillment of strategic-operational objectives (in the period from at least 6 months to one year).

It should be noted once again that evaluation and detailed understanding of the maximalist approach will allow us to see what financial resources are required for this model of forces, a huge difference with today's reality (i.e. insecurity) and potential optimal (compromise or realistic) ways for the rapid development of the

Defense Forces in a certain period (5 to 10 years) and alignment with the optimistic mode. In addition, there is a difference of views about the role, structure, and capability of the Navy. However, it is also clear that the Georgian Navy will never fulfill the same tasks as the fleets of the large Black Sea states. Thus, in

Maximalist/Optimistic Structure of the Georgian Defense Forces 2034



the presented structure, we have focused only on the objectives of the Coast Guard, which naturally does not exclude the possibility of having the Navy in the future.

The total number of the Defense Forces in the maximalist/optimistic structure is about 104,000 and their majority are professional military personnel due to the high-tech trends of modern warfare (see table below).

The structure also includes cadre units (mainly infantry and mechanized units), and in general the operational command structure relies on the formation of groups of army corps size in the West and East (including the South) of the country and subordinate division-like units (brigade, battalion, company) in the East (Vaziani, Gori, Tsalka) and West (Kutasi, Senaki, Batumi). All units represented in the structure (including the National Guard) are subordinated to the Operational

Commands of the Defense Forces, while in all brigades their own fire support, UAV and medical elements are integrated.

The financial side of the transition to an optimistic model, i.e. the budget allocations, are calculated for the 10-year period of transition, based on the baseline scenario of economic development, and the distribution of expenses is given according to relevant categories.<sup>1</sup>

The illustrations below also clearly show that under these conditions it is possible to develop a maximalist model if from 2025 the financial allocations (budgets) for defense purposes are on average from 12% to 13% of GDP, starting from GEL 12.5 billion in 2025 and reaching a GEL 18.6 billion mark in 2034. At a glance, these figures are incredibly high, but we should not forget that Georgia is in the conditions of

Maximalist Force Structure (Personnel)			
#	Unit	Location	Personnel
	Ministry of Defense	Tbilisi	300
	General Staff	Tbilisi	500
XXXX	Land Forces	Tbilisi	80,494
XXX	Army Corps	Vaziani	42,864
XX	Mechanized Division	Vaziani	14,910
XX	Mechanized Division	Tsalka	12,790
XX	Mechanized Division	Gori	15,044
XXX	Army Corps	Kutaisi	37,630
XX	Mechanized Division	Batumi	8,880
XX	Mechanized Division	Kutaisi	13,419
XX	Mechanized Division	Senaki	15,211
XX	Air Force	Tbilisi	6,282
XX	Navy	Poti	2,913
XX	National Guard	Tbilisi	9,050
X	Special Operations Command	Tbilisi	1,872
X	Training and Doctrine Command	Tbilisi	2,867
X	Cyber Command	Tbilisi	1,020
Total			105,404

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Finance of Georgia, "Chapter 6: the Georgian state budget assignments", in the Law of Georgia on State Budget, 2022, <https://mof.ge/5603>.

occupation and high chance of the renewed aggression. This puts the country in a factual state of war and forces it to achieve adequate defense capability and dramatically increase defense expenditure. After all, allocating for defense purposes 5 % to 7 % of GDP annually is a rather normal practice and, in our case, will be used in the next chapter to calculate the costs of a future realistic model of the Defense force.<sup>2</sup>

## REALISTIC APPROACH: FORCE STRUCTURE AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The structure of forces presented in this chapter represents a reasonable compromise between financial capabilities and minimum necessary defense/combat potential, which must first enable deterrence of aggression and in case of failure of deterrence, ensure effective defense and retention of country's sovereignty in the currently controlled territories. This potential is

not intended for liberation of the de-facto occupied territories, but is fully inclusive of expansion of combat operations in the occupied territories if necessary. The proposed force structure does not imply a dramatic increase in the number of regular troops (high readiness component). The focus is on its structural enhancement, optimization, and provision with modern high-efficiency military equipment. At the same time, the number of highly trained, organized, and well-equipped reserve is dramatically increased.

Considering the operational objectives, the number of regular troops remains at a minimum level in view of financial limitations, but it is designed for rapid response (including the cadre units). Its potential is designed to hold the adversary back for as long as it is needed for the mobilization of an organized reserve (National Guard and Territorial Defense units) and for securing delivery of the foreign aid (see below).

Macroeconomic Data (Billion GEL)												
			Year	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year
	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034
Defense budget (maximalist model)	1,1	1,4	11,7	12,3	12,9	13,5	14,1	14,7	15,3	16,0	16,6	17,6
GDP (Base-line scenario)	78,1	84,7	91,6	99,0	107,1	113,8	121,0	128,2	135,5	142,7	149,9	157,1
Defense budget (% of GDP)	1,4%	1,6%	12,8%	12,5%	12,1%	11,9%	11,6%	11,4%	11,3%	11,2%	11,1%	11,2%

Maximalist Forces Structure Budget (Billion GEL)											
Personnel expenditure	0,79	0,97	1,15	1,34	1,52	1,70	1,89	2,23	2,44	2,62	
Operation and support	3,59	3,94	4,30	4,66	5,02	5,38	5,74	6,10	6,45	7,17	
Weapons procurement	6,49	6,49	6,49	6,49	6,49	6,49	6,49	6,49	6,49	6,49	
Construction	0,43	0,47	0,52	0,56	0,60	0,65	0,69	0,73	0,77	0,86	
R&D	0,45	0,45	0,45	0,45	0,45	0,45	0,45	0,45	0,45	0,45	
	11,74	12,33	12,91	13,5	14,08	14,67	15,25	16,0	16,61	17,59	
Total expenditure for weapons procurement: <b>GEL 64,9 billion</b>											
<b>10-year defense expenditure: GEL 144,7 billion</b>											

<sup>2</sup> James E. Payne and Anandi Prasad Sahu, eds., Defense Spending and Economic Growth (Boulder: Westview, 1993)

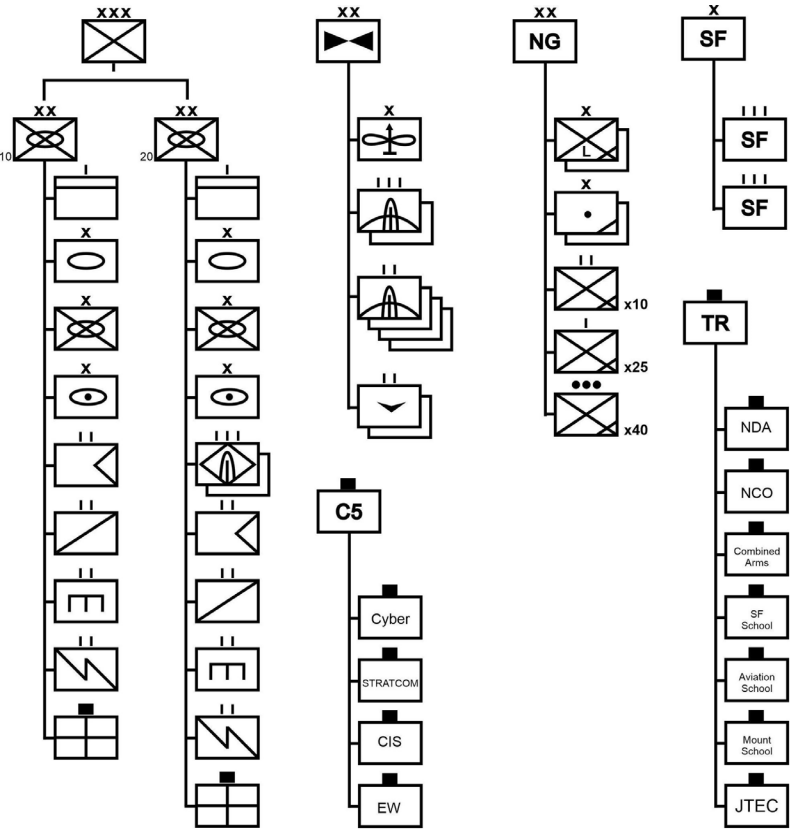


The operational command structure of the Defense Forces is based on the Division Command model in the West and East of the country. These are autonomous units with maximum level of self-sufficiency and have all the resources and means needed to fulfill operational objectives during war for at least 6 months. This model is characterized by a strong (division-size) reserve component, optimum size aviation element, strong air defense, and highly effective artillery and missile capabilities, as well as reinforced special operations force, which is essential not only during the full-scale hostilities, but also in the initial, the so-called hybrid phase, when it is possible to thwart adversary's aggressive plans before open and large-scale military actions take place. Accordingly, the number of personnel of this type of force is increased to 54,700. This figure is objectively lower than the figure in the maximalist model (see below). It should be noted that in this project the importance and role of the reserve forces in the country's defense has significantly increased. They are directly subordinated to the operational commands, and their personnel structure, training and equipment are fully tailored to specific operational objectives

based on the territorial principle. The realistic model retains maritime and air components only in a limited form due to financial constraints. And in terms of meeting the needs (especially for weapons modernization) envisaged by this model in a period of 10 years and with growing financial resources, it will be necessary to start gradual restoration of comprehensive air and maritime components.

The analysis of defense expenditure has clearly demonstrated that in the conditions of country's occupation and potential for resumption of hostilities at any time, annual expenditure for defense purposes should be no less than 5% to 7% of GDP, which corresponds to a normal international practice. Thus, the assignments for realistic model of the Defense Forces will start at GEL 5,6 billion (GEL 2.5 = USD 1) in 2025 and reach the GEL 8,3 billion mark in 2034 (see below). The largest share falls on the procurement of military equipment and weapons and their service and maintenance.

It is worth noting that the quantities and characteristics of the weapon systems to be procured are determined



Realistic Force Structure (Personnel)			
#	Unit	Location	Personnel
	Ministry of Defense	Tbilisi	300
	General Staff	Tbilisi	500
XXX	Land Forces	Tbilisi	24,670
XX	Mechanized Division	Vaziani	11,640
XX	Mechanized Division	Kutaisi	13,030
XX	Land Forces Aviation and Air Defense Command	Tbilisi	3,603
XX	National Guard	Tbilisi	19,964
X	Special Operations Command	Tbilisi	1,728
X	Training and Doctrine Command	Tbilisi	2,867
X	Cyber Command	Tbilisi	962
Total			54,700

Macroeconomic Data (Billion GEL)												
			Year	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year
	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034
Defense budget (realistic model)	1,1	1,4	5,6	5,9	6,1	6,4	6,7	6,9	7,2	7,5	7,8	8,3
GDP (Baseline scenario)	78,1	84,7	91,6	99,0	107,1	113,8	121,0	128,2	135,5	142,7	149,9	157,1
Defense budget (% or GDP)	1,4%	1,6%	6,1%	5,9%	5,7%	5,6%	5,5%	5,4%	5,3%	5,3%	5,2%	5,3%

Realistic Force Structure Budget (Billion GEL)												
Personnel expenditure	0,36	0,44	0,53	0,61	0,7	0,78	0,86	1,02	1,11	1,2		
Operation and support	1,62	1,78	1,95	2,11	2,27	2,43	2,60	2,76	2,92	3,25		
Weapons procurement	3,21	3,21	3,21	3,21	3,21	3,21	3,21	3,21	3,21	3,21	3,21	3,21
Construction	0,19	0,21	0,23	0,25	0,27	0,29	0,31	0,33	0,35	0,39		
R&D	0,22	0,22	0,22	0,22	0,22	0,22	0,22	0,22	0,22	0,22	0,22	0,22
	5,61	5,88	6,14	6,41	6,67	6,94	7,20	7,54	7,82	8,27		
Total expenditure for weapons procurement: GEL 32,1 billion												
10-year defense expenditure: GEL 68,5 billion												

based on the operational and combat needs and are distributed as follows (see the table below for specific details):

▶ Air Defense

6 NASAMS battalions and 2 mixed NASAMS + Patriot Pac-3 reinforced battalions to protect the army group deployment areas, administrative centers, strategic communication networks and hubs in an adequately reliable way. Obviously, it will be impossible to ensure full coverage of the entire country. Reserve units (the so-called universal battalions) will also be equipped with anti-aircraft guns and machine guns. Similarly to the regular units, they will be equipped with the Stinger type man-portable air-defense systems (MANPAD).

▶ Rocket and Gun Artillery

The HIMARS type universal MLRS allows the precision strikes at operational and operational-tactical depth. This type of weapon system acquires special significance in the absence or weakness of the aviation component and together with reliable air defense systems constitutes an indispensable expenditure item. For gun artillery (self-propelled and towable), range and accuracy of fire has become even more important. This is required for efficient counter-battery fire and leveling of quantitative superiority of the adversary's artillery. Consequently, the mobile FH77BW L5 Archer for regular troops and towable M777 for cadre brigade of the National Guard would be the optimal choice.

▶ Tanks and Armored Vehicles

All army maneuver units will be transformed into mechanized units and due to the small number of their personnel they should at least be on par (and preferably be superior) to the analogous adversary units by their fire capability and maneuverability. Accordingly, obsolete Soviet armored personnel vehicles should be replaced by transitioning to locally produced Didgori, but as the centerpiece of the mechanized unit on the battlefield the American infantry fighting vehicle Bradley is defined. The tank units, due to their operational reserve role, which implies containment of the adversary breakthrough at the critical sections and direct fire support for mechanized units during the counteroffensive operations, requires substantial

qualitative enhancement and transitioning to the best Western models (e.g. Abrams).

▶ Coast Guard

Procurement of two batteries of anti-ship missiles intended in the realistic model will minimize the risk of a large naval landing. However, the acquisition of such systems cannot guarantee a breakthrough of the maritime blockade by Russia.

▶ Individual Equipment

In this component the focus is on the provision of the troops to a maximum level with modern medical items, night vision tools, micro-reconnaissance and FPV drones, special and innovative tools for combat in the mountainous and urban settings. It is extremely important to continue equipping the Defense Forces with anti-tank systems. Along with the Javelin type system, focus is also made on procurement of more short- and long-range anti-tank systems.

▶ Command and Control, Battlefield Awareness

Introduction to a maximum possible extent of modern command-and-control systems, battlefield software, reliable communication, electronic warfare (EW) systems at tactical and operational levels is a must.

▶ Unmanned Aerial Vehicles

Due to general weakness of the aviation component and UAVs incredibly increased importance at all phases of modern combat, a special focus is on provision of the units to a maximum level with reconnaissance and strike unmanned systems, including both the Bayraktar type and loitering munition, as well as securing their sufficient stocks.

▶ Army Aviation

Based on financial constraints and operational objectives, a realistic model does not foresee the development of manned aviation. At the same time, considering the specifics of the battlefield and objectives, military transport aviation cannot be neglected. That is why the focus is on the minimum necessary number of suitable models. In peacetime, helicopters may also be used for search and rescue operations.

Thus, their acquisition is a necessary and justified expenditure not only in the interests of the defense. According to this project, a minimum number of attack helicopters required for close fire support will also be procured, especially those that are fit for our terrain and can ensure helicopters' synchronized action in combination with artillery and UAVs.

Overall, a realistic model of the Defense Forces and the allocated financial resources represent the neces-

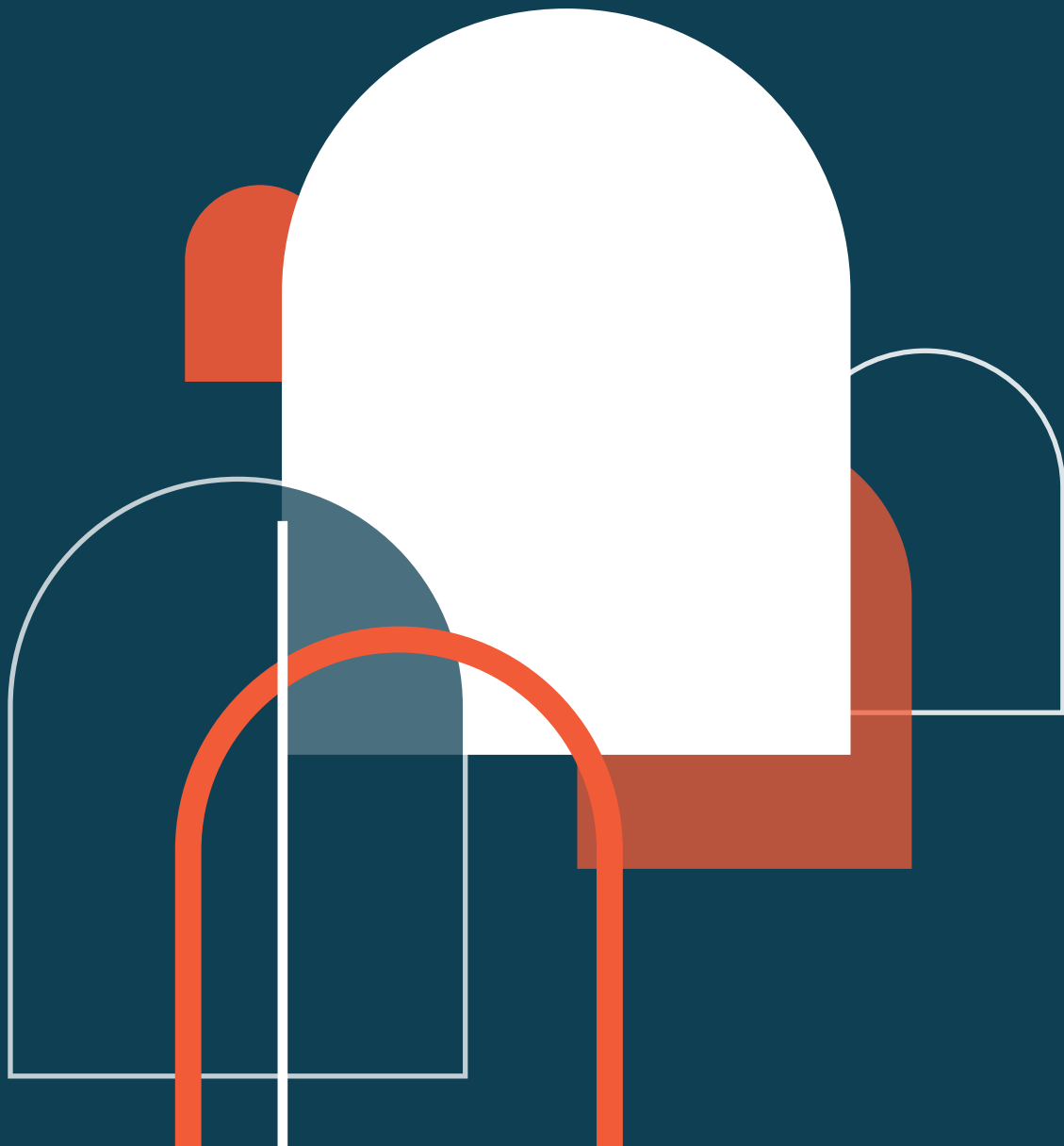
sary minimum, which, if rejected, will result in Georgia's loss of its defense capability and inability to deter and effectively resist the potential adversary's military aggression. Naturally, there is a huge variation between the maximalist (optimistic) and realistic models, which is intentionally shown in this document partly due to great political responsibility, lack of which may lead to inadequate protection of the country, which in turn poses a threat to the nation and state as a political entity, as well as its physical survival.

### Cost of procurement of major weapon systems (realistic model)

	Main weapon systems	Qty	Total cost	
Tanks and armored vehicles	Armored vehicles (all modifications of Didgori)	436	GEL 141,700,000	GEL 5,951,140,000
	IFV (Bradley M2A3)	336	GEL 2,659,440,000	
	Tanks (Abrams M1A2)	140	GEL 3,150,000,000	
Artillery	MLRS (HIMARS)	48	GEL 456,000,000	GEL 2,007,420,000
	Self-propelled howitzer system (Archer)	108	GEL 1,215,000,000	
	Towed howitzer (M777)	36	GEL 336,420,000	
Air defense	Radar system (AN/MPQ-64 Sentinel)	6	GEL 1,800,000	GEL 9,838,800,000
	Anti-missile defense system (Patriot)	2	GEL 2,000,000,000	
	Anti-missile defense system missiles (Patriot)	80	GEL 820,000,000	
	Air defense system (NASAMS)	18	GEL 1,035,000,000	
	Air defense system missiles (AIM-210)	1,800	GEL 5,400,000,000	
	Air defense guns (C-RAM)	12	GEL 300,000,000	
	MANPADS (Stinger)	940	GEL 282,000,000	
Coast Guard	Anti-ship missile launcher system (Harpoon)	18	GEL 63,000,000	GEL 333,000,000
	Anti-ship missiles	48	GEL 270,000,000	
Intelligence/Surveillance	UAV (Shadow)	40	GEL 30,000,000	GEL 271,300,000
	UCAV (Bayraktar TB2)	16	GEL 200,000,000	
	Loitering munition (Harpy)	236	GEL 41,300,000	
Air support	Helicopter (AH-64E)	8	GEL 260,000,000	GEL 2,155,000,000
	Helicopter (UH-60M)	18	GEL 1,125,000,000	
	Helicopter (CH-47)	4	GEL 650,000,000	
	Helicopter (UH-146 Lakota)	6	GEL 120,000,000	
Force protection	Man-portable anti-tank missile (Javelin)	3,700	GEL 2,220,000,000	
			<b>GEL 22,776,660,000</b>	

*SECTION V*

**DEFENSE POLICY AS PART OF THE  
NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY,  
INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT AND  
DEMOCRATIC CONTROL**



# DEFENSE POLICY AS PART OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY, INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT AND DEMOCRATIC CONTROL

## DEFENSE AS PART OF SECURITY (INTERAGENCY) POLICY

This chapter takes a closer look at the shortcomings of and potential improvement measures for existing (state) institutional mechanisms in the context of Georgia's national security. It should be noted that national security policy is broader than defense policy, as it covers a wide range of domestic and foreign policy issues. Accordingly, the number of agencies involved in the planning and implementation process of this policy is increased, thus effective institutional mechanisms and legislative framework for proper coordination and close inter-agency cooperation are required.

There have been significant failures in this regard. Over the years, serious questions have been posed about the functioning of the National Security Council, which should play a leading role in the national security policy planning process. A sign of serious shortcoming is the fact that the role of the Council is downgraded in crisis prevention and management, as well as in the development and monitoring of security and defense policies. The most recent National Security Concept of Georgia is dated by 2011, while the Threat Assessment Document spanning the period of 2015-18 has not been updated since then. This situation is a result of lack of interest on the part of the government in national security policy planning, which naturally leads to the lack of good practice to be introduced in the defense and security area, as well as lack of experience (culture) and legislative initiatives (improvements).

When discussing the shortcomings, one should highlight, for example, the existing model of the National Security Council, according to which the Secretary of the Council is a position held simultaneously by a cabinet member. This model differs from a well-tested

international approach, based on which the Secretary of the Council is a standalone full-time political position and is held by an impartial political figure having an independent and crucial role in the process of security policy planning. This principle is automatically violated when the Secretary of the Council is the head of a governmental agency.

According to the Law of Georgia on National Security Policy Planning and Coordination, a state agency strategy should have a time-defined action plan, which sets time and resources for specific tasks performance and designates structural units responsible for that. Naturally, a similar requirement applies to the plans for the Defense Forces development. Nevertheless, the NSC has been unable to exercise its authority for years and has not been able to monitor the action plans, partly because of lack of a relevant practical mechanism. In addition, the process of planning and implementation of security policy and especially defense policy envisages the activities of inter-agency working groups at various levels, that in a continuous mode analyze and address critical aspects for country's defense by planning, implementing, and monitoring relevant measures (e.g. critical infrastructure, need for joint exercises, standards, etc.).

In terms of distribution of powers and responsibilities, the situation becomes even more intricate and incomprehensible if martial law is declared, during which the authority of the President of Georgia as Supreme Commander-in-Chief is heightened according to the Constitution of Georgia and current legislation. However, it is totally inexplicable how the powers of the President of Georgia and the Prime Minister are separated when martial law is declared. For example, according to the Constitution of Georgia, another consultative body is formed in the period of martial law - the

National Defense Council, which consists of only five members and is chaired by the President of Georgia.

However, according to the Law of Georgia on Martial Law, the President is not authorized to convene meetings of the National Defense Council of Georgia without the consent of the Prime Minister. In addition, it is totally incomprehensible what is the function of the National Security Council in the time of martial law, which, unlike the National Defense Council, is not only an advisory body, but has also full-time staff, members of which are supposed to have relevant expertise and experience accumulated on the issues related to the matters of national security, including country's defense capabilities (see below).

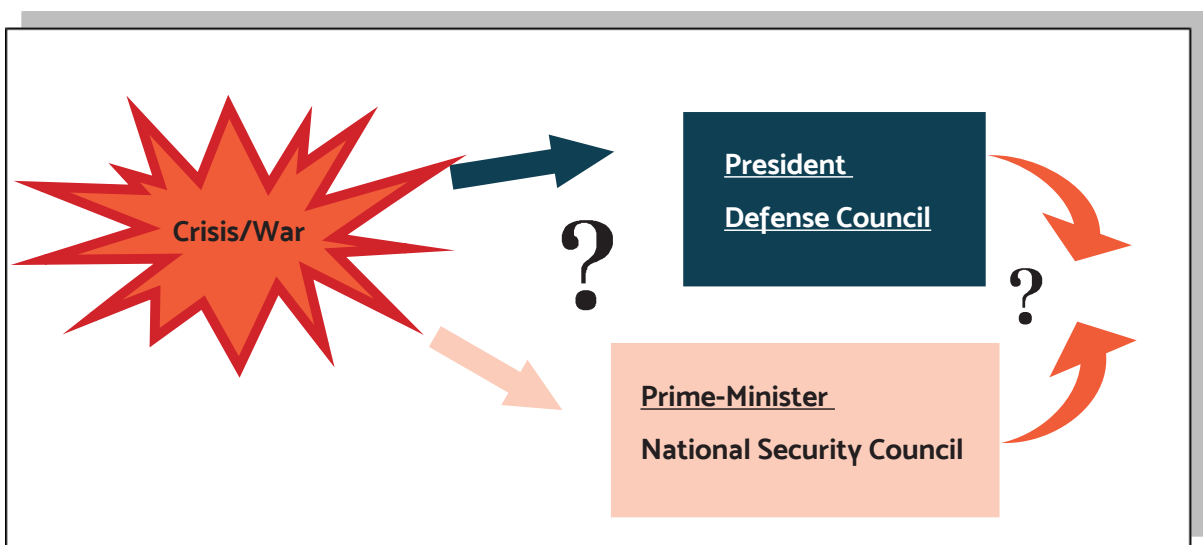
Consequently, one gets a strong impression that increasing the powers of the President in the time of martial law and activating a new advisory body, the National Defense Council, will not facilitate the enhancement of country's defense capability but, as a minimum, will cause additional confusion and further complicate the decision-making process. This is completely unacceptable, and it is necessary to retain only one coordinating, advisory and decision-making body (National Security Council) to ensure consolidated and fully efficient governance during peacetime crises and emergencies and during war. Thus, in the time of war the President of Georgia should also become a member of the National Security Council.

## ROLE OF MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND PARLIAMENTARY CONTROL

This chapter reviews the mechanisms, which should prevent politically motivated decisions within the defense system, enhance democratic control and efficiency of the defense system. Such mechanisms include a well-formulated legislative framework, efficient Parliamentary control, as well as civil society involvement and monitoring.

MoD should become non-political to a maximum possible extent. Therefore, the risk of domination of narrow partisan views of a governing force within the system should be limited in making decisions on the internal personnel and institutional reform issues, as well as in the process of defense policy planning. To achieve this, it is necessary to implement the mechanisms of effective democratic control over the defense and entire security system generally afforded in the Parliamentary republic. It is especially important to refine and enhance the existing mechanisms of Parliamentary control.

The role of the Parliament should not be limited to superficial refinement of draft legislation in the defense and security spheres. It is advisable to introduce the mechanisms that ensure maximum involvement of legislators in the process of formulation of defense and security policy, drafting and execution of the defense budget, ongoing reforms within the system (public





service), development and monitoring of the implementation of specific programs.<sup>1</sup> In this regard,

a harmful practice established for decades, when the Defense and Security Committee, in the background of a party dominance in Parliament, serves the purpose of supporting the executive branch and its positions without necessary criticism and comprehensive deliberations, especially in monitoring policies and plans approved earlier. The involvement of the Defense and Security Committee of the Parliament should increase in the detailed and critical discussion of the vision and plans for long-term defense policy, Defense Forces development and the country's defense capability (defense system), as well as in the development and review of programs and budgetary plans in the defense and security areas. For the adequate functioning of the Committee under the conditions of these significantly increased powers, it is necessary to add sufficiently qualified personnel to the Committee staff.

To ensure a higher level of Parliamentary oversight, the procedure for submitting the report of the Minister of Defense should be improved. With the existing format, the Minister's report is largely a political speech, and that is why its presentation often turns into a non-thematic and less relevant political debate. To have a more thematic discussion in the Parliament, it is important that the Minister's annual report primarily reflects the implementation of the main budgetary programs (also, explains the failed objectives) and focuses on the specific goals of programs planned for the future, which are aimed at pursuing defense and security policy at the strategic level. In addition, at least 14 calendar days before the presentation of the Minister's report to the members of the legislative body, the written version should be delivered to the Parliamentary Committee on Defense and Security enabling the Committee to comprehensively assess and share the report with the members of Parliament before the verbal presentation of the Minister's report.

It is noteworthy that the current system (and legal tradition) somehow grants the Minister of Defense excessive

authority in making decisions on political or bureaucratic issues within the MoD, which often negatively affects development and sustainability of the system (appointments, promotions and incentives, relations with the Defense Forces). One of the optimal solutions for achieving maximum protection of the bureaucratic neutrality of the civil office of the Ministry as a public service and keeping the influence of the Minister's political figure at bay is the introduction of a new high administrative position - Secretary of Defense. The functions of the Secretary will include coordination, management, and monitoring of all civil administration structural units of the MoD. The Secretary shall be selected by the Parliamentary Defense and Security Committee on the basis of Parliamentary consensus and competence and approved by the Parliament of Georgia, thus increasing even more the level of his/her individual and MoD's accountability to the Parliament. To ensure that a non-partisan individual is selected for the position of the Secretary of Defense, it is necessary to limit by law the appointment to this position of a political figure or a member of a political party.

As of today, the Minister of Defense has five deputies who oversee relevant structural units of the Ministry. Such practice of administration does not work well in practice, because due to the partisan nature of the Deputy Ministers, the political influence is exerted in the depth of certain spheres of the defense system also causing vertical division of the system based on the portfolio areas of the DMs, which significantly hinders horizontal cooperation between structural units. By introducing the position of Secretary of Defense, and retaining only one Deputy Minister of Defense, the risk of partisan influence will be substantially reduced, horizontal collaboration between structural units improved and the degree of bottom-up (and not as it is today, top-down) decision-making increased.

To have the best Parliamentary control mechanisms effected and current harmful practices and consequences in the MoD and the Armed Forces prevented, it would be necessary to have Parliamentary Committee hearings, a high level consensus agreement

<sup>1</sup> Bayala, Boulin et al., Parliamentary oversight of the security sector, DCAF, 2023. 11-38 pp. <https://www.dcaf.ch/tool-5-parliamentary-oversight-security-sector>



and approval reached for candidates of the positions of Deputy Commanders of the Defense Forces and individual Command Chiefs, alongside a similar procedure for the Minister of Defense, Deputy Ministers, Commander of the Defense Forces (Chief of General Staff) and Secretary of Defense. This process should be as transparent as possible and based on the principle of a non-partisan agreement. Therefore, the role of the Defense and Security Committee, as a key platform for review and consensual agreement, will be substantially increased in this process. In addition, it is extremely important to have on the one hand, the defense budget and strategic policy approved through a Parliamentary consensual agreement, and, on the other hand, ensure extensive engagement of civil society and expert groups in the process of security and defense policy and planning, which implies institutionalization of their continuous cooperation with both the Parliament and MoD.

Eventually, it is worth noting that an additional mechanism of accountability of the Ministry of Defense, the General Inspection, the functions of which include inquiry into and response to administrative and financial violations, due to its direct subordination to the Minister, has in reality turned into Minister's obedient punishing leverage enabling control over the personnel. Consequently, the General Inspection should be abolished, and its functions reassigned to the Audit Office and the Ministry's Financial and Human Resources Departments.

### **IMPORTANCE OF TOTAL DEFENSE AND INTERAGENCY COOPERATION FOR GEORGIA'S DEFENSE CAPABILITY**

In conclusion of the report, this chapter outlines the main issues that should be paid special attention in peacetime in order to enhance the country's defense capability and have both the state agencies and the civil and private sectors fully prepared for the crisis situation in case of military aggression. It is a reality that Georgia objectively suffers from scarce resources (human, financial, material), which makes the implementation of the total defense model especially important for our country. According to this model, all relevant resources should be optimized and channeled to strengthen the defense capabilities of the country. As a result, mech-

anisms should be created, through which, in case of military aggression, the mobilization will be quickly and efficiently for defense purposes.

To create such mechanisms, all appropriate measures must be taken in peacetime, which will ensure resilience of the country and continuity of the critical functions' fulfillment by the state during the crisis and war. Based on NATO standards, these critical functions include:

- ▶ Assured continuity of government and critical governmental services, which primarily include the ability to make governmental decision and communicate with citizens in a crisis and/or war.
- ▶ Resilient energy supplies, which also include the availability of backup technical facilities and supplies, as well as the availability of plans to eliminate energy supply related problems.
- ▶ Ability to deal with the uncontrolled movement of people and effective management of flows, which includes prior preparation of temporary accommodation sites.
- ▶ Ensuring resilient food and water supply, which includes development of strategic reserves and uninterrupted (water) supply infrastructure throughout the country.
- ▶ Resilience of the healthcare system, which includes the availability of both medical personnel and medical supplies to ensure adequate medical care in a crisis and/or war.
- ▶ Resilient civil communication systems, which includes the proper functioning of telecommunications and cyber networks in a crisis supported by a proper backup system.
- ▶ Resilient transport systems, including active cooperation with the private sector.

Fulfillment of critical functions by the government in the time of crisis and war should be one of the primary objectives of the country's security policy. This objective can be achieved only through close interagency coordination, which at the same time relies on the rou-

tine implementation of short-, medium- and long-term plans of interagency cooperation (including training/exercises). The National Security Council (NSC) and its staff, as the main coordinating and monitoring body on all security related issues, should play a leading role in this process. The role of the NSC is also crucial in relations with the private sector, as the largest part of critical infrastructure is privately owned and it is the owner's responsibility to ensure physical safety, physical protection training and accumulation of appropriate reserves (e.g. energy carriers or supplies).

The process of planning security policy also includes identification of shortcomings and vulnerabilities in various areas and appropriate decision-making for their elimination. In today's reality, as one of the vulnerable areas can be considered the absence of properly trained and equipped units for border protection, which would ensure deterrence/delay of the adversary's initial attack. Accordingly, it is advisable to identify sections in the border line of Georgia posing a particular high risk. Also, within the Border Police force, rapid response and initial military deterrence units should be trained and properly equipped. These units should be deployed in the zones posing a particular risk to the state border of Georgia to fulfill the combat objective of deterrence/delay of the adversary's initial attack. At the same time, these Border Police units should be in close coordination with the units of the Defense Forces deployed in their vicinity, whose task is to neutralize the assaulting adversary force.

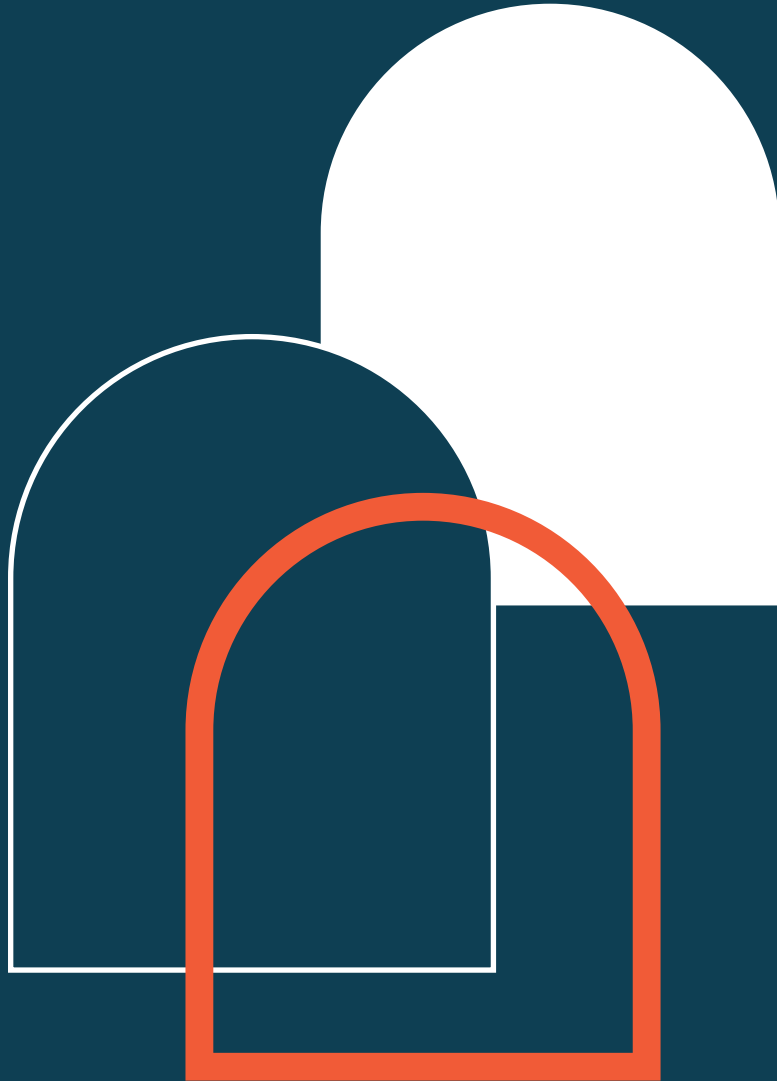
Alongside the state border, an additional vulnerable area for the security of Georgia is the occupation line (ABL). Unlike the state border line, in this case the task

of deterrence/delay of the initial adversary assault should be assigned not to the Border Police, but to the Defense Forces of Georgia, in particular, to those military units that are deployed in the vicinity of the occupation line. In turn, relevant units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs should take appropriate measures to ensure continuous open and discrete surveillance of the occupation line. For this purpose, it is necessary to equip with technical capabilities the relevant units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA) deployed near the occupation line and also arrange appropriate continuous control and surveillance infrastructure along the occupation line.

The Emergency Situations Management Service is yet another structural unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, which is assigned a particularly important role to perform in the time of war by performing various tasks. It is extremely important for the Emergency Situations Management Service personnel to have relevant prior training and exercises so that the Service is fully prepared to tackle the assigned tasks in the time of war. The total defense model provides for effective support of the Defense Forces not only by the MoIA units but also by other government agencies, which shall be done in accordance with the defense readiness plan. According to this plan, paramilitary units subordinate to various agencies (such as MoIA, SSS, SPSS, CG) to be transferred under the command of the Defense Forces in the time of war should be specified in advance and their combat objectives clearly defined. In addition, certain paramilitary components should be retained by the law enforcement agencies, which may be needed to neutralize saboteurs or other groups deployed prior to the hostilities in the depths of the country.

*SECTION VI*

# CONCLUSION



# CONCLUSION

Georgia is susceptible to numerous different threats and the situation is further complicated by the problematic and unstable security environment in the country. In addition to the serious risks that our country is currently facing, including the threats of restriction of its sovereignty and violation of territorial integrity, its security is made even more vulnerable by the complex processes evolving in our region and on the international arena.

In such circumstances, development of the country's defense and security system should naturally be one of the main priorities. However, unfortunately, today the situation with the planning and implementation in the defense and more broadly in the national security policy fields is clearly unfavorable, and there is no conceptual vision on how to develop these areas. Against this background, one gets the impression that the development process is not only slowed down, but stalled.

As a result of the complex analysis of Georgia's security and defense sphere within the project, the need for implementation of fundamental reforms in numerous different areas has been clearly identified. These reforms are needed not only in the Ministry of Defense and Defense Forces, but also in other relevant agencies. In addition, the need for the legislation improvement has also been clearly identified with the aim of defining and separating the roles of individual governmental institutions and agencies. Not least, the role of the Parliament in the process of defense and security policy planning should be increased. Accordingly, we can identify the following concrete steps for improvements in the defense and defense related security system, which by their importance can be categorized as urgent and long-term steps:

## URGENT STEPS

- ▶ Amendments should be made to the Constitution, which will address the ambiguity regarding the powers of the President and the Prime Minister of Georgia in the time when martial law is declared. Both in peacetime and in the time of martial law, the Prime Minister should be assigned the only and primary responsibility. Consequently, the National

Defense Council shall be abolished, and its functions transferred to the National Security Council, which is a standing body subordinated to the Prime Minister of Georgia with relevantly qualified staff members.

- ▶ As a result of the legislative amendments, the NSC structure should be redesigned to bring it in compliance with international practice. As a result, the NSC Secretary's position should not be held in parallel to other government position but rather become an independent position, which will be granted the status of the National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of Georgia. It is also necessary to introduce the positions of the Deputy Secretaries of the NSC (the optimum variant will be three deputy positions).
- ▶ Legislative norms should be adopted, which, on the one hand, will ensure the selection and approval of the Defense Minister (and Deputies) and Chief of the General Staff (and Deputies and Commanders) by the Parliament on the basis of multi-partisan consensus, while, on the other hand, restrict the adoption of political decisions on personnel issues in the Ministry of Defense and increase the level of accountability of the Minister of Defense to the Parliament of Georgia. For this purpose, a new high administrative position of the Secretary of Defense should be created, which will be assigned relevant competences, including bureaucratic coordination, management, and monitoring of all structural units within the civil administration of the Ministry of Defense.

In addition to these institutional changes, the following changes should take place in a short period of time:

- ▶ Increase the annual defense budget to at least 6% of GDP and maintain this limit until a positive change in the security environment is observed.
- ▶ Complete staffing of existing major units with allocated funding, procure equipment and weapons, as well as organize necessary supplies stock and carry out organizational and infrastructural (including transport and communication) works to enhance the logistics (supply) system and operational reserves (rear).

- ▶ With the adversary's advantage factors considered, gradually form and train appropriately equipped additional units based on a realistic plan.
- ▶ Train (and equip) units and especially prepare junior commanders based on the content and requirements of combat objectives within the area of operations.
- ▶ Provide as quickly as possible units and stocks with reconnaissance, communication and loitering munition supplies and integrate them into the command-and-control system.
- ▶ Equip the units to a maximum possible level with night vision devices and individual equipment, including communication, camouflage and medical items.
- ▶ Form and equip Coast Guard mobile groups and equip them with missile systems.
- ▶ Complete transfer of regular troops to contract service and improve significantly their compensation and social package.
- ▶ Identify and eliminate shortcomings in critical infrastructure in a short period of time.
- ▶ Increase frequency and coordination of planning and practical training for the Ministry of Defense, Defense Forces and other relevant government agencies at all levels for the stable provision of governmental services in the time of war.
- ▶ Increase to the maximum level the military reserve and territorial defense volunteer units and their combat capability.
- ▶ Abolish the practice of granting special defense ranks.
- ▶ Remove the General Inspection from the defense system and strengthen (introduce) internal audit and military ombudsman position.
- ▶ Form, equip and train to a maximum possible level appropriate units for fighting in mountainous conditions.
- ▶ Clearly separate the civilian office of the Ministry of Defense from the Defense Forces.
- ▶ Select and appoint the candidate for Minister of Defense based on the political consensus.
- ▶ Also, as a result of a consensus decision, appoint in the Ministry of Defense a "Permanent Secretary" enjoying a high level of public trust for a non-election term (e.g. 6 years), with the main function of guaranteeing bureaucratic efficiency of the defense system and agency's political neutrality.
- ▶ Introduce an effective and institutionalized mechanism of long-term defense planning, which will ensure effective planning of the structure of the armed forces, combat capabilities and deployment of units, infrastructure, logistics, training, procurement, and other aspects.
- ▶ Implement a sound and fair policy for human resources and career advancement, including education, promotion, and effective use of knowledge of field commanders with rapid and complete integration of the experience gained.
- ▶ Support the military industry and revise military procurement policy to ensure long-term procurement. The focus should be on meeting pre-defined criteria, especially in the field settings.

## LONG-TERM STEPS

- ▶ Re-deploy the units ensuring their maximum proximity to operational areas with appropriate adjustment of the logistics system.

It is especially important to understand that the development of defense and security, just as of any other area, is a continuous process and a single one-time reform will not produce tangible results. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a clear institutional frame ensuring the development process, systemic approach, and complex analysis in the conditions of intra-agency coordination and engagement. To achieve this, it is necessary to substantially enhance the national security policy planning process, which includes the above-mentioned components and serves the purpose of minimization/neutralization of the threats facing the country and increase of the efficiency of relevant agencies.

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**“THE RADICAL RIGHT AND YOUTH IN GEORGIA:  
NETWORKS, MECHANISMS AND TENDENCIES OF  
RADICALIZATION”**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research analyzes contemporary trends of radicalization within Georgia, with a specific focus on the young adult demographic. Central to this study is the deconstruction of mobilization strategies employed by the radical right, understanding their appeal among young supporters, and illuminating the motivations behind their engagement with various radical-right discourses and groups. Additionally, the analysis unpacks the commonly attributed “pro-Russian” label associated with the Georgian far right and explain the nuances of this association.

To achieve its objectives, this study employs a triangulation approach in regard to data collection and analysis methods. The study reveals complex motivational factors driving right-wing radicalization among Georgian youth, including the search for alternative pathways, perceptions of global antagonism, and interest in/references from Western politics. Additionally, feeling of fear, perception of control deprivation, and relativism toward violence all play significant roles in shaping their ideologies. In this context, on-line platforms serve as crucial arenas for ideological exchange, fostering solidarity and amplifying radical narratives. The perception of global antagonism, fueled by events such as the full-scale war in Ukraine, contributes to alignment with right-wing. Furthermore, a simplified and binary framing that views Georgian politics as a struggle between two antagonistic groups adds to the moralization of political issues and justifies engagement with radical ideologies.

Fear, related to identity, security and culture, underpins youth engagement with radical ideologies. Despite denials of violence, situational relativism is ob-

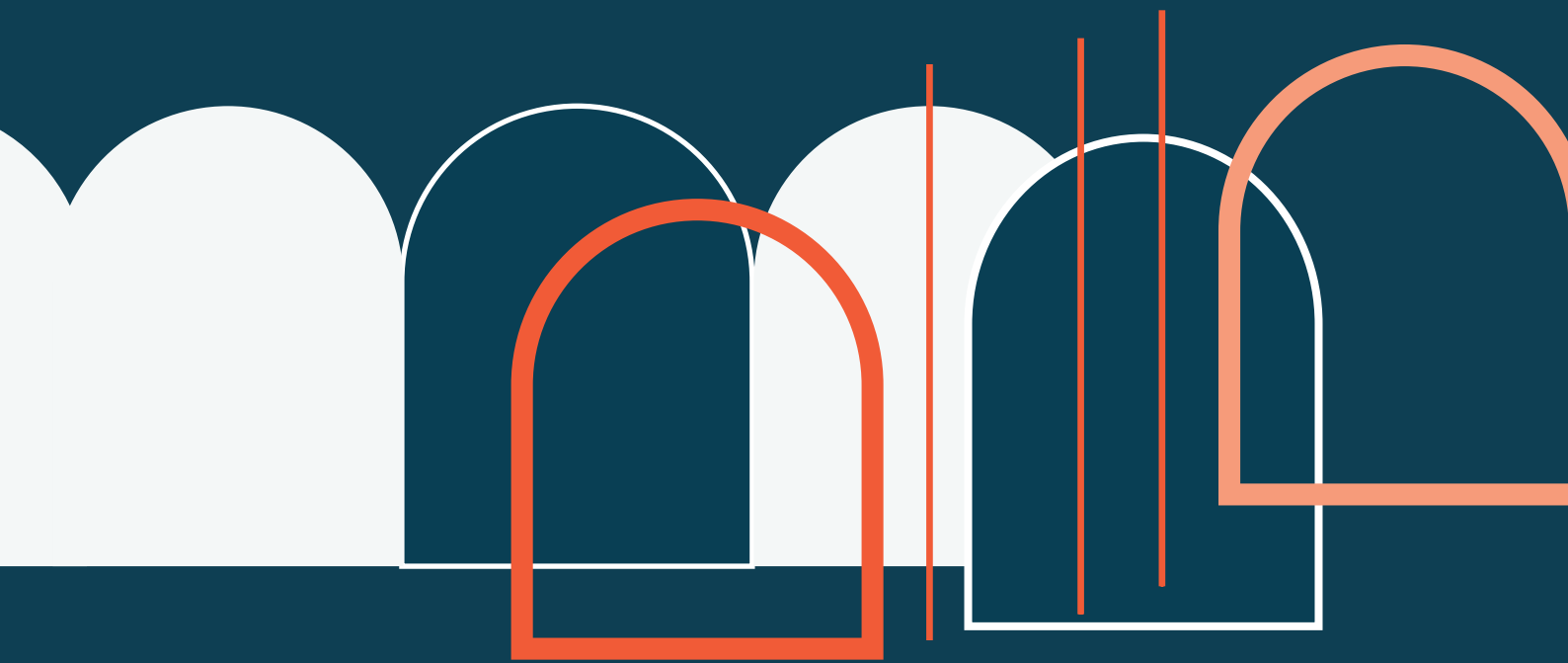
served, justifying actions against perceived threats to national identity and values. In their search for affiliation with a political ideology offering a sense of belonging and purpose, nationalism resonates among young adults.

The radical right in Georgia concentrates on identity, religion, migration, and media, opposing the non-governmental sector, emphasizing traditional values, and critiquing liberal ideals. They actively promote discriminatory stances against minority groups and challenge the legitimacy of the media and non-governmental organizations. While not explicitly stated, the radical right embodies pro-Russian discourse, emphasizing dialogue with Russia to address issues like the status of the occupied territories. However, it is essential to avoid oversimplification: pro-Russianness coexists with anti-LGBTQ agendas, illiberal influences, and at times, anti-democratic or violent expressions, presenting a complex ideological landscape.

In the end, the study overviews the concepts of deradicalization and disengagement, further outlining international practices from the Western democratic spheres in these regards. Subsequently, the following avenues of recommendations applicable to the Georgian context are offered in close dialogue with the research findings: Long-Term Prevention Strategies; Tailored Activities and Programs on Diverse Political Ideologies; Programs on Raising Awareness of Radical-Right Ideologies; Youth-Oriented Programs Encouraging Active Participation in Society, and Integration of Psychological Support.

*SECTION I*

# PROBLEM STATEMENT



## PROBLEM STATEMENT

The growth of radical sentiments and activities of radical-right forces have been trending throughout Europe, particularly affecting the state of democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. Popularization of the far-right powers is driven by a variety of factors; however, the issue of migration has largely defined right-wing national-populist political discourses (Nourbakhsh et al. 2023). The outcome of European parliamentary elections in 2019, in which the far-right parties achieved greater success than ever before, serves as one proof of their growing popularity (Nourbakhsh et al. 2023). At the time of writing this report, the EU elections also forecasted an increased representation of right-wing ideologies in the European Parliament, predicting the highest increase in voting rates for groupings such as Identity and Democracy (ID) and European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) (“Politico Poll of Polls” 2024). Following the rise and electoral success of broad far-right discourses and political actors across the European states, these rates only emphasize the core of the challenge that contemporary liberal democracy faces in the region. In parallel, anti-minority attitudes, especially targeting immigrants and the LGBTQ community, draw a worrying picture in the countries of Central Europe. Some public opinion surveys demonstrate that public attitudes are largely beneficial for the above-discussed political forces. For instance, more than half of respondents rejected having an immigrant neighbor according to the results of public opinion polls conducted in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Bulgaria (Küpper and Váradi 2021).

In Georgia, Such groups are manifesting their influence through different anti-democratic, illiberal proposals (i.e., against NGOs and the media), and aggressive opposition to minority rights (including the freedoms of assembly and expression). Several examples underscore their presence and impact over the years:

- ▶ **Tbilisi Pride Fest Site Storming (2023):** This event was marked by the forceful cancellation of an LGBTQ festival as hundreds of opponents vandalized the stage, set fires, and looted the

event’s private location. Far-right activists were central in mobilizing against the event and encouraging violence.

- ▶ **2021 Attack on Tbilisi Pride:** In July 2021, far-right protesters engaged in a violent counter-demonstration against attempts to hold a pride parade by pro-LGBTQ organizers of the NGO Tbilisi Pride. At the event, dozens of journalists were physically attacked.
- ▶ **Far-Right Demonstrations Against Youth Protesting Bassiani Events (2018):** The heavy-handed police raid on the club in May 2018 led to subsequent protests and prompted counter-demonstrations by far-right activists who aggressively opposed the alleged liberalization of drug laws and the cultural shifts associated with clubbing.

While these events only scratch the surface of the radical right’s increased activities, they are reflective of an increasing tendency to incorporate violence into their public manifestations, as well as of a sense of impunity from the state, as only a limited number of activists—not including from the organizers—faced criminal allegations. These events were dominated by young adult males (under 35), reflecting the increasing share of the youth/young adults in the country’s radical-right scene. However, at the same time, support for Georgia’s Western aspirations and democratic development is consistently high, especially among the young (CRRC 2013–2021; CRRC 2011–2019). Simultaneously, the exposure of far-right groups has increased notably in Georgia over the past five years, at all points along a spectrum from populist to extreme right movements (Stephan 2018, Gelashvili 2023). Their role in these incidents underscores the complex landscape in Georgia, where societal and political dynamics are shaped by the exacerbating polarization between conservative and progressive segments in the country. Moreover, far-right ideas and policies are frequently linked with Russian politics, both as it is conducted locally and propagated abroad (see Laruelle 2015).

With the upcoming parliamentary elections in the fall of 2024, it is vital to be aware of the illiberal, undemocratic tendencies in the country, especially among the young electorate (18–35). This study aims to investigate trends of radicalization in present-day Georgia, specifically concentrating on the demographic of young adults who exhibit heightened susceptibility to the influences of radical-right mobilization. The study aims to comprehend the resonance of the mobilization efforts amongst young supporters, all the while seeking to understand the latter’s motivations and drivers toward the spectrum of radical-right discourses and groups. Furthermore, it is the goal of the analysis to deconstruct the commonly ascribed pro-Russian label to the Georgian far right and outline the specificities of this association.

Anyone can be vulnerable to the threat of radicalization, regardless of their age, gender, religion, ethnicity, or background. However, the following factors are deemed to make some people more susceptible to radical-right ideas: failed societal integration; questioning one’s place in society; feelings of alienation; mental health issues; a traumatic life event; family issues; feeling left behind; low self-esteem; experiencing racism, bullying or discrimination; and so on (Bąkowski 2022). Young people who are entering a new phase of life often experience these types of challenges, making them vulnerable to the threat of increasing right-wing radicalization. Moreover, the research outlines that avoiding discussing politics at home or school might contribute to the radicalization of youth, as they seek to identify with a political community whilst still young (Róna 2020, Kvatadze 2020).

It is particularly worrying when young people, whose views and actions shape the future of the country, become involved with groups that endanger democracy and contribute to social antagonism, at times fetishizing political violence and ethnic homogeneity.

## **RUSSIAN INFLUENCE AND THE RADICAL RIGHT**

Radical-right movements are usually not defined by a fixed set of principles and tend to adapt to changing circumstances. They seek effective modes of expression that resonate with the context and situation, rather

than adhering to specific traditions. At the same time, nativist appeals, appeals to ethnic homogeneity, and the rejection of pluralism in society are typical goals for far-right groups. Far-right parties also share some features of the (“traditional”) far-left political forces, like being anti-establishment, anti-NATO, and Eurosceptic. However, despite the quite versatile nature of far-right politics, a commonly ascribed general feature of the contemporary radical right across Europe—among other associations—seems to be Russian influence (Enriquez 2017). The illiberal features of the far right contribute to aligning them with Russia’s aim to weaken the state of liberal democracy in the West. Additionally, far-right groups’ emphasis on exclusionary nationalism and the alleged restoration of “traditional values” aligns with Russia’s ideological approach at local and transnational levels.

Beyond the post-Soviet sphere of influence, Russian interest in contributing to devaluing the Western models from within is frequently pursued by, through, or in direct partnership with the radical right in Europe. These parties tend to support Russia’s anti-EU agenda, emphasizing national sovereignty and conservative ideologies. In turn, Russia views them as platforms to influence EU foreign policy in its favor (De Maio 2018). This alignment with far-right groups aids Russia in weakening the EU and NATO, as well as exploiting divisions within Western democracies to further its influence and strategic objectives on the European continent. These groups, with their anti-EU and nationalist stances, offer opportunities for Russia to influence domestic and foreign policies in its favor. Importantly, the extent of Russian support for these parties is not entirely clear, but some financial support cases suggest involvement (Krekó, Gyóri, and Zgut 2017).

On the other hand, Russia aligns itself with radical-right groups across Europe for various strategic reasons. Russia has embraced these political actors in order to legitimize its policies, spread disinformation, and influence European domestic debates (Shekhovtsov 2018). These movements often share anti-Western and anti-establishment sentiments, making them appealing allies for Russia’s goal of undermining Western unity and influence. Russia considers far-right groups as valuable partners in challenging liberal democratic institutions, serving its broader

geopolitical agenda (Dennison and Pardijs 2016). Far-right media outlets across Europe frequently promote narratives that coincide with Russian interests, providing a platform for the dissemination of disinformation and amplifying Russian influence. Furthermore, the Russian state leverages the polarization and divisiveness that these radical-right groups can generate within European politics, ultimately sowing discord and chaos. We can conclude that Russia strategically engages with far-right movements and populist parties in various countries to advance its interests, which can vary from party to party and nation to nation.

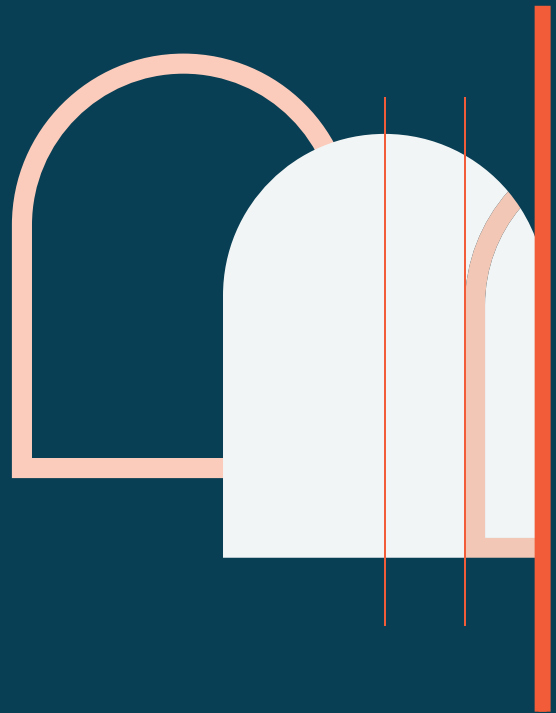
Russia's influence is noticeable in radical-right youth movements in, for instance, Austria. The ideology of Russian far-right political philosopher Alexander Dugin has gained traction within the Identitarian Movement there, which opposes US influence in Europe. Russia has also supported various NGOs and think tanks in Austria and Germany which promote pro-Russian positions (Krekó, Weidinger, and Schmid 2017). The far-right media in Germany has close ties to both the AfD and the Kremlin, often promoting similar narratives while receiving support from Russian hackers and automated networks (Havlicek et al. 2017). In the Czech Republic, openly pro-Russian parties and organizations often represent nationalist or far-right positions. They aim to establish a pro-Russian geopolitical platform opposed to liberal democratic institutions, the European Union, and NATO. These organizations have ties to Russian embassies and cultural centers and promote pan-Slavic and Eurasianist geopolitical ideas (Vejvodová et al. 2017). Similarly, pro-Russian groups in the Czech Republic disseminate disinformation, delegitimize democratic institutions, and contribute to destabilization.

Furthermore, Russia's playbook includes supporting territorial disintegration and secessionist movements in various Western countries. To achieve these goals, it often supports the spread of historical revisionism, particularly sensitive across the countries of Central Europe. Budapest has become a hub for pro-Russian extreme right networks, hosting meetings and activities of extremist groups from other countries (Krekó, Györi, and Zgut 2017). Russia's influence operations are pragmatic and tailored to each country, focusing on strategic goals. In these terms, the instrumentalization of historical narratives have become prevalent, as seen prior to the authorization of armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine and promoting its version of historical truth since (Koposov 2018, Hrytsak et al. 2019, Gozalishvili, Kartsivadze, and Kalandadze 2022).

While the Georgian radical right has been narrative-labeled as pro-Russian almost since its widespread resurgence in recent years, this designation is still in need of deconstruction. As seen above, association with Russia is a multidimensional process, varying from value association to practical links and financial networks. While all of it could be considered contributive to the destruction of liberal democracy, the nuanced understanding of "pro-Russianness" within Georgia's radical right is salient at least for the following reasons: it assists in identifying the core of the challenge and focusing solution-oriented discussion on the matter; moreover, it reflects on the indirect ways of influencing the youth's ideological inclinations and positions on democratic values; and finally, it contributes to tailoring policy suggestions to the nuances of the issue.

*SECTION II*

# RADICAL RIGHT



# RADICAL RIGHT

While moving along the continuum of radicalization and extremism, contemporary radical-right movements usually participate in constitutional forms of democratic politics, such as elections, and adopt populist styles to avoid accusations of extremism (Henderson 2020). The online presence entangled with youth-dominated activities online and on-site characterizes a considerable part of contemporary radicalization tendencies, as evidenced below. The research proposes to examine radicalization tendencies in contemporary Georgia, with a particular focus on the youth, who are particularly susceptible to radical-right mobilization.

Radical-right politics is hereby understood as a political movement rooted in nativism, characterized by xenophobic, homophobic, anti-Islamist, and anti-immigration attitudes, and is aimed at advancing the “interests” of the major ethnic/national group in the country as opposed to the minorities there (Mudde 1995, Jupskås 2020, Bötticher 2017). “Radicalism as an ideological mindset tends to be very critical of the existing status quo, pursuing the objective of restructuring and/or overthrowing outdated political structures” (Bötticher 2017, 75). The concept of the nation and tradition plays a central role in their ideologies, with nationalism being a common thread.

In sum, the radical right is hereby approached as a spectrum of diverse political actors, varying from groups that frame their “front-stage politics” in a populist manner, to movements that lean toward extremism and consider violence a means to an end (Snow and Cross 2011).

## OUTLINE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research aims to comprehend and deconstruct the complex process of radicalization in Georgia, particularly focusing on the tendencies of youth radicalization there. It is, therefore, the goal of the research to provide an analysis of the far-right scene

in the country, the issues with which they concern themselves, and their mobilizing strategies, as well as motivating factors on the part of the youth. One of the study’s objectives is to examine the characterization of the Georgian radical right as pro-Russian, a narrative prevalent since its notable resurgence in recent years, with an emphasis on deconstructing this categorization. In accordance with the objectives of the study, it will:

1. Map the far-right scene in Georgia as it has evolved over recent years (especially considering the period since 2017–2018, the years of the radical right’s public resurgence, as well as the years when anti-immigrant issues were most widely discussed in the media). This proves important for observing the general tendency and structural composition of the radical right in the country, together with their tendencies of organizational transformation and a timeline of their public activities.
2. Attempt to deconstruct the omnipresent pro-Russian labeling and scrutinize the contextual congruence with “Russian politics,” while also scrutinizing this term.
3. Draw upon the motivational factors that contribute to the radicalization of youth in the Georgian context.
4. Provide an overview of international practices and contextually relevant deradicalization strategies.

Research Questions:

- ▶ Why are young people becoming involved in radical-right movements and activities?
- ▶ How can we operate the “pro-Russian” label in reference to the Georgian radical right?
- ▶ What effective deradicalization tools are applicable to the Georgian context?



## METHODOLOGY

As the first step, it is important to identify radical groups, movements, or organizations that actively use social networks and channels to spread their ideas and recruit people. Subsequently, the study focuses on comprehending the relevant reasons and mechanisms behind the young people's incentive to join radical groups and subscribe to subsequent ideologies. The task remains problematic to study, as getting the people involved to talk about their experiences is an omnipresent challenge. Considering the inherent challenges of the study matter, the research applies triangulation of the data collection and analysis methods.

The study conducts qualitative semi-structured interviews with young members and supporters of radical groups. These interviews provide first-hand insights into the motivations, drivers, and barriers to radicalization, offering a deeper understanding of individual experiences. The research team carefully selected interview participants from key groups, using broad digital platforms and a snowball sampling method to expand the participant pool. Conducted by trained students throughout February, a total of fourteen interviews were gathered and analyzed to enrich the overall findings.

Moreover, the study also conducts an ethnography in digital space of the far-right scene, focusing on uncovering the strategies used for recruitment. The goal is to thoroughly investigate the various pathways to

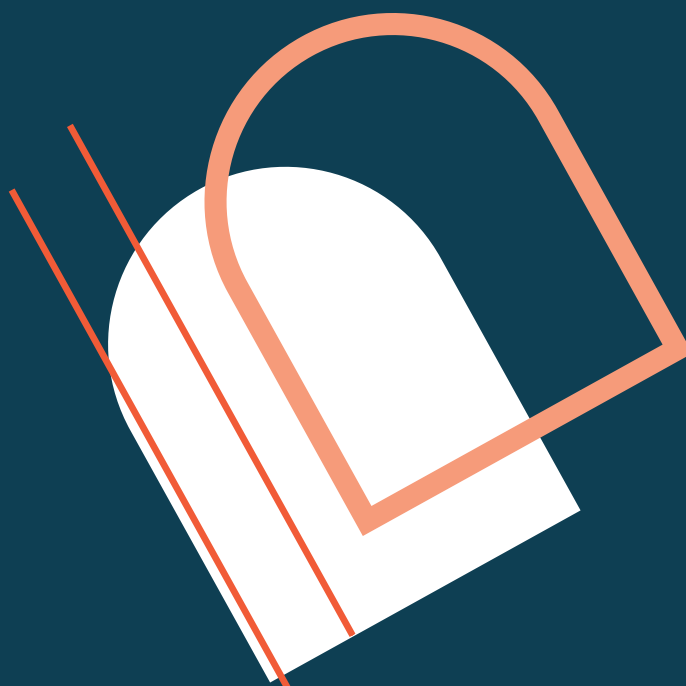
radicalization, considering both overt and covert recruitment methods, as well as active and passive engagement. By tracking the evolution of content shared by political actors, the research examines the dynamics between these actors and the groups they target or attract. The technical approach involves a six-week period of monitoring key online platforms—Facebook, Telegram, and TikTok—chosen for their widespread use and relevance in Georgia. Two researchers spend 60–90 minutes each day analyzing content on these platforms to identify and categorize recruitment-related data. The data is organized into categories such as general recruitment, self-recruitment, explicit recruitment, and covert recruitment, with daily logging of the findings.

*Technical plan:* After identifying the main groups, the research team outlined the particular segment aiming to target supporters/members for each political grouping. Since it was expected that the positions of supporters within these groupings would not be static, the target group for the interviews was selected via the broad digital platforms and expanded via a snowball strategy. The interviews were conducted by trained students over the month of February. In total, fourteen interviews were collected and analyzed.

Qualitative interview data are first transcribed and categorized per the mixture of data-driven and concept-driven coding. Accordingly, the codebook is systematized and submitted to an interpretative analysis in dialogue with the research questions and conceptual framework of the study.

*SECTION III*

**THE FAR-RIGHT SCENE IN GEORGIA**



## THE FAR-RIGHT SCENE IN GEORGIA

The global rise of the far right has been extensively discussed in both academic and media circles. Not only have far-right ideologies gained momentum in transitioning and hybrid regimes, they have become especially prominent in those countries where notable democratic and liberalizing reforms have taken place. The enduring political polarization and continual crises in these countries foster a widespread apathy among the populace, leading to a lack of motivation to engage in politics. Consequently, both the participatory process and trust in democratic institutions are adversely affected (Waal and Gegeshidze 2021).

During the past few years, Georgia has witnessed an increasing exposure to far-right discourse, with several demonstrations being organized by radical and extreme-right groups. Some of the events, as briefly mentioned above, exhibited violence. As stated by Tamta Gelashvili (2019), such events have naturally instilled fears of rising right-wing extremism in Georgia, especially considering the global trend of far-right mobilization impacting numerous other nations.

April Gordon, in "A New Eurasian Far Right Rising" (2020), argues that "while the electoral power of far-right groups is limited, they are nevertheless influential within their respective societies, and shape social and political discourse according to their ideological framework. Moreover, far-right groups pose a direct physical threat to minority populations, undermining their ability to exercise basic freedoms of expression and assembly." The considerable danger these groups cause in Georgia is not just instant damage, such as violent attacks or vandalism, but also the long-term consequences of their mobilization: their public appearances, however rare, carry the risk of proliferating extremist opinions (Gelashvili 2019). The latter is concerning insofar as many of these groups exhibit an electoral interest and plan subsequent campaigns.

Georgian right-wing radicals display diverse ideological viewpoints and communication styles. The rhetoric of far-right radical groups usually encompasses

conspiracy theories, fake information, and distorted facts within their discursive arsenal. Utilizing homophobic, xenophobic, and anti-liberal narratives, these ideas are used to influence views and perceptions of society, shape social and political discourse, and create the desired political agenda in the country (Kvakhadze 2018). As April Gordon observes, the far-right in Georgia frequently advocate for "a return to what they describe as 'traditional' values and the ideal of a 'pure' nation-state." To protect a country's "national identity," therefore, hate speech or (online and on-site) violence is frequently justified (A New Eurasian Far Right Rising 2020). In the anti-liberal discourse, the radical right in Georgia targets the following communities: immigrants, religious minorities, the LGBT community, non-governmental organizations, and politicians, journalists, activists, businessmen, etc., who support liberal values (GFSIS, 2018). Since these radical right actors first appeared in public, their ideas have rarely remained within the realm of social movements, frequently transforming into party structures with an electoral agenda. Archil Gegeshidze and Thomas De Waal in "Divided Georgia: A Hostage to Polarization" state that "[p]arts of the Georgian Orthodox Church disseminate the message that the contemporary globalized world poses a threat to Georgian traditions.... [and] the fear that modern life is destroying precious Georgian moral values" (Gegeshidze and De Waal 2021).

Georgia is a deeply religious country, and the Church and its Patriarch are more highly respected than most political figures and institutions (CRRC Georgia 2008–2019). As Gordon asserts, some far-right narratives have been able to gain mainstream legitimacy in Georgian society, due in large part to the tacit support of the Georgian Orthodox Church (Gordon 2020). While this does not denote any official alignment between the Church and far-right groups, the latter often utilize religious narratives to legitimize exclusionary discourses, depicting clergy as well as religious symbols during its public appearances.

The discussion below reviews the main political actors that utilize radical-right ideas in the country to outline the main trends and structural composition of Georgia’s far right.

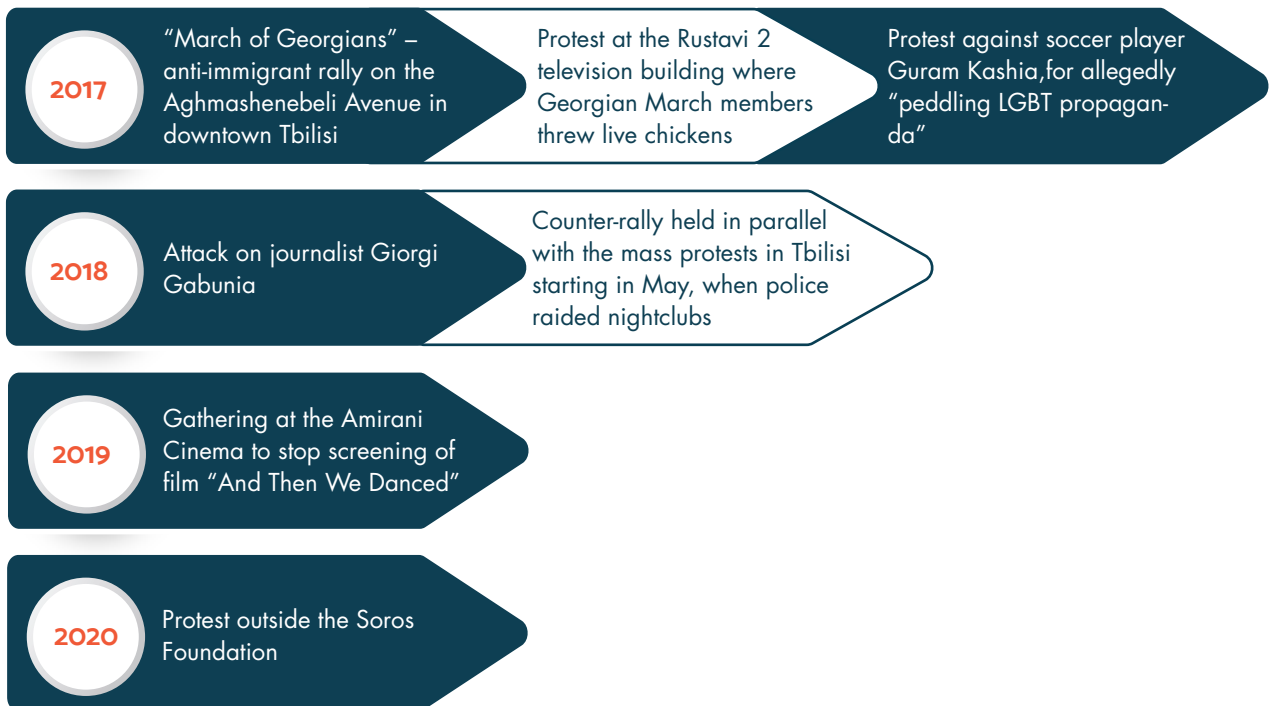
The timeline below depicts the main activities of the movement, reflecting on the policy issues advocated by GM over the years.

### GEORGIAN MARCH

The Georgian March movement (GM) was established in 2017. It was later registered as a political party in July 2020, with the self-declared aim of restoring “traditional Georgian values.” The leader of GM served in the government as the Deputy Minister of Diaspora Issues from 2014–2016 (Nativist ‘Georgian March’ Movement Becomes Political Party, 2020). The movement appeared on the public scene with anti-immigrant narratives and has since advocated for anti-LGBT, nationalist, and anti-Western ideas.

### THE “NATIONALS” MOVEMENT

The Georgian March leader, Sandro Bregadze, is the founder of another movement, “Nationals,” which was registered on February 8, 2016. According to its charter, one of the movement’s goals is to protect and strengthen the values of Orthodoxy. The movement’s cofounders are Kakhaber Migineishvili and Zurab Enukidze. Migineishvili was a member of the initiative group that addressed the Central Election Commission with a referendum question on defining the status of marriage (Gogiashvili et al 2018).



## ALT-INFO/THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT

The Conservative Movement as a social movement was founded on November 20, 2021. Like GM, it was quickly transformed into a political party, on December 7 of the same year. The Conservative Movement's founders are members of Alt-Info,<sup>1</sup> a media platform and television company officially registered in 2019 and broadcasting since January 2021. Its stated aims are "to end the diktats of liberal ideology prevailing in Georgia, to establish a culturally organic and acceptable agenda for the majority of Georgia's population, and to preserve Georgian identity and statehood" (The Conservative Movement, About the Party). Their goals are reflected in the demand for the "prohibition of external interference" in Georgian media and education, along with attempts to exert total control of foreign-funded organizations at the legislative level (The Conservative Movement, About the Party). The Conservative Movement "started forming a regional network shortly after its creation. The party managed to open district offices in a short period.... At the moment, 65 offices of the party have been opened throughout Georgia. The offices of the Conservative Movement in the municipalities of Khulo and Shuakhevi were soon closed as a result of the opposition of the local population." (Activities of the Conservative Movement/Alt Info In The Regions of Georgia, ISFED 2022). According to local monitoring undertaken by the Democracy Research Institute, the total amount officially donated to the Conservative Movement has exceeded 500,000 GEL. In total, the party received 585 donations from 102 individuals; 25 of the 102 individual donors are heads of the group's regional office. Importantly, most of the donors have no real estate holdings recorded in the public register (Democracy Research Institute, 2023).

The members of the Conservative Movement depict anti-NATO narratives and, especially after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, support the normalization of relations with Russia. This aim is reflected in the ideological declaration published on their website, offered in Georgian and Russian: "We are not going to stand for decades at the entrance to the doorway of the mystical NATO. The interests of

Georgia come first! Everything that strengthens the Christian, Georgian identity is good; all international contacts and connections that contribute to this are necessary."

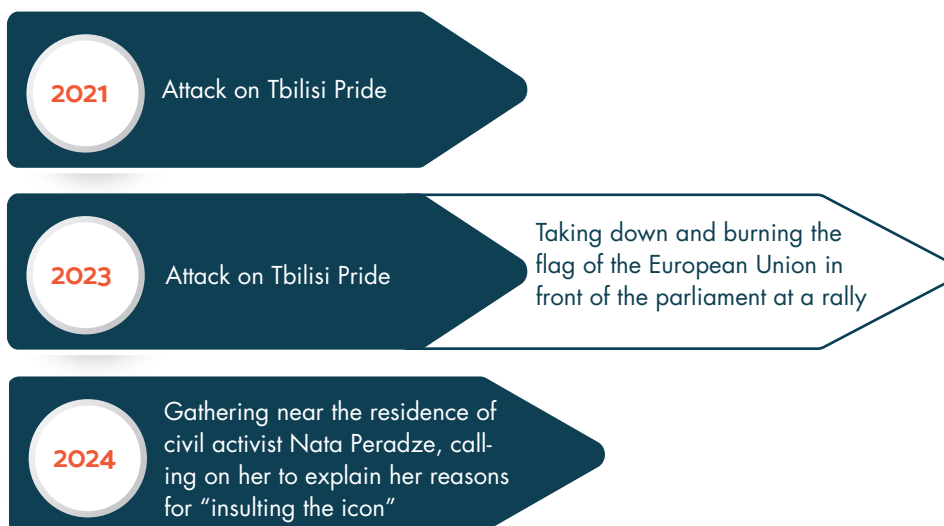
From the start, Alt-Info/The Conservative Movement has instrumentalized social media in its communication strategy. It frequently uses Facebook pages and groups, as well as TikTok and Telegram channels, to devalue the ideas of liberal democracy and spread its own discourse. Their rhetoric is marked by the cultivation of fear toward, and the unacceptability of, the different and the new. While initially the movement did not depict explicit support toward Russia and focused on accentuating far-right narratives and personas from the West (see Gozalishvili 2021), after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 it has become more vocal in its sympathy toward Russia. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that on the social network, the founder of the Eurasian Movement and ideologist of Russia's expansionist policy, Aleksandr Dugin, expressed his approval of the political party established by representatives of Alt-Info (ISFED 2022).

Even during its early years, when the movement rejected any association with or favoritism toward Russia, Dugin was still referred to positively by them. For example, on July 10, 2020, Dugin was invited to be a guest on an Alt-Info program, where he explained that if Georgia opts for a neutral course and rejects pro-Western aspirations, Russia will welcome its territorial integrity (ISFED 2020).

Alt-Info/The Conservative Movement has depicted its readiness to use violence to achieve their goals. In 2021, several days before the anti-Pride rally, its leader Zurab Makharadze stated that "They call us violent people and yes, I am a violent person.... I can and plan to defend my values, including with force... I am ready to act with force against this [rally]" (Kinchka 2023).

**In April 2024**, the National Agency of Public Registry of Georgia (NAPR) cancelled party's registration "following the request from the Anti-Corruption Bureau to review the legality of the party's registration" (Civil.ge 2024). The cancellation of the party was

<sup>1</sup> Founded by Shota Martinenko and Tsiala Morgoshia in January 2019.



primarily due to administrative and legal irregularities. Although the party promptly appealed the decision, the likelihood of its participation in the up-

coming elections under the same party structure is exceedingly slim, if not entirely nonexistent. However, it has been announced that the party will collaborate and share an electoral platform with another political entity (Georgian Idea, discussed below) sharing the same ideological stance (Nikuradze and Kincha 2024).

#### GEORGIAN IDEA

The sociopolitical movement Georgian Idea (GI) was established in 2014 and reorganized as a political party later that year. Like the groups characterized above, GI propagates anti-immigrant, anti-LGBT, and anti-Western rhetoric, all the while emphasizing the urgency "to protect the national identity of Georgia." The leaders of GI strongly supported the participants of the violent protest on July 5, 2021, and referred to the people arrested during this protest as "prisoners of conscience." Later, Georgian Idea also joined the protest actions organized by Alt-Info, the main demand of which was to release those arrested on July 5, 2021 (Online Discourse and Political Transformation of Far-Right Group in Georgia, DRI, 2023).

According to their charter published on their website, the goals of the Georgian Idea are the following: "building an independent, legal, and truly national Georgian state; promoting the role of the Church in building the Georgian state and restoring the territorial integrity of the country; initiating direct negotiations with Russia for the purpose of de-occupation of the country; defining a national economic policy and creating a healthy investment environment; rejecting the sale of land, water, forests, and other objects of strategic state importance, etc" (Georgian Idea [Qartuli Idea] 2019).

In 2016, GI participated in the parliamentary elections. At the top of the party list was leader Levan Chachua, who was arrested in 2010 for his extremist behavior at the Kavkasia television station. He, alongside other members of the "Orthodox Parents' Union," burst into the studio during a live television broadcast and engaged in a physical altercation. Chachua was sentenced to four and a half years in prison, but in 2012 he was released with the status of a political prisoner (Baranec, 2018).

The Georgian Idea got only 0.17% of the votes in the 2016 parliamentary elections, but despite this unsuccessful result, the GI did not disappear from the public space. According to the ISFED report "A Coordinated Network of the 'Georgian Idea' Party on Facebook," Georgian Idea once again appeared in the headlines before the local elections of 2021,

when the network of Facebook pages affiliated to GI became particularly active, spreading sharply anti-Western, homophobic, xenophobic, and aggressive content aimed at provoking political polarization. Hence, despite not achieving an electoral success over the years, the right-wing political actors do not vanish from the public scene entirely, but move into the passive mode temporarily.

For the parliamentary elections of 2024, Levan Chachua called on the “conservative wing” for unity and proclaimed an initiative to create “national-Church unity.” Membership in the latter would be based not

on party affiliation, but on personal characteristics. At the final stage of writing this report, GI has offered his platform to Alt-Info Conservative Movement therefore enabling them to still partake in the upcoming elections, despite their party being formally deprived from the right due to the National Agency of Public Registry of Georgia (NAPR) retreating their registration (Civil.ge 2024).

According to Chachua, the Orthodox Church of Georgia should give its blessing and political legitimacy to this unity (DRI, 2023). Accordingly, affiliation with the Orthodox Church remains narratively



significant and an important mobilizing strategy for the country’s far right.

### GEORGIA’S NATIONAL UNITY

Georgia’s National Unity (GNU) was founded in 2016, as a non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity. GNU declares its aim to be “to carry out a peaceful and united policy, according to which the Georgian mental worldview is prioritized”(Tabula 2018). The leader of the movement openly stated that he follows fascist ideology: “We live with our roots. We push for fascism and national socialism; we are followers of this ideology.” Hence, GNU constitutes a more unusual case, where the entity openly and publicly declares its fascist inclinations.

GNU tends to justify violence in its public activities. In May 2018, during the demonstrations in front of the parliament to protest police raids on the night-

club Bassiani, GNU leaders and supporters, together with other radical right groups discussed above, stood out with their aggressive and violent behavior against the participants of the rally (Pertaia 2018). At that time, GNU stated that they would create patrol squads, begin walking the streets, and deal with any violation of the law. The members and supporters of GNU also used threatening verbal attacks: “They demand blood? We will give them a sea of blood” (Pertaia 2018).

Unlike other movements, GNU is also outspoken about its use of weaponry and physical preparation. In August 2018, GNU’s Facebook page published a video titled “Fascist Sunday,” in which members of the organization engage in weapons training. The caption of the video states that “a Georgian male should devote at least one day a week to sports and combat training.” Subsequently, the group writes that its members, known as “blackshirts,” train reg-



ularly every week. Physical preparation for potential violence is an important aspect of the group's activities. As the group's leader, Giorgi Chelidze, put it in 2018: "I have a hunting rifle, a sawed-off Winchester which I bought in full compliance with the law. My fellow members have also purchased weapons in accordance with the law. If the events that happened in 1991, which I vaguely remember as a time when the government got out of control, there was a civil war and bloodshed that set our country back decades, we will use irons, forks, and anything else we can get our hands on" (Tabula 2018). That same year, Chelidze expressed his intention to create a "Civil Guard": "We are starting to form Civil Guard units to protect our homeland. Tens, hundreds, etc. will be created. The agenda should not be set by drug dealers and LGBT people. We should set the agenda" (Radio Liberty 2018).

In September 2018, Chelidze was arrested for possession of illegal weapons. After he was arrested on charges of illegal purchase, storage, and carrying of weapons, the GNU Facebook page was deleted. However, as of February 2024, the page has been reactivated, mainly resharing videos by the group that had been published on YouTube; its reach is severely limited (less than 200 followers).

GNU has never expressed any desire to participate in elections. Moreover, Giorgi Chelidze has said that he supported the ruling Georgian Dream, although the laws adopted by the party were so unacceptable for him that he even left his public position: "I was an active supporter of Georgian Dream and had some influence in my district. I worked in the Ministry of Finance; however, after Georgian Dream approved two laws that were unacceptable to me, I realized that the government's course since Shevardnadze's rule would not change." (Arabuli 2018).

### THE CIVIL SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT

The Civil Solidarity Movement was registered in 2013. One of the founders is Giorgi (Gia) Korkotashvili, a prominent figure within the Georgian nationalist scene. The purpose of the movement was declared as "restoring justice," as well as "monitoring and exposing the fulfillment of the promises made" by the ruling party, Georgian Dream (Gogiashvili, 2018).

By 2014, the Civil Solidarity Movement's Facebook page was no longer active; instead, its leaders began to appear within different organizational structures, such as Georgian March, Georgian Idea, and Georgian Mission (see e.g. Tabula 2018).

In July 2017, a march was organized on David Aghmashenebeli Avenue by the Civil Solidarity Movement and Georgian March. The organizers presented the ruling party with the following ultimatum: "All illegal foreigners (Iranians, Arabs, Africans, etc.) must leave the territory of Georgia!" Following this march, Korkotashvili threatened a female, former Georgian Youth Delegate at the UN online, with sexual violence and gang rape (OC Media 2017).

### GEORGIAN MISSION

The sociopolitical movement Georgian Mission was founded in 2015; one of its founders is the aforementioned Giorgi (Gia) Korkotashvili. The goals of Georgian Mission were declared as "to study and assess the current socio-legal and economic situation in Georgia and search for a concrete solution, as well as to raise civic self-awareness and involve the citizens in the current public-political processes" (Georgian Mission Facebook Page). The movement has never expressed any desire to participate in elections although the movement has been affiliated with several other radical right fractions in the country on situational occurrences. After 2021, the Facebook page directly associated with Georgian Mission is no longer active.

### GEORGIAN POWER

The social movement Georgian Power began its activity in 2015. The focus of the group's activity was the occupied territories of Georgia. Its leader consistently emphasized that they did not receive any support from Russia: "We are a truly right-wing nationalist force, and we don't take funding from anyone, and we don't protect anyone's interests." (Palitravideo.ge 2016).

Georgian Power made headlines with its violent appearance in May 2016, when its members and sup-



porters attacked a vegan café, Kiwi, in Tbilisi (Eurasianet 2016). More than a dozen men stormed into the café, shouting and throwing meat at patrons. The attackers wore strings of sausages around their necks and threw chunks of meat onto customers' plates. The BBC reported that the café was "popular among young people sporting unconventional hairstyles, tattoos, and body piercings." Its workers stated that they endured some hostility due to "the way we look, music that we listen to, ideas we support, and the fact that we don't eat meat," as well as their support for LGBT people (BBC, 2016). Georgian Power also held a nationalist rally near Turkish restaurants on David Aghmashenebeli Avenue, during which several of their members were arrested.

On September 27, 2017, Georgian Power organized a nationalist rally, declaring on Facebook: "We will remember the lost territories, display nationalist symbols and end the march with an eye-catching performance. Anyone with a right-wing ideology can join us." The demonstrators broke into Turkish restaurants on their way, shouting nationalist slogans, such as "Glory to the nation, death to the enemy!", and demolishing billboards (On.ge 2016). Since August 2023, the Georgian Power Facebook page is no longer active.

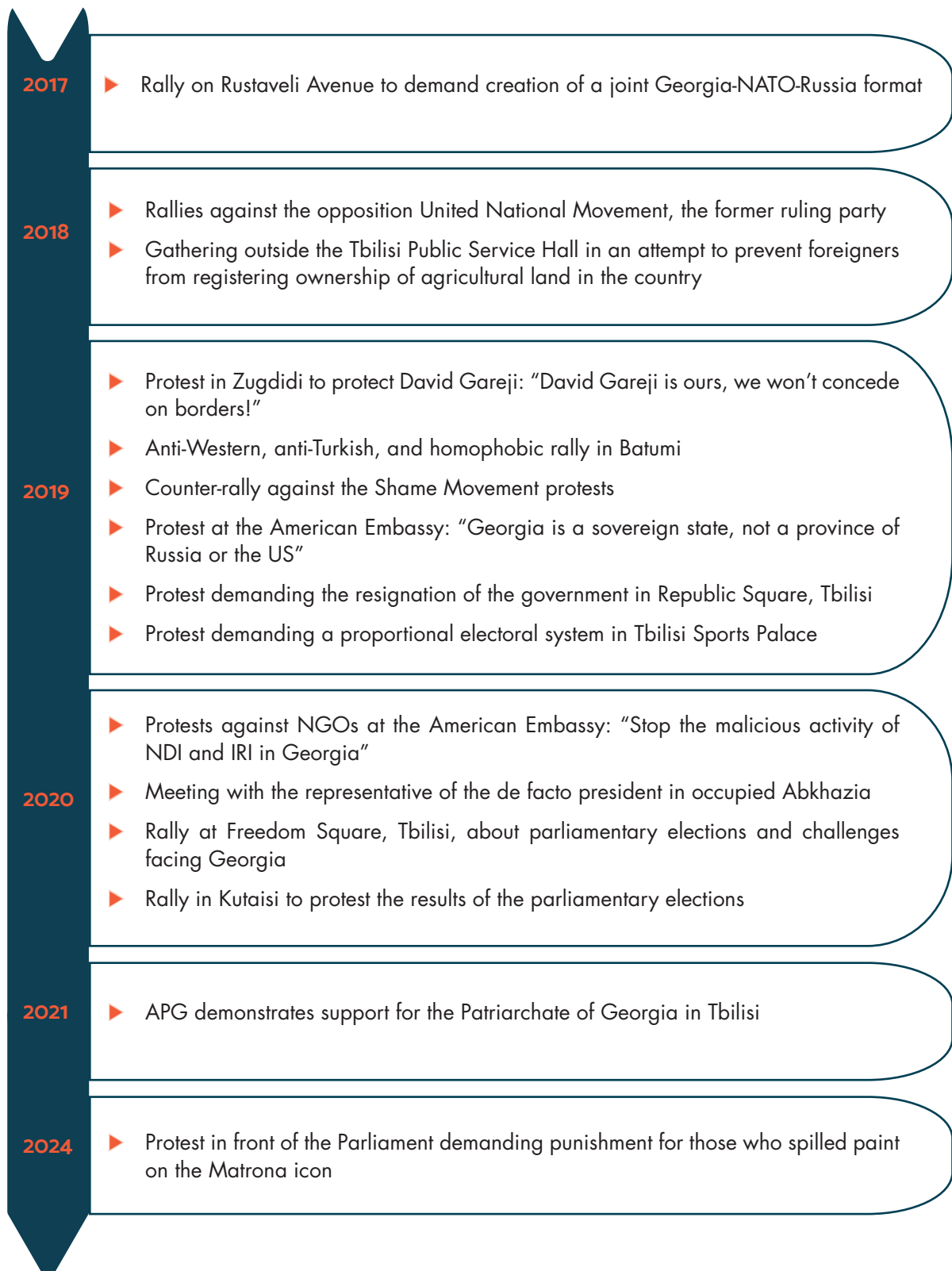
#### **ALLIANCE OF PATRIOTS OF GEORGIA**

The political party Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (APG) was founded in 2012. In contrast with other groupings mentioned here, APG established itself from the start as a political party with electoral ambitions. Before the party was established, in 2003, Irma Inashvili and Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi—who would go

on to be leaders of the party—founded the "Media Union Obieqtivi," a TV and radio broadcasting company, and later became vocal critics of the Mikheil Saakashvili government. Like other mentioned political actors (for instance, Georgian Idea, Civil Solidarity, and Georgian Mission), the APG also demands punishment for members of the former ruling party of Georgia, the United National Movement. Obieqtivi, which is active to this day, has provided a platform for nationalist right-wing ideologies and religious discussions.

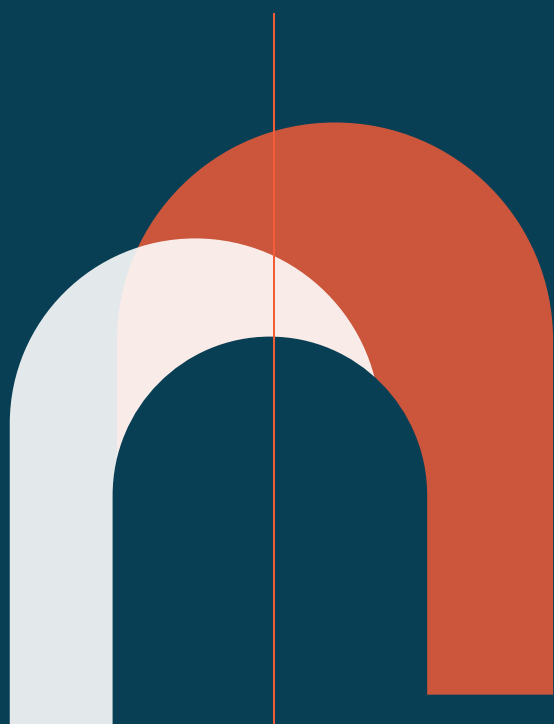
The APG took part in elections for the first time in 2014. In city council elections across the country, the party collected 4.72% of the vote and won council seats in several municipalities. Subsequently, in the 2016 parliamentary elections, the Alliance of Patriots won six parliamentary mandates, maintaining four of them in 2020. Accordingly, the party has been operating in the parliamentary realm, while backing conservative and nationalist proposals in the country.

The APG was one of the first parties with parliamentary representation that openly advocated for "normalising relations with Russia." The Russian Federation is presented not as an occupier, but as a mediator and facilitator by the Alliance of Patriots. This attitude is revealed in frequent visits by party members to the Russian Federation, which are justified as attempts at "doing a real job, instead on just pursuing the PR" (Civil.Ge 2017). In addition, it constantly instigates anti-Turkish sentiments and uses the border dispute surrounding the David Gareji monastery to mobilize supporters (iFact 2020). During the early years of its activity, the APG collected signatures in the coastal city of Batumi against the project of building a mosque there (Kucera 2016).



*SECTION IV*

# DECONSTRUCTION OF THE “PRO-RUSSIAN” LABELING



## DECONSTRUCTION OF THE “PRO-RUSSIAN” LABELING

Reflecting analogous movements gaining momentum globally during the “fourth wave” of far-right politics since World War II (Mudde 2019), the far-right movement in Georgia frequently mobilizes against the LGBTQ community, immigration, and Islam, as well as progressive or liberal politicians, activists, and journalists (Gelashvili, 2023). With even a brief glance, it is easy to notice that the Georgian far right has seldom, if ever, mobilized against Russia. Over the years, it is difficult to recall any event of such nature. On the other hand, the far right has orchestrated large-scale rallies advocating for direct dialogue with Moscow, endorsing military neutrality for Georgia, and expressing anti-NATO sentiments (GPB 2019, Gvazdabia 2019, Civil.ge 2022). In the aftermath of the 2008 war, when certain political figures and civil society organizations launched the “Russia Is An Occupier” campaign to bring international attention to Russia’s recognition of the independence of the Georgian breakaway regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the far right’s response involved depicting Turkey as an occupier and alleging its exertion of soft power in Western Georgia (Kucera, 2017). As such, anti-Turkish and anti-Western sentiments have also been utilized by the Georgian far right to narratively counterbalance Russia’s hostile presence in the region.

The articulation of Russia in both rhetoric and activities has incited enquiries among analysts, media representatives, and academics about potential connections between the Georgian far-right movement and Russia. In specific discourses, these groups are labeled as distinctly pro-Russian. This includes illustrative examples such as the characterization of Georgian March as the “Russian March of Georgians” in media reports, as well as the slogan of a coalition of opposition parties uniting against the far right, “No to Russian Fascism” (Gvarishvili 2017). At the same time, some factions in Georgia had in past distanced themselves from the groups labeled as pro-Russian (for instance, from Georgian March) (Nanuashvili 2020). This tendency in turn indicates on the public unpopularity of the association.

Nodia (2020) conducted a comprehensive quantitative investigation focused on far-right groups, examining attitudes toward the far-right groups held by experts that align with democratic principles. The findings reflect a shared inclination toward characterizing the Georgian far right as pro-Russian. A striking 97% of experts polled concurred that Russia’s backing constitutes a catalyst for the proliferation of far-right groups in Georgia, with 67% strongly affirming and 30% partially endorsing this proposition. Nevertheless, consensus waned when respondents were queried about classifying these groups as “pro-Russian forces.” A mere 33% unequivocally endorsed this classification, 14% dissented but acknowledged an alignment between their messages and Russian propaganda, and 48% presumed that, while some may harbor pro-Russian sentiments, they refrain from explicitly articulating them due to the unfavorable nature of such a stance in Georgia. Notably, only one expert among those surveyed contested any linkage to Russia, asserting that such affiliations were entirely erroneous (Nodia 2020). This study therefore clearly demonstrates that the label ascribed to the far right in Georgia is contested, being open to divergent interpretations across not only the media, but also expert perspectives.

Additionally, proponents of such labeling highlight the far-right narrative prioritizing (its version of) traditional values and Orthodox Christianity, mirroring Russia’s self-portrayal as the guardian of traditional values in contrast to the perceived “decadence of the West” (Wales, 2017). Furthermore, a prevailing argument asserts that the Georgian far-right represents yet another instance of Russia’s influence as realized on a global scale, via the promotion of illiberal powers (Shekhovtsov, 2017; Nodia 2020). It is worth noting that, unlike some European extreme-right parties that visibly praise Putin’s policies and portray him as a role model for their respective countries, the Georgian far right has been more reluctant in openly expressing support for Putin, at least until the full-scale war in Ukraine began. As Ghia Nodia (2020) concludes, these tactics might have stemmed from the

unpopularity of publicly exploiting pro-Russian sentiments in Georgia, leading these groups to align indirectly with Russia's interests by discrediting the West.

Despite the widespread perception that Georgian far-right groups are fundamentally pro-Russian, it is essential to acknowledge that this characterization is not universally undisputed. Moreover, considering that different types of discussions commonly apply the "pro-Russian" label, it is significant to deconstruct the categorization. Some researchers actively engaged in studying these groups express a degree of skepticism regarding the ubiquitous use of this "pro-Russian" label. One notable example is the comprehensive empirical analysis of media narratives conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) Georgia, which concluded that the majority of these groups cannot be simply or solely labeled as pro-Russian, cautioning against the oversimplification caused by such a categorization. Their findings indicate that the sentiment employed by these groups toward Russia was, at the time, predominantly negative. However, in their assessment of liberal norms and the role of the West in Georgia, the study outlines that there exists an obvious similarity between the opinions articulated by these groups and the messages disseminated by Russian propaganda (Sichinava 2019). Still, Gelashvili (2023) argues that such labeling reduces the dangers of far-right expression to a single, yet broad issue. Furthermore, such labeling might also bring a tendency to drive researchers and decision-makers away from considering the local roots of this radicalization.

Before discussing the issue of pro-Russianness in more detail, it is important to examine its meaning and connotations. While these political and non-governmental organizations may not explicitly label themselves as pro-Russian, it is necessary to address what makes them susceptible to such categorization. According to Silagadze (), an entity's position on the spectrum (between pro-Western and pro-Russian) is determined by its scores in four interconnected sub-dimensions, eventually forming one dimension: (1) rhetoric; (2) geopolitics and security; (3) civilizational identity; and (4) military alignment.

The pro-Western ideal type is characterized by (1) harsh anti-Russian and strongly pro-Western rhetoric; (2) viewing Russia as the primary threat, with

an unwavering pro-Western foreign policy response; (3) depicting the West as a civilizational choice for Georgia; and (4) robust support for military alignment with the West. In contrast, the pro-Russian ideal is typified by (1) harsh anti-Western and strongly pro-Russian rhetoric; (2) considering the West as the primary threat, advocating a rigid Russian foreign orientation in response; (3) aligning with Russia as a civilizational choice; and (4) offering strong support for military alignment with Russia. The Neutral category indicates: (1) neither harsh anti-Western nor anti-Russian rhetoric, and neither strong pro-Western nor pro-Russian rhetoric; (2) neither the West nor Russia being identified as a primary threat, with other countries potentially portrayed as threats, and advocating for Georgia to pursue a balanced foreign policy; (3) neither Russia nor the West as a civilizational home for Georgia, with these actors being self-proclaimed pro-Georgians; and (4) promoting military nonalignment (Silagadze 2021, 3).

In the Georgian context, Euroscepticism is often interpreted as pro-Russianness. Given the prevailing public discourse framing Georgia as a battleground between the West and Russia, Euroscepticism implies a departure from the "pro-Western ideal type" all the way toward the "pro-Russian ideal type." Internal perceptions in Georgia aid this perception of a "zero-sum game" between the two foreign policy paths. While a significant portion of Georgia's population maintains pro-Western foreign policy views, a notable segment, comprising approximately a fifth to a fourth of the public, expresses pro-Russian attitudes, as indicated by a March 2022 NDI/CRRC Survey. (National Democratic Institute 2022). Identified through criteria such as favorable views of the Russian government, a belief in increased Russian influence being positive, and advocating for economic and political cooperation with Russia, this pro-Russian demographic constitutes 23% of the electorate (Silagadze, 2022). Hence, despite most of the radical right groups not explicitly identifying themselves as pro-Russian, they actively promote narratives aligned with Russian interests, echoing Kremlin ideologies as discussed below.

Russia's state ideology is based on two key pillars. The first is a statism which manifests in presenting Russia as a unique and exceptional civilization, ef-

fectively a lone guardian of traditional values in the contemporary world. The second is anti-Westernism, portraying the West as a declining power which allegedly tries to bring instability and enforce liberal values on other nations in order to maintain its global dominance (Snegovaya, Kimmage, and McGlynn 2023). While the safeguarding of “traditional values” is a relatively new phenomenon in the Russian state ideology, the anti-Western discourse has a longer history in its discursive arsenal. In this vein, the narratives about the “decaying West” date back to the nineteenth century (Yeliseyeu and Laputska 2023), as anti-Western sentiments were strengthened against the backdrop of Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War. Also, at that time one of the most famous ideologues of the Russian Empire, Count Sergey Uvarov, formulated a theory that Russia constituted a unique, Orthodox civilization with a unique state and people, which was very different from all others, especially Europe (Sazonov et al. 2016).

The other discursive direction—asserting that the West tries to sow discord and spread instability globally, especially in the regions surrounding Russia—was one of the fundamental pillars of Soviet propaganda (Kolesnikov 2023). Especially intensified after the Second World War, this construction repeatedly juxtaposed the image of “an intrusive and conflictual West” to the peace-seeking Soviet bloc (Vacharadze et al. 2023). The latter narrative did not only provide a foundation for the subsequent anti-NATO narratives, but also to the contemporary Russian legitimizing narrative regarding its armed invasions in the region.

This Russian state ideology has been spreading via the ever-increasing propaganda tools in Russia’s hybrid war arsenal since the Soviet era. The propaganda machine consists of various non-state national and international actors including media outlets, journal-

ists, experts, thinktanks, and NGOs, as well as institutions such as the Russian Orthodox Church. However, the Russian state is the major actor formulating propaganda narratives and spreading them throughout various channels, using both state and non-state actors for this purpose. Russian top-level politicians, including President Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and Secretary of the Security Council Nikolai Patrushev consistently articulate the key messages of Russian propaganda in their statements, interviews, and newspaper articles. Similarly, those key messages are reflected in conceptual documents of the Russian Federation, such as its National Security Strategy and Foreign Policy Concept.

As asserted above, the pro-Russian propaganda campaign in Georgia takes different forms and frequently replicates the major narratives of Russian propaganda, adjusting them to the local context. The following key messages from Russian propaganda, advocated nationally as well as internationally across recent years, assist in depicting tendencies and parallels between the Georgian anti-Western and pro-Russian discourses, increasingly propagated by the far right in the country: By demonstrating the logic of Russian anti-Western discourse, this analysis showcases the contextual alignment of Georgian far right discourse with the Russian narratives, strategic aims and vision in the region.

- ▶ *Narrative 1:* Since the end of the Cold War, the United States and its allies have been trying to impose an order that reflects their own interests in disregard of the interests of other nations. In pursuit of this goal, they act unilaterally and—ignoring international law—use military force, which is manifested in the growing number of violent armed conflicts and increasing global instability;

Year	Actor & Statement
2014	<b>Vladimir Putin:</b> “Our western partners, led by the United States of America, prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun.” (“Address by President of the Russian Federation,” Kremlin.ru 2014)
2016	<b>Foreign Policy Concept:</b> “The containment policy adopted by the United States and its allies against Russia, and the political, economic, informational, and other pressure Russia is facing from them undermine regional and global stability, are detrimental to the long-term interests of all sides, and run counter to the growing need for cooperation and addressing transnational challenges and threats in today’s world.” (“Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on approval of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” RF Government 2016)

Year	Actor & Statement
2023	<b>Sergey Lavrov:</b> "We see the West making every effort to retain the remnants of its dominance, resorting to overtly neocolonial methods that are met by the global majority with rejection. The goal of the West is simple and at the same time cynical. It is to continue reaping the benefits of global politics, the economy, and trade and live off other nations' resources. Like the overwhelming majority of other countries, Russia will not accept these plans." ("Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at the Primakov Readings International Forum, Moscow, November 27 2023," MFA 2023)
2023	<b>Nikolai Patrushev:</b> "With the collapse of the USSR, Washington and London imagined that they had a chance to create a unipolar world. The Anglo-Saxons do not abandon these ideas even today. The West considers the destruction of Russia or its weakening to a third-rate country under external control to be a radical way to change the world order." (Unofficial Translation) ("Interview of the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation N.P. Patrushev with the 'Izvestia' newspaper," RF SC 2023)

- ▶ *Narrative II:* Against the current Western model of the international world order, which is based on rules shaped in accordance with the West's own interests, Russia continues to adhere to international law and rejects the policy of external intervention into sovereign states through the use of force or other rough methods;

Year	Actor & Statement
2015	<b>National Security Strategy, 2015:</b> "The Russian Federation builds its international relations on the principles of international law, the ensuring of states' reliable and equal security, peoples' mutual respect, and the preservation of the diversity of their cultures, traditions, and interests." (Unofficial Translation) (Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated December 31, 2015 No. 683, Kremlin.ru 2015)
2016	<b>Nikolai Patrushev:</b> "The Russian Federation is not interested in confrontation with the West. Moreover, the basis of Russia's foreign policy is the desire not only to defend its own interests, but also to take into account the interests of other partners. The initiator of the current conflict is the United States. Europe submits to their will. So, the decision to end the confrontation does not depend on Russia. We are always ready to resume equal cooperation." (Unofficial Translation) ("Interview of N.P. Patrushev with the 'Moskovsky Komsomolets' newspaper," RF SC 2016)
2022	<b>Vladimir Putin:</b> "The position of Russia and many other countries is that this democratic, more just world order should be built on the basis of mutual respect and trust, and, of course, on the generally accepted principles of international law and the UN Charter." ("Address to participants of 10th St Petersburg International Legal Forum," Kremlin.ru 2022)
2023	<b>Sergey Lavrov:</b> "Our collective Western partner does not allow for equality in the belief that the world should abide by its 'rules' rather than the principles and norms of the UN Charter and international law." ("Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with the Znaniye Society on the sidelines of the St Petersburg International Economic Forum, St Petersburg, June 17, 2023," MFA 2023)
2023	<b>Foreign Policy Concept, 2023:</b> "Russia is striving towards a system of international relations that would guarantee reliable security, preservation of its cultural and civilizational identity, and equal opportunities for the development for all states, regardless of their geographical location, size of territory, demographic, resource and military capacity, or political, economic and social structure. To meet these criteria, the system of international relations should be multipolar and based on the following principles: sovereign equality of states, respect for their right to choose models of development, and social, political and economic order." ("The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," MFA 2023)



- ▶ *Narrative III:* In order to maintain its dominance, the West manipulates public perceptions by disseminating fake news and disinformation and imposing liberal values, which are unacceptable for the majority of the public;

Year	Actor & Statement
2015	<b>National Security Strategy, 2015:</b> "The intensifying confrontation in the global information arena caused by some countries' aspiration to utilize informational and communication technologies to achieve their geopolitical objectives, including by manipulating public awareness and falsifying history, is exerting an increasing influence on the nature of the international situation." (Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated December 31, 2015 No. 683, Kremlin.ru 2015)
2019	<b>Vladimir Putin:</b> "So, the liberal idea has become obsolete. It has come into conflict with the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population." ("Interview with The Financial Times," Kremlin.ru 2019)
2021	<b>National Security Strategy, 2021:</b> "Against the background of the crisis of the Western liberal model, a number of states are making attempts to deliberately erode traditional values, distort world history, revise views on the role and place of Russia in it, rehabilitate fascism, and incite interethnic and inter-confessional conflicts. Information campaigns are carried out to form a hostile image of Russia." (Unofficial Translation) ("Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on approval of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation," RF SC 2021)
2022	<b>Vladimir Putin:</b> "It is notable that the West proclaims the universal value of its culture and worldview. Even if they do not say so openly, which they actually often do, they behave as if this is so, that it is a fact of life, and the policy they pursue is designed to show that these values must be unconditionally accepted by all other members of the international community." ("Valdai International Discussion Club meeting," Kremlin.ru 2022)
2023	<b>Sergey Lavrov:</b> "The theme of our conference is especially essential because we see that in many Western countries, traditional values are being eroded and fundamental moral norms are being revised. They are aggressively encouraging all-permissiveness, tolerance taken to the point of absurdity and various destructive patterns of behaviour.... This policy is being conducted contrary to the aspirations of the majority of people, is doing irreparable damage to their moral health, is eroding their civilisational roots and leading to disengagement, depersonalisation and the self-destruction of society. The worst effect of this is the growth of radicalism, aggressive nationalism, xenophobia and intolerance." ("Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at the opening of the forum Strengthening Traditional Spiritual and Moral Values to Guarantee Unity among Compatriots, Moscow, November 1, 2023," MFA 2023)

- ▶ *Narrative IV:* The collective West tries to expend institutions such as NATO and EU, dragging states like Ukraine and Georgia into them. This expansion policy brings instability and amplifies military threats against Russia;



Year	Actor & Statement
2016	<p><b>Foreign Policy Concept, 2016:</b> "The Russian Federation maintains its negative perspective toward NATO's expansion, the Alliance's military infrastructure approaching Russian borders, and its growing military activity in regions neighboring Russia, viewing them as a violation of the principle of equal and indivisible security and leading to the deepening of old dividing lines in Europe and the emergence of new ones." ("Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on approval of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," RF Government 2016)</p>
2021	<p><b>National Security Strategy, 2021:</b> "Military dangers and military threats to the Russian Federation are intensified by attempts to exert military pressure on Russia, its allies and partners, the buildup of the military infrastructure of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization near Russian borders, the intensification of reconnaissance activities, and the development of large military formations and nuclear weapons against the Russian Federation." (Unofficial Translation) ("Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on approval of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation," RF SC 2021)</p>
2022	<p><b>Vladimir Putin:</b> "The choice of pathways towards ensuring security should not pose a threat to other states, whereas Ukraine joining NATO is a direct threat to Russia's security. Let me remind you that at the Bucharest NATO summit held in April 2008, the United States pushed through a decision to the effect that Ukraine and, by the way, Georgia would become NATO members. Many European allies of the United States were well aware of the risks associated with this prospect already then, but were forced to put up with the will of their senior partner. The Americans simply used them to carry out a clearly anti-Russian policy." ("Address by the President of the Russian Federation," Kremlin.ru 2022)</p>
2023	<p><b>Sergey Lavrov:</b> "We have been warning publicly since 2008, even 2007, that NATO expansion, contrary to all the promises given to Boris Yeltsin and Mikhail Gorbachev not to expand their lines, was going too far, five waves of expansion. And then NATO, I mean at the last moment at the end of 2020, found itself just on the borders of the Russian Federation. Ukraine was pulled into North Atlantic Alliance. There were plans to build military bases on Ukrainian soil, including naval bases in the Sea of Azov, not to mention the Black Sea." ("Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with CBS TV channel, New York, January 22, 2024," MFA 2024)</p>
2023	<p><b>Nikolai Patrushev:</b> "The anti-Russian Western global strategy has not changed for centuries. I remembered Mackinder due to the fact that he was one of the first to put a theory behind the numerous aggressive 'crusades' of the so-called Western civilization against Russia. Even NATO's expansion to the east follows the same directions along which Napoleon, Kaiser Wilhelm, and Hitler moved." (Unofficial Translation) ("Interview of the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation N.P. Patrushev with the 'Izvestia' newspaper," RF SC 2023)</p>

- ▶ *Narrative V:* The West is fighting against traditional values, imposing liberalism, which generally manifests in the promotion of homosexuality and gender reassignment. In contrast to the West, Russia is promoting spiritual and moral values and guarding the traditional family, religion, and other values that are shared and respected by the majority of the world;

Year	Actor & Statement
2015	<b>National Security Strategy, 2015:</b> "Threats to national security in the cultural sphere are the erosion of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values and the weakening of the unity of the Russian Federation's multinational people by means of external cultural and information expansion (including the spread of poor-quality mass cultural products), propaganda of permissiveness and violence, and racial, ethnic, and religious intolerance, as well as the decline in the role of the Russian language in the world and in the quality of its teaching in Russia and abroad, attempts to falsify Russian and world history, and unlawful encroachments upon cultural objects." (Unofficial Translation) (Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated December 31, 2015 No. 683, Kremlin.ru 2015)
2021	<b>National Security Strategy, 2021:</b> "Basic moral and cultural norms, religious foundations, the institution of marriage, and family values are increasingly being undermined. Freedom of the individual is being absolutized, permissiveness, immorality, and selfishness are being actively promoted, the cult of violence, consumption, and pleasure is being inculcated, drug use is being legalized, and communities that deny the natural continuation of life are being formed." (Unofficial Translation) ("Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on approval of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation," RF SC 2021)
2023	<b>Vladimir Putin:</b> "Look what they are doing to their own people. It is all about the destruction of the family, of cultural and national identity, perversion and abuse of children, including pedophilia, all of which are declared normal in their life. They are forcing the priests to bless same-sex marriages." ("Presidential Address to Federal Assembly," Kremlin.ru 2023)
2023	<b>Sergey Lavrov:</b> "This creative policy enjoys broad support in the international community. A growing number of people, including in Europe, not only have a liking for Russia but also regard it as the defender of enduring traditions and real values." ("Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at the opening of the forum Strengthening Traditional Spiritual and Moral Values to Guarantee Unity among Compatriots, Moscow, November 1, 2023," MFA 2023)
2023	<b>Foreign Policy Concept, 2023:</b> "A wide-spread form of interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states has become the imposition of destructive neoliberal ideological attitudes that run counter to traditional spiritual and moral values." ("The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," MFA 2023)

- ▶ *Narrative VI:* Notwithstanding its hard effort to maintain its dominance, the West is in a state of decay, its power and influence is declining, and its political system is weakening. However, the Western states further enhance their destructive policy instead of seeking a reasonable compromise that would lead to global security and establishment of more equal and stable world order;

Year	Actor & Statement
2016	<b>Foreign Policy Concept, 2016:</b> "Systemic problems in the Euro-Atlantic region that have accumulated over the last quarter century are manifested in the geopolitical expansion pursued by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), along with their refusal to begin implementation of political statements regarding the creation of a common European security and cooperation framework, have resulted in a serious crisis in relations between Russia and the Western states." ("Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on approval of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," RF Government 2016)

Year	Actor & Statement
2021	<b>National Security Strategy, 2021:</b> "Under the conditions of stagnation and recession of the world's leading economies, the declining stability of the global monetary and financial system, the intensified struggle for access to markets and resources, the use of unfair competition tools, protectionist measures, and sanctions, including in the financial and trade spheres, is becoming more widespread. In order to gain advantages, a number of states exert open political and economic pressure on Russia and its partners." (Unofficial Translation) ("Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on approval of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation," RF SC 2021)
2023	<b>Foreign Policy Concept, 2023:</b> "The changes which are now taking place and which are generally favourable are nonetheless not welcomed by a number of states being used to the logic of global dominance and neocolonialism. These countries refuse to recognize the realities of a multipolar world and to agree on the parameters and principles of the world order accordingly." ("The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," MFA 2023)
2022	<b>Vladimir Putin:</b> "The smoothing out and erasure of all and any differences is essentially what the modern West is all about. What stands behind this? First of all, it is the decaying creative potential of the West and a desire to restrain and block the free development of other civilisations." ("Valdai International Discussion Club meeting," Kremlin.ru 2022)
2023	<b>Sergey Lavrov:</b> "The world remains stormy, and one of the reasons is that the Western policy-makers provoke crises thousands of kilometres away from their borders in order to solve their own problems at the expense of other peoples." ("Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with TASS news agency, December 28, 2023," MFA 2023)

- *Narrative VII:* The war in Ukraine has been instigated by the West, which supported an illegal change of power back in 2014 and then reinforced the Nazi regime of Ukraine and its anti-Russian policy. Russia's aim has been to end the war (referring to it as a "special military operation"), but the United States and UK did not allow the Ukrainian government to sign a peace agreement in the spring of 2022. While the majority of the world shares Russia's position, the West still tries to prolong the war in Ukraine with a sole aim: to weaken Russia.

Year	Actor & Statement
2015	<b>National Security Strategy, 2015:</b> "The West's stance aimed at countering integration processes and creating seats of tension in the Eurasian region is exerting a negative influence on the realization of Russian national interests. The support of the United States and the European Union for the anti-constitutional coup d'état in Ukraine led to a deep split in Ukrainian society and the emergence of armed conflict. The strengthening of far-right nationalist ideology, the deliberate shaping in the Ukrainian population of an image of Russia as an enemy, the undisguised gamble on the forcible resolution of intrastate contradictions, and the deep socioeconomic crisis are turning Ukraine into a chronic seat of instability in Europe and in the immediate vicinity of Russia's borders." (Unofficial Translation) (Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated December 31, 2015 No. 683, Kremlin.ru 2015)
2015	<b>Nikolai Patrushev:</b> "We proceed from the common understanding that any new arms supplies to Kyiv will lead to an escalation of tensions and undermine European security. Unfortunately, mass protests by nationalist radicals continue in the Ukrainian capital itself." (Unofficial Translation) ("Interview of the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation N.P. Patrushev with the 'Komsomolskaya Pravda' newspaper," RF SC 2015)

Year	Actor & Statement
2023	<b>Foreign Policy Concept, 2023:</b> "Considering the strengthening of Russia as one of the leading centres of development in the modern world and its independent foreign policy as a threat to Western hegemony, the United States of America (USA) and their satellites used the measures taken by the Russian Federation as regards Ukraine to protect its vital interests as a pretext to aggravate the longstanding anti-Russian policy and unleashed a new type of hybrid war." ("The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," MFA 2023)
2024	<b>Vladimir Putin:</b> "So, in 2008 the doors of NATO were opened for Ukraine. In 2014, there was a coup, they started persecuting those who did not accept the coup, and it was indeed a coup, they created a threat to Crimea which we had to take under our protection. They launched a war in Donbass in 2014, using aircraft and artillery against civilians. This is when it started." ("Interview to Tucker Carlson," Kremlin.ru 2024)
2024	<b>Sergey Lavrov:</b> "The Western curators of the Kiev regime, who were behind the anti-constitutional coup in Kiev ten years ago, not only failed to rein in the leaders of the Kiev clique during all this time, but also took advantage of the Minsk Package of Measures to arm Ukraine and to prepare it for war against Russia." ("Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine, New York, January 22, 2024," MFA 2024)

The label "pro-Russian" in the Georgian context thus takes on a broader interpretation, encompassing actions that ultimately serve Russia's strategic interests internationally and toward Georgia (Nodia 2020). Undermining Georgia's pro-Western policies by discrediting the West, transforming connotations of the West, and disparaging liberal values is part of these strategic interests. Convincing Georgians that adhering to their European and Euro-Atlantic orientation is erroneous and futile, as Georgian far-right discourse frequently attempts, aligns with Russia's interests in the region. Notably, just days before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, fifty-three political and non-governmental organizations in Georgia issued an "open letter" to Russian President Vladimir Putin, seeking assistance in achieving "neutral status" for their country. Since then, the degree of publicly aligning with Russia has become increasingly notable in Georgian politics, especially within the far-right discourse there. A prominent player in this effort has been Alt-Info, which, throughout March 2022, focused extensively on Ukraine in its news releases, delivering a narrative steeped in anti-Western sentiments and pro-Russian viewpoints ("Ukraine is responsible for the war it is losing," JAMnews 2022). Alt-Info operates its own broadcast and television platform, disseminating a daily narrative that aligns with the Russian perspective on the war in Ukraine.

Its content emphasizes a version of events in which the West is portrayed as the instigator of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Alt-Info's audience receives a steady stream of messages asserting that President Zelenskyy prioritized NATO interests over the welfare of his people. Extracts from the eight-hour news program on the evening of March 23, 2022, show these key messages ("Ukraine is responsible for the war it is losing," JAMnews 2022).

The war in Ukraine has paradoxically opened new avenues for the Georgian radical right to justify its pro-Russian aspirations (Gozalishvili and Topuria 2023). Within this discursive construction, Ukraine's descent into war was portrayed as inevitable due to its aspiration to join NATO, an ambition purportedly responsible for its destruction. The West was criticized for its perceived lack of assistance to Ukraine, with Alt-Info asserting that the West's non-intervention policy in matters of Ukrainian security left the country with no alternative. Alt-Info contended that the Ukrainian people were not consulted about their desire to join NATO, questioning the legitimacy of such geopolitical decisions. Their narrative suggested that Ukraine was losing the war, and President Zelenskyy was depicted as belatedly realizing the repercussions of initiating the conflict. Alt-Info framed the West as a provocateur, using Ukraine and Georgia as pawns while asserting that military neutrality represented the

optimal solution to the ongoing crisis ("Ukraine is responsible for the war it is losing," JAMnews 2022). Hence, the above illustrated ideological foundations have been implemented by the Georgian radical right in reference to the geopolitical shifts and security crisis in the region.

The Georgian far right thus deploys the narrative frames and anti-Western vocabulary developed as part of the Russian state ideology. According to yearly reports by the local media monitoring organization, Media Development Foundation (MDF), radical groups usually use four specific topics to create grounds for mobilization. These topics are: 1) identity; 2) children; 3) values; 4) the institution of family. The protection of identity largely dominates among these four topics. Herewith, traditional identity usually implies national, cultural, religious, as well as sexual identity (Khomeriki and Kintsurashvili 2023). At the same time, the anti-Western outlook defines the major aspect of construing these topics by the radical right. Most narratives spread by radicals related to values issues argue that neither Western values nor liberalism are compatible with a Christian society. Accordingly, the narrative claims that the purpose of the European Union is to violate traditional values and to promote and support homosexuality. As one member of the Alt-Info/Conservative Movement stated about the West: "It establishes liberalism, it establishes feminism, it establishes an anti-religious society, it propagates an LGBT lifestyle, it establishes depravity, what are they going to do with such a society?" (15.11.22. MDF)

According to the narratives of radical-right groups, the threat of losing traditional identity is linked to the West, which ostensibly has an agenda of imposing homosexuality and perversion, as well as promotion of "LGBTQ propaganda" in Georgia. Georgia's integration into the EU is presented as a direct threat in this context, while implying Russia's role in protecting traditional identities. It should be also mentioned that, against the backdrop of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Alt-Info has even further accelerated its anti-Western and pro-Russian propaganda campaign and tried to establish itself as one of the strongest openly pro-Russian political forces in Georgia.

Radical-right groups frequently make claims and spread information claiming that democracy and

integration into the West and the European Union contains the danger of losing gender identity. Hence, the homophobic narratives articulated across the radical-right groups and parties are deeply intertwined with anti-Western discourse too:

Alt-Info: "The question is whether the Georgian nation wants a propagandistic Europe of depravity, immorality, and dirt, which hides behind the name of democracy, but in reality, with constant gay ultimatums, tries to take away the existing and firmly established values from the country along with its future."

Vazha Otarashvili, Alliance of Patriots: "We were, are, and will always be Orthodox Christians; we cannot match [the West] because their LGBT propaganda will destroy Georgia. We should not enter the European Union, because we will perish; they will destroy us." (17.10.2022. Georgia and the World).

Protection of children ranks as the second most important theme. The majority of messages on the subject concern the topics of gender reassignment and gender identification among minors, as the radical-right narratives circulate opinions about psychological violence against children and the propagation of depravity among them. Narratives regarding the supposed normalization of pedophilia in the West are also frequent, usually accompanied by various pieces of disinformation on the topic mostly copied from Russian propaganda.

The protection of values, which is in third place among the four aforementioned topics, also has mostly anti-Western connotations, claiming that Western values and liberalism are incompatible with a Christian society and the West is forcefully imposing intolerable values on Georgia.

The final topic, which is protection of the institution of family, is mainly associated with abortion, a practice generally described as a sin and murder, blamed mainly on women. The messages related to the institution of family values are mainly about abortion, feminism, and the family as a union between man and woman. Within these narratives too, the West is portrayed as an actor that fights against the traditional family. Liberals and LGBTQ people, as well as the "propaganda of homosexuality," are named by radicals as the main dangers to children, while teaching sex education and gender-related issues in schools is



labeled child perversion and LGBTQ propaganda.

Member of Alt-Info/Conservative Movement: "Where feminism is present to a higher degree, there is one child per family, statistically speaking, and those cultures where there is strong feminism are on the decline." (07.09.2022. MDF Report).

Member of Georgian Idea: "Prying into the private life of a foreign family, and even more so, of a husband and wife, should be totally unacceptable for an Orthodox Christian." (13.11.2021. Facebook page of Georgian Idea).

Member of Alt-Info/Conservative Movement: "In reality, the usual libertarian agenda is being imposed in order to fully establish the worldview of the sexualization of children, the establishment of perversion... We, our parents' generation, and our grandfathers' generation were not taught such lessons by anyone, and in my opinion, they were the normal ones... There were fewer problems among them with sexual crimes and other issues." (03.11.2022. MDF).

Hence, as also discussed above, the anti-Western narrative is indelibly linked to radical-right discourse in contemporary Georgia, mainly on identity-related and value-based issues. The above-discussed far-right groups are the main proponents of these narratives, with Alt-Info/Conservative Movement taking the lead in recent years.

In conclusion, the pro-Russian sentiments within certain political and non-governmental organizations in Georgia are subtly evident, despite their reluctance to openly identify in this way. Following the conceptual framework outlined above, those entities falling under the pro-Russian category exhibit distinctive features such as a marked anti-Western stance, strong pro-Russian rhetoric, viewing the West as a primary threat, considering Russia a civilizational choice, and advocating for military neutrality or alignment with Russia. Their narratives, while fitting all four points of the pro-Russian type within Silagadze's framework, extend further to underscore a shared perspective. This perspective emphasizes that dialogue with Russia stands as the sole pragmatic path forward, representing the cornerstone for addressing pressing issues, notably the resolution of the long-standing challenges posed by the occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While not explicitly self-proclaimed as pro-Russian, their alignment becomes evident through an analysis of their discourse. However, it should be carefully considered that "pro-Russianness" is in no

way an exhaustive classification for categorizing the far right in Georgia, especially considering their outspoken illiberal influences and anti-democratic or violent expressions. Finally, this label, while important, ought not to refocus attention from local issues contributing to the public resonance of radical ideas and increasing tendencies of radicalization.

## MAIN FINDINGS SUMMARIZED

### *Deconstruction of "Pro-Russianness"*

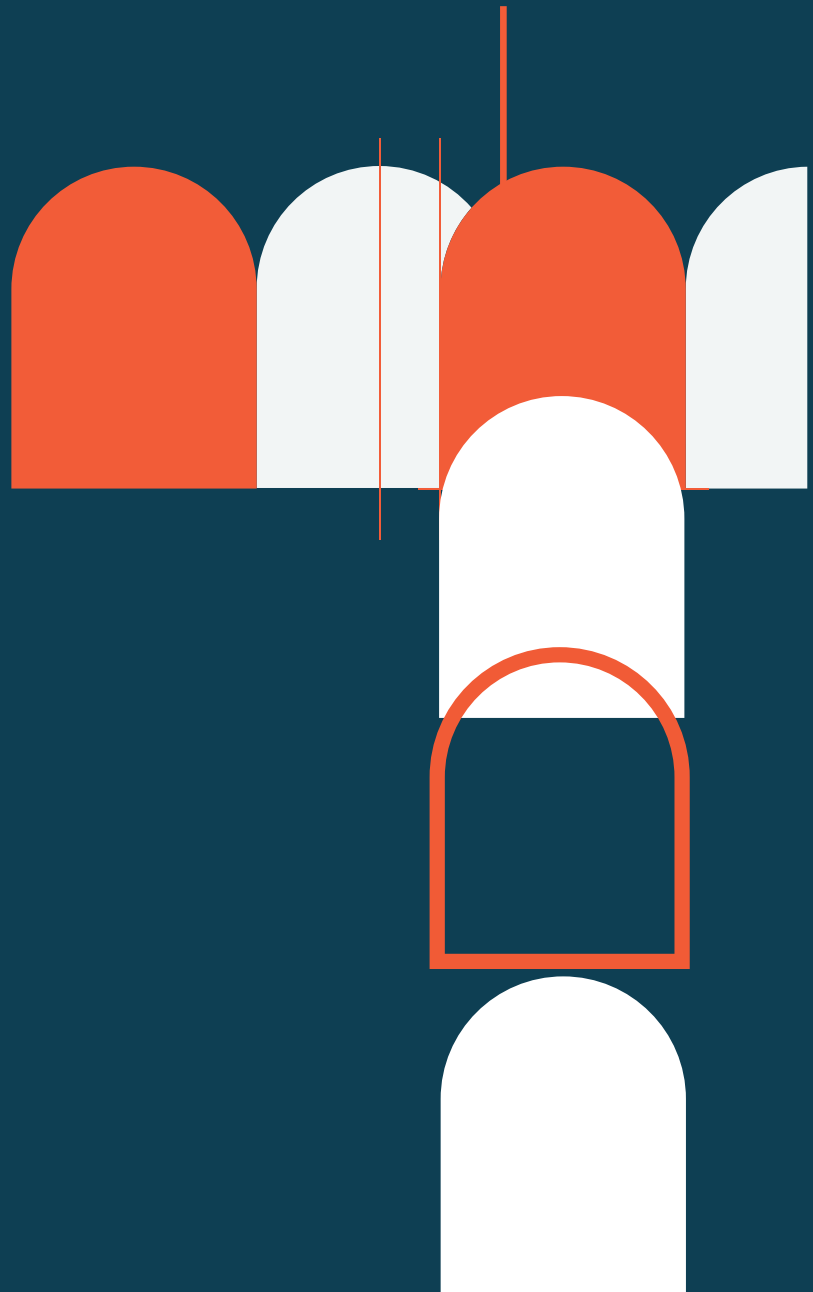
- Features of pro-Russian entities: marked anti-Western stance, strong pro-Russian rhetoric, viewing the West as a primary threat, considering Russia a civilizational choice, and advocating for military neutrality or alignment with Russia;
- While not explicitly self-proclaimed, the Georgian radical right's narratives fit all points of the pro-Russian type, emphasizing dialogue with Russia as a pragmatic solution for addressing pressing issues like the status of the occupied territories;
- Caution against oversimplification: Pro-Russianness does not fully characterize the far right in Georgia, considering their anti-LGBTQ agenda, illiberal influences, and anti-democratic or violent expressions.

### *Key Areas of Focus for the Radical Right in Georgia*

- Domains encompassed: Identity, religion, human rights, migration, and media, alongside opposition to the non-governmental sector.
  - \* Increasingly explicit anti-Western discourse and pro-Russian sentiments particularly on identity-related and value-based issues;
  - \* Emphasis on anti-LGBTQ and anti-liberal narratives within the realm of identity, characterized by narrative upholding of traditional, family, and Christian values;
  - \* Discriminatory stance toward the human rights of minority groups, particularly in terms of freedom of expression and assembly;
  - \* Critique of media and non-governmental organizations: portrayed as representatives of an illegitimate "liberal" elite.

*SECTION V*

# YOUTH RADICALIZATION AND THE GEORGIAN CASE



## YOUTH RADICALIZATION AND THE GEORGIAN CASE

Radicalization is viewed not as a condition but as a process (Campelo et al. 2018). In their study of youth radicalization, Nicolas Campelo et al. explain the phenomenon of radicalization as comprising multiple factors: “1) individual risk factors include psychological vulnerabilities such as early experiences of abandonment, perceived injustice and personal uncertainty; 2) micro-environmental risk factors include family dysfunction and friendships with radicalized individuals; and 3) societal risk factors contain geopolitical events and societal changes such as Durkheim’s concept of anomie. Some systemic factors are also implicated as there is a specific encounter between recruiters and the individual” (Campelo et al. 2018, 1). As seen throughout the analysis below, these factors are frequently entangled and intertwined in motivating young adults to engage with radical-right groups and activities. Above all, individual and societal risk factors lead the analysis concerning Georgian youth. Thus, the issue’s salience proves important in connecting different generations in their radical-right manifestations.

The recent empirical contributions to understanding the Georgian radical and extreme right highlight several driving factors. In this context, Mariam Kvatadze, the author of “Exploring Reasons of Extreme Right-Wing Attitudes Development in Youth: Case of Georgia” (2020), explains the radical views and behavior of young people using the theory of political socialization and its agents (especially family, context, social environment, friendships, peer groups, religion, educational institutions, social media, and war memory). In the study, she argues that church, unions, educational institutions, and peer groups are apparently not influential agents, but in the Georgian case, family and social media networks are deeply influential agents in youth socialization (Kvatadze 2020). As for this study, traumatic memories or feelings of deprivation also appear amongst the youth.

Especially in countries like Georgia, the radical thinking of young people is significantly influenced by their memory of the country’s wars and the collective remembrance of them. Georgian youth’s memories of

armed conflicts (the Georgian Civil War, the war in Abkhazia in the 1990s, and the Russo-Georgian War in August 2008) are connected with family memories and perceived as an extremely difficult period, when their parents lived on the edge of starvation and/or had to leave their home. These memories produce multidimensional tensions and trauma among young people about issues of national identity (Kvatadze 2020). Moreover, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has also provided a framework of the new geopolitical reality for a youth still processing its own traumatic experiences.

Annick Percheron argues that the family plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual’s political socialization, development, and values. Percheron asserts that an adolescent’s value system emerges through dynamic interaction and mediation among all the environments in which they are immersed (Percheron 1982, cited in Kvatadze 2020, 14). In addition to family and school, other important social institutions that influence the formation of a person’s value system are the Church, unions, and the government. However, religious institutions are currently among the few places where young people spend their time (Pearson-Merkowitz and Gimpel 2009). Simultaneously, religious influence may be disseminating through alternative platforms and media. This multidimensionality adds up to the complex nature of the individual and societal risk factors mentioned above. Notably, the significance of religion in an individual’s life positively correlates with rightwing worldviews at the international level (Norris 2011).

Hence, per the brief theoretical overview here, different ideological, social, and country-specific political factors contribute to the complex process of radicalization among youths and young adults. The analysis below discusses the findings from the two-degree field research and deconstructs the driving factors as well as the ideological composition of the young adults in Georgia. The analysis also draws on the mobilizing strategies deployed by the radical right in the country.



## DATA ANALYSIS

To attain a nuanced comprehension of the radical right's strategies, a deliberate decision was made to investigate the primary sphere of mobilization and recruitment: the internet. To assimilate into the far-right online sphere and gain access to these groups, the test profiles strategically embodied characteristics reflective of other real users deeply involved with far-right groups. While the test accounts were initially inactive, the engagement from the observant group members called for minimal involvement in order to be able to remain within the social media platforms. These attributes were collected from other members of these groups and included elements like a cover picture featuring the Georgian flag, symbols emphasizing Christianity, images from past demonstrations organized by these groups, reshared posts asserting the superiority of Georgian culture and people and posts mocking liberalism also reshared from the groups. Upon the creation of the profiles, prompt access to the online enclave of far-right group activists and supporters was achieved. In contrast, the test profiles with no such elements were not admitted to the groups, excluding the massive open platforms that are solely used for resharing other posts. Active individual profiles from these digital platforms readily added these profiles as friends on Facebook, with some of them even trying to initiate communication. Subsequently, seamless integration into Facebook groups established by far-right entities became attainable. Importantly, in our references below, we have hidden the actual names of these groups and channels in order to avoid their amplification. Instead, their affiliation with a specific group/party and the date of publication is indicated.

It is noteworthy that the entire network of far-right activists and supporters proved to be smaller than anticipated, typically comprising only a few hundred individuals. Significantly, many within this network employ pseudonyms and maintain multiple accounts rather than a single one.

Contrary to expectations regarding the prominence of Facebook groups as primary forums for discussion among supporters of these factions, they proved to be relatively inactive. Similarly, engagement on the personal pages of far-right activists and supporters mirrored this pattern, with a primary focus on shar-

ing posts from the official page onto their individual profile timelines.

One of the key findings of this digital ethnography concerns the tendency and strategy of radical-right content dissemination. Information is spread in the following way: one page creates content, and then members and supporters of a particular organization instantly share this post on their own page, group, or Telegram channel. Recruitment includes both ideologically covert and explicit strategies, which are discussed in detail below.

### IDEOLOGICALLY COVERT MOBILIZATION/RECRUITMENT

Radical-right groups spread their ideology, views, and principles through pages, groups, and channels in order to gain supporters and like-minded people. Most of the groups/movements in Georgia claim that they are not pro-Russian, pro-European, or pro-American, but simply pro-Georgian, interested only in protecting Georgian identity. Often, such groups spread information about the existence of a specific and immediate threat (legalization of same-sex marriage, changes or threats to Georgian identity, harming Georgian traditions, insulting religion, and so on). Subsequently, the logic amplifies a belief that the supporters need to unite with the movement to prevent these threats. These ideological mobilization efforts also include antiestablishment narratives.

“The government has officially announced that intrusion into a church and insulting the icons and Christians will result in five days of imprisonment starting today. On the other hand, burning the ‘holy’ EU flag will be punishable by six years in prison. That’s Ivanishvili’s amazing democracy.”

**02.02.2024. Alt-Info/Conservative Movement**

“Organizations funded by the West are already demanding the legalization of religious insults. They want to make insulting Christians the norm by using ‘freedom of expression.’ However, using ‘freedom

of expression' against the EU flag, according to them, should be punishable by prison. That's right, brothers and sisters, there will be no compromise with hell. Either us or them!" **15.01.2024.**

**Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated Facebook page.**

"We will visit every part of Georgia and prove that it is possible to do pure Georgian politics in this country." **19.02.2024. Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated TikTok page.**

Approximately 10–15 individuals within this particular online sphere would regularly contribute by posting a series of original statuses on Facebook. These posts predominantly revolved around deriding supporters of other political parties, asserting the primacy of their conservative ideology, or accentuating the prospective triumph of conservatism (notably their own vision of conservatism). As seen below, this construction of reality (a zero-sum game between liberalism and conservatism) also resonates with the sup-

porters. The routine resharing and commenting on these statuses by the same cohort underscored a consistent messaging pattern in the comment sections. Remarkably, this process became so conventional that even analogous statuses shared by the research team's test profile garnered a noteworthy volume of shares and comments, replicating the established interactional norms.

#### EXPLICIT MOBILIZATION/RECRUITMENT

For its explicit recruitment (open calls for any type of membership and/or participation in public or private events), Alt-Info/The Conservative Movement disseminated information about daily meetings in their main office in Tbilisi, as well as in the regions. The group initiated efforts to recruit individuals into the party during the observation period. These appeals frequently used anti-establishment sentiments and focused on offering an alternative to supporters. Planning for its electoral debut, the Conservative Movement was the most active in its explicit mobilization and recruitment strategies adopted online.

Date	Actor (Group) & Statement
<b>21.01.2024</b>	"If you want to see Alt-Info when you turn on the TV, and if you think we voice your thoughts, stand with us. The formation of the party is beginning now; shaping a membership-based party is starting now; and the television will be funded by supporters. Stand with us." <b>Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated TikTok page.</b>
<b>21.01.2024</b>	"I call on everyone who supports us, who thinks the Conservative Movement is their party, who thinks Alt-Info should be on their TV, come and let's do it together." <b>AltInfo/Conservative Movement affiliated TikTok page.</b>
<b>22.01.2024</b>	"For those who don't like to watch the ballet of 'Natsi' and 'Kotsi' [the governing and oppositional parties] and want to change Georgian politics and want conservative forces to be properly represented in Georgian politics, come, and we will explain to you exactly how to win and change the political situation in the country." <b>Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated TikTok page.</b>
<b>30.01.2024</b>	"We have fought wherever it was necessary to fight; we are going to do it until the end, and those of you who are similarly motivated should join us." <b>Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated TikTok page.</b>

One notable instance of such communicative dynamics unfolded during the State Security Service's interrogation of the conservative blogger Beka Vardosanidze. Given Vardosanidze's contentious standing even among far-right supporters, numerous active social media users posted statuses and engaged actively, urging people to assemble in front of the State Security Services building. For instance, on January 31, 2024, one active user implored, "Everyone who is in Tbilisi, come to the Module building! Everyone out to support Vardosanidze!" Similarly, one of the group's most prolific members, with dozens of daily posts, posted "#Solidarity to Beka Vardosanidze. We are meeting at the Susi (Module) building (Vazha-Pshavela Avenue 72)." This identical text was subsequently copied and disseminated across various Alt-Info pages, including Alt-Info Rustavi. This illustrates the explicit attempts at mobilization and recruitment pursued via the network of group members.

Following Vardosanidze's release after a brief period of interrogation, the group claimed victory, attributing this outcome to the mobilization they had orchestrated. They contended that the collective efforts and, above all, the sheer quality of those assembled played a decisive role in compelling the State Security Service to release Vardosanidze.

Even seemingly inconsequential events were seized upon for mobilization efforts. For instance, on March 5, 2024, during a temporary Facebook outage, messages swiftly circulated upon its restoration. These messages urged all Alt-Info online supporters to converge at the office for face-to-face interactions, advocating for physical engagement over digital. Additionally, attendees were encouraged to provide their contact details to the party for more streamlined communication. Thus, explicit recruitment and mobilization strategies are pursued online and on-site in parallel, with both substantiating and adding to each other. The upcoming elections this year have affected the intensity of the recruitment efforts.

## SELF-RECRUITMENT

The process of direct self-recruitment, characterized by users seeking information about joining and explicit engagement with recruitment strategies, was

less prominently visible in the digital ethnography. However, such occurrences did take place throughout the observation period. Typically, individuals (often using fake accounts) under posts disseminated through radical groups' pages, groups, and Telegram channels inquire about joining and request bank account details for financial support ("Where should I deposit money?"; "I am a big fan of you, how can I help you??"; "Maybe give us the account number, many will deposit money for you"; "Would you write me the account number?"). Responses from organization members are prompt when specific questions about meetings or bank accounts are raised. However, it is notable that this form of direct self-recruitment appears to be less prevalent.

It is important to note that the network of members and supporters within radical groups has proven to be smaller than external appearances suggest, often involving individuals managing multiple profiles to artificially inflate the perception of widespread support for radical ideologies.

During the observation period not only ideological, but financial mobilization proved pivotal in the radicalright group's online activities, especially Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliate platforms. To this end, the online interactions followed a repetitive pattern across various media products. Whether an hour-long TV show or a short reel, all related pages employed identical text in front of each post:

“ For those who want to hear the voice of Alt-Info when they turn on the TV, fund a channel that defends your position, your values. Alt-Info—your television! For financing: Beneficiary: Shota Martynenko TBC BANK JSC TBC BANK Bank code: TBCBGE22 Account number: [bank details] The Bank of Georgia blocked the account Bank Kartu CARTU BANK [bank details] ” – **22.01.2024. Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated Facebook page.**

The requests for money also feature specific, instrumental purposes: for instance, to support the existence of Alt-Info television, or for releasing imprisoned supporters. Notably, some supporters/members of the movement occasionally get arrested at violent events such as anti-LGBTQ rallies. These members are frequently referred to as “political prisoners” by the radical-right leaders and supporters.

“To help prisoners of war held hostage by a traitorous system! account number GE\*\*B-G\*\*\*\*\*GEL.” **20.01.2024. Georgian National Unity affiliated Telegram channel.**

“For this television to continue existing, your support is very important. Your help is very important. Your money transfers are very important.” **16.02.2024. Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated TikTok channel.**

During the monitoring of social networks, it was revealed that the Conservative Movement had established a monthly membership fee of 30 GEL. This is unique to the year 2024, when a full-fledged mobilization campaign was launched in preparation for the elections. According to the Democracy Research Institute (DRI) monitoring report, donations to the Conservative Movement notably decreased throughout 2023 in comparison to the year before (Online Discourse and Political Transformation of Far-Right Groups in Georgia, DRI 2023).

“Let us form a party with your limited budget. You may not be able to have a suitcase full of money like Bidzina Ivanishvili, but you can pay 30 GEL for membership every month. If there are 10,000 people like you, it will be enough to run a preelection campaign and enter parliament with such numbers that people cannot imagine.” **20.01.2024. Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated TikTok Channel.**

In parallel with the meetings in the regions, the leaders of Alt-Info/The Conservative Movement continue to meet with their supporters at their central office. These meetings with like-minded people are held at 15:00 every day, including on weekends.

#### MAIN FINDINGS SUMMARIZED - ETHNOGRAPHY

- The research uncovered a smaller-than-expected far-right online network in Georgia, often employing pseudonyms and multiple accounts to amplify visibility and engagement online.
- Facebook served as the primary platform for far-right mobilization in Georgia, with groups mainly facilitating content dissemination from official pages like Alt-Info, contributing mainly to ideological mobilization and recruitment.
- Far-right groups mobilized supporters through framing issues as threats to Georgian identity and religion, fostering urgency and unity.
- Anti-establishment narratives resonated with disillusioned youth seeking purpose and belonging within cultural or religious communities.
- The study highlights explicit recruitment efforts by far-right groups, including calls for participation in public events and political campaigns, often emphasizing anti-establishment sentiments and offering an alternative to supporters.
- Financial mobilization was significant, with radical groups asking for support through membership fees, donations, and specific fundraising campaigns.
- Direct self-recruitment involved limited occurrences of individuals inquiring about joining or offering financial support under posts from radical groups, with prompt responses from the members.

## PERSPECTIVES FROM YOUNG ADULTS: INTERVIEW DATA

The interview data were categorized according to concept-driven and data-driven coding approaches, as discussed in the methodological framework of the study. Accordingly, the main categories were taken from the research questions and supplemented with the tendentious groupings from the data. Subsequently, the codebook encompasses three main categories (motivational factors, violence, and (self-)mobilizational strategies) and nineteen subcategories<sup>2</sup>. Importantly, the majority of the respondents preferred to identify as “free supporters” than registered members of the organization, perhaps reflecting the general tendency (see “Taking Georgians’ pulse: Findings from October–November 2023 face to face survey,” National Democratic Institute 2023) of lack of trust toward political institutions and the unpopularity of political membership among the youth in the country.

### MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS

The radical right continually presents itself as an alternative to the established political, social, and economic models, claiming to be against the traditional political elite and in favor of supporting the needs of the ordinary people (Rydgren 2007). The young adults surveyed in this study share a pursuit for an “alternative to the mainstream” from a young age. Many of the respondents appear to have been inspired by the alternative ideas that the far right provided “beyond the closed informational circles.” The framing and communication style employed by these “alternative groups” appeared to have been particularly inspirational for young people. Besides their inclination toward difference and alternatives, the youth seem to have been drawn to the narratives articulated by the radical right for its legitimizing purposes.

At the same time, their perception of local and transnational reality had similarly affected the young adults’ interest in far-right ideas and narratives. While reality is ubiquitously represented as an antagonism between a positively constructed “us” and pejoratively termed “them,” the narratives of far-right groups are seen as best “serving Georgian deeds”

(respondent #14). Hence, the feeling of “being useful” for the country is intrinsically tied to the ideological identification with nationalism. This antagonism is significant for the youth to locate themselves in not only a local, but also an international “clash of cultures.” The feeling of a zero-sum game and a critical situation is shared across the respondents, explaining and legitimizing their actions within the context of “two opposing powers” in society. The perception of confrontation pushes the youth to take up public space in order to fulfil their sense of representation in the country. Thus, the perception of a critical situation and bipolar antagonism is a salient motivational factor for the surveyed youth. In this confrontation, the clash is perceived to be taking place between morally correct (“us,” “conservatives”) and immoral, unreligious (“them,” “liberals”) powers, characteristic of the radical-right populist discourse universally.

“Also... there is a cross in front of the parliament. There are two things in total, right? Either a cross will be erected, or Pride will be held, and it will be decided for us who owns this country. If the cross stands, it belongs to us, if the Pride passes, it belongs to them. That is, it is a symbol of victory. If they hold a victory pride, it’s a victory for them, what they call LGBT Pride: that is, they won and they decide what will happen in Georgia from now on.” (Respondent #1)

Hence, the youth reproduce narratives disseminated by the far right in the country, including their perspectives on the composition of society and the issue of compromise. In this overly simplified perspective, two homogeneous and antagonistic groups are struggling over the representation of the Georgian nation, providing a sense of usefulness and urgency for youth inclined toward radical-right ideas. The democratic practice of discussion, debate, and compromise is neglected via interpreting the political matters in “moral” terms and contextualizing the possibility of a dialogue within the above-mentioned bipolar confrontation of homogeneous and morally-charged groups (“us” and “them”).

<sup>2</sup> Codebook available in Annex 1.



“We can’t come to agreements on such matters, right? In reality, we are talking about the very existence of this country... and I can’t imagine a compromise on that.” (Respondent #1)

In this context, the issue of political identification comes to the fore. Among the study group, there is a palpable need to align with a political ideology, and nationalism has emerged as the most resonant option. This trend reflects a tendency among young adults to seek affiliation with ideologies that offer a sense of belonging and purpose, especially in response to the complexities and uncertainties of the contemporary sociopolitical landscape. In this context, nationalism—providing a sense of belonging and augmenting feelings of national pride—offers an appealing platform and adds to the sense of self-fulfillment for these young adults.

“I was aiming to find my place in some ideology. Basically, there was more interest from my own point of view, and the interest came from this [need] to find out where my place was.” (Respondent #8)

While peer influence and the impact of religious institutions do not show strong effects, they still play a role in informing the priorities of the youth in their perspectives and actions. Identifying religion as the main distinguishing factor for Georgian identity, the youth perceive issues related to religious identity, or perceived threats to it, as salient and worthy of protection. Hence, as discussed in the theoretical framework of this study, the influence of religion and the Church is multidimensional, revealing itself in different ways. In this context, the sense of threat to national identity encompasses the need to shield religious values as well. The latter features are perceived to be equalized with each other and in confrontation locally, as well as from external sources.

“It’s terrible... When they threaten your faith and nationality... I would go to a rally against such people and I do usually go.” (Respondent #3)

As for peer influence, this factor emerges on several occasions: in its importance to disseminating information, facilitating connections with the radical right, and expanding the attendance rate for particular public events. In this sense, the friendships work as “gatekeepers” for the youth to become interested and associated with right-wing radical groups. Having friends already interested or somehow integrated (as members, journalists, or youth wing leaders) into the radical-right groups, the respondents would either be interested in becoming acquainted with the ideas of these groups or have easy access to the “inner circles” that immensely influenced their trust and motivated them to engage as well.

“A friend of mine worked with them in Alt-Info and, so to speak, I was following them all the time. And then when they announced that the party itself should be founded, I was also there then... I knew those people from inside [sources]...” (Respondent #1)

Another significant motivational factor observed among the surveyed youth is the emphasis on Georgianness and the matter of its defense and preservation. It is crucial to unpack the nuances of this concept. Georgianness, in this context, is closely associated with values such as Christianity, moral conduct, and, by extension, familial and cultural norms, alongside admiration for the national identity. Consequently, any professed challenge or threat to these values is perceived as an assault on Georgianness itself. These assaults are primarily ascribed to external influences, revealed in either “direct impacts” from the West or indirect influence via the “local others.” In relation to this, the motivation of youth in their endeavors is notably fueled by a commitment to uphold and defend tradition. Whether rooted in cultural heritage, familial customs, or societal norms, the defense of tradition emerges as a driving force in their activities. In this context too, the outgroup is constructed as homogeneous and antagonistic, while the in-group is seen as a victim of systematic attacks.

“Our identity will be lost in that case... because our identity is fundamentally based on Christianity and if you allow a moral contrast [to Christianity], then our identity will be slowly erased, and I think this is the reason why I would not want to be accepted [into the EU] even if they say so.” (Respondent #11)

“For example, when the [Christian] icons were taken out of the churches and the kindergartens, this was very unacceptable for me... I had serious emotions, a serious protest regarding this. This is a Christian Orthodox country, and this was completely unacceptable from my perspective.” (Respondent #14)

### SENSE OF DEPRIVATION

The feeling of not being in control is an important driver of action for the interviewed youth. In this context, anti-establishment and anti-Western narratives are used in combination, in a populist communicative style. Referring back to the above-discussed pursuit of alternatives, the youth view the local situation as externally controlled and therefore not representative of “the needs of Georgians” (perceived as a homogeneous majority). Accordingly, the anti-establishment perspective encourages them to take action against “total control” from outside and contribute to the sovereign rule of “the people,” as well as the expression of their “true inclinations.”

“They have the Georgian educational and informational spaces under complete control, the social networks are also Western, they are under their complete control. Therefore, they have a monopoly, they control the narrative that gets to the people. They control people’s leanings, so to speak.” (Respondent #10)

Following this logic, frustration with social issues is frequently ascribed to the pro-Western orientation of the country and is reflected in anti-establishment narratives. The feeling of being underrepresented and deprived is ascribed to not only current, but also previous governments’ mismanagement, as well as their “pro-Western” orientation. In this context, only

the narratives of the leaders from the 1980s National Liberation Movement are remembered positively.

Such perceptions, together with insights about social inequalities, seem to be a strong driving factor for the youth to engage with the radical right’s narratives and politics. This narrative seems particularly powerful since the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which seems to have strongly influenced the sense of security as well as ideas about the foreign political path, as discussed in the forthcoming section of the study.

“We have been in such discussions for thirty years; all we hear is Europe. But I don’t remember any period in general when the cry for Europe brought anything good to our country. What ways did the population benefit for these thirty-two years? Nothing except for losing territories, increased emigration, and such.” (Respondent #3)

“After Merabi [Kostava] and Zviadi [Gamsakhurdia] were killed, things turned upside down in the country. They think that freedom is being enslaved by someone... So, I am against the system.” (Respondent #5)

### SENSE OF FEAR

The sense of fear is a noticeable driver for the majority of the respondents. This fear is related to matters of identity and culture, state interests, external influences on the cultural framework, local liberal influences, and security issues. As seen in narratives developed by the Georgian far right as well as in Russian state propaganda, fear is a significant tool deployed by contemporary illiberal powers internationally (Wodak 2021). Seemingly, fear precisely resonates on several different levels with the Georgian youth engaged with radical-right groups and narratives. Fears related to security, derived mainly from the memories of war and intertwined with anti-Western and anti-liberal narratives, take an important part in this construction, alongside identity-related fears amongst the youth. The full-scale war in Ukraine has exacerbated security-related fears, adding to the anti-Western narratives and the sense of pride in breaking the “main-

stream" proWestern discourse. In this narrative, radical-right groups' version of reality as it has developed since March 2022 is reflected in the justifications provided by the surveyed youth (Gozalishvili and Topuria 2023; AntiWestern Propaganda 2022).

"These... liberal, so to speak, forces in Georgia are provoking confrontation with Russia, they want Russia to invade Georgia... both are the real threats. We could say that they are trying to get Russia to conquer us."  
(Respondent #1)

"In other words, we are facing the danger of being conquered by Russia, but we are facing this because the West, so to speak, has so much influence on us that... its interest today is for us to confront Russia. Let's say, we openly saw that today Ukraine is on the agenda and tomorrow it will probably be us."  
(Respondent #7)

However, issues surrounding identity, concerns about perceived threats to traditional family values, and the influence on children, particularly regarding anti-LGBTQ attitudes, continue to dominate the rationale behind respondents' actions. Frequently, the actors depict the narrative as being at a critical juncture, using a populist approach to conveying crisis (Maher et al. 2022), which offers a doomed and inaccurate picture. This bleak and fictitious picture of the situation further amplifies the sense of urgency and fear.

"This is a cultural war and this is a turning point, it should not be allowed in Georgia. What will follow is that, for example, sixteen people may walk down the parade this year, next year there will be 100, then there will be 1000, then what? Of course, they will introduce... well, we all know their tactics."  
(Respondent #12)

"I have two children, and I don't want my children to be told what the West is preaching now... forcing us to protect their rights."  
(Respondent #14)

Hence, fear plays an essential role, not only in pushing young adults toward the ideas articulated by the radical right in the country, but also in justifying their actions and legitimizing the version of reality that they uphold.

## INVOLVEMENT IN VIOLENCE

"It was a turning point because the myth that journalists have the right to do everything was destroyed, and an answer was given for insulting the Georgian nation and values," comments respondent #10 on the aforementioned events of July 5, 2021. In a similar way, violence is frequently interpreted as a defense mechanism by the far right in the country. The offence in this case is interpreted as arising from the manipulative and intrusive influence of liberal powers, both within the country and at the international level ("If we turn the question around, then they also abuse society with lies." (Respondent #6)). While most of the inquired respondents narratively deny the incorporation of violence functions as a tool in their activities, still, situational definition and relativism toward violence is observed throughout the interviews.

The respondents either avoid classifying the events of July 5 as violent at all, or attempt to legitimize them as "the emotional response of the people, which is natural toward them." (Respondent #6, emphasis added). Hence, some respondents suggest that certain circumstances are deemed "significant enough" to warrant the use of force as a means to an end, while others reject any use of it. Additionally, the definition of violence appears to be nuanced, with some instances being framed as "emotional outbursts" provoked by external stimuli, simplifying the interpretation of violent actions in the public space altogether. In this context, the rights of minorities are deemed illegitimate in a narrative juxtaposition with values such as the "honor and history of the country." Thus, through deploying "moral politics," the actors reproduce populist tropes of far-right discourses observable in Georgia and across Europe. Moreover, in the context of imagining society as a confrontation of two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the moral framework justifies violation of the rights of the "outgroup" ("them") for the sake of "securing national values."



“When *they* come against you with ugliness and actions that undermine our dignity, in that case you have to fight, it’s not violence, it’s about protecting the culture and history of your country.” (Respondent #3)

“Why should they be arrested, for what crime, because they pulled down the flag of the colors [the LGBTQ flag]? To protect the honor of their country? And because they tried to save their dignity?... For me it was a really memorable [event] and my first protest” (Respondent #14)

“If you protect your country, your family, Christianity, morality and so on, then you should go for violence too. The response to the July 5 rally was the same as I told you earlier, a response to provocation. We were just standing, not committing any violence, then they come and insult us...” (Respondent #11)

“It depends on the purpose and aim: if there is a call to be made to someone, of course, use words, but if there is something to be solved physically, then action [is necessary]” (Respondent #4)

Moreover, the discursive strategy of “victim-perpetrator reversal” is frequently used in regard to the violent actions of radical-right groups in the country. Building on the feeling of being disregarded and unheard over the years, the narrative justifies involvement in violent actions by the “forgotten and abused people” in response to the “perpetual psychological harassment of society with unacceptable values” (Respondent #10). The justification for resorting to violence is often intertwined with the perceived lack of action or response from the established authorities. In such logic, when the youth feel that the stakes are high and that their concerns are not adequately addressed by the existing institutions or authorities, they express a feeling of obligation to resort to violent means as a way to assert their grievances or affect change. This is the context that the respondents provide for presenting violence as a potentially justifiable course of action in order to make their voices heard, or to address what they perceive as urgent issues.

“When you couldn’t make them understand, the law is not enforced, the government doesn’t take anything into consideration for you, things like that... then it [violence] is just the last thing left. You have to stand up physically, do not let them pass... I mean, I would prefer violating the rights of some LGBT person over destroying the country.” (Respondent #1)

“...because there are situations when you are obliged to use force to protect something... something that is important to you, even if it [the violence] is not right...” (Respondent #4)

At the same time, the involvement in violence, as well as attitudes toward engaging in violent acts, emerges as a significant factor in delineating boundaries among representatives of the distinct yet ideologically similar groups under scrutiny. Indeed, this issue is deemed the most problematic by members of different groups, as it hinders their attempts at cooperation. Importantly, in the denial of violence, the role of the Church and Christianity leads the argument. In other words, being religious is regarded as a preventive factor for some respondents to use violence. At the same time, online harassment, while narrativevely delegitimized, is not classified as violence for the respondents (with one solitary exception). This is especially important first considering the instances of online harassment by the far right in the past (Leaders of Tbilisi far-right march threaten woman with gang rape, OC Media 2017), as well as the importance of the online sphere as an essential platform of action, especially for the youth-dominated groups.

“I understand them too, because here, someone is telling you something crazy, stupidity. In this case, maybe someone does not have enough patience or capacity to explain something... When someone is saying something like “the cathedral should be destroyed,” maybe someone cannot be patient in this case, what can we do...” (Respondent #1)

## IDEOLOGICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL MOBILIZATION

As also seen throughout the findings of the digital ethnography, the election year has particularly affected the mobilization strategies utilized by radical-right groups with electoral plans. These mobilizational and recruitment strategies similarly appear relevant to supporters, both in online and on-site contexts. While the parties/organizations utilize the online sphere as the main platform for mobilization, the supporters also outline the importance of the internet and social media in their experiences of discovering and engaging with these groups.

As for the particular methods of engagement, the active or officially registered members of these groups—even though officially joining groups seems less popular amongst the youth surveyed—are involved in daily tasks. These responsibilities are specific to the election year and include involvement in group discussions and meetings with supporters, assistance in collecting signatures to qualify for the elections, help in spreading posters, and being present in every group activity during this period. Accordingly, per the respondents' experience, being an active member requires devoting at least three working days per week to these groups, making this membership an important aspect of their life. Additionally, they play integral roles in publicly promoting the groups and facilitating further recruitment efforts. Consequently, the modes of recruitment previously discussed, such as "pyramid-style" and bottom-up recruitment methods, also manifest prominently throughout the interviews as popular practices used by these groups.

"As for other activities, these include, for instance, drawing stencils in the street... for example, inscriptions of Antsukhelidze or Giorgi Mazniashvili or any famous Georgian, and so on. Basically, this is our activity. As for the personal activity I did with some friends a few days ago, it was simple, drawing stencils and making inscriptions." (Respondent #7)

Moreover, the supporters also perceive their role as important for motivating other young people and showing them that "it is not scary to stand by [these groups]" (Respondent #1). In these terms, attendance at every public activity is considered crucial not only for disseminating the group's message, but also for recruitment and mobilization purposes. In other words, young people are also recruited horizontally during the street activities of these groups.

"I may have just stood there and not done much, but it is also important to set an example, so... when you stand there, you become an example for some people that may be really afraid to stand there otherwise... and when they see you, at least, they will realize that they should also be standing by you."  
(Respondent #1)

The identity-related fears, particularly concerning gender roles, family dynamics, and the perceived polarization between "conservatives and liberals," both locally and globally, contribute significantly to this self-mobilization. These factors collectively drive individuals to actively engage in this type of political discourse.

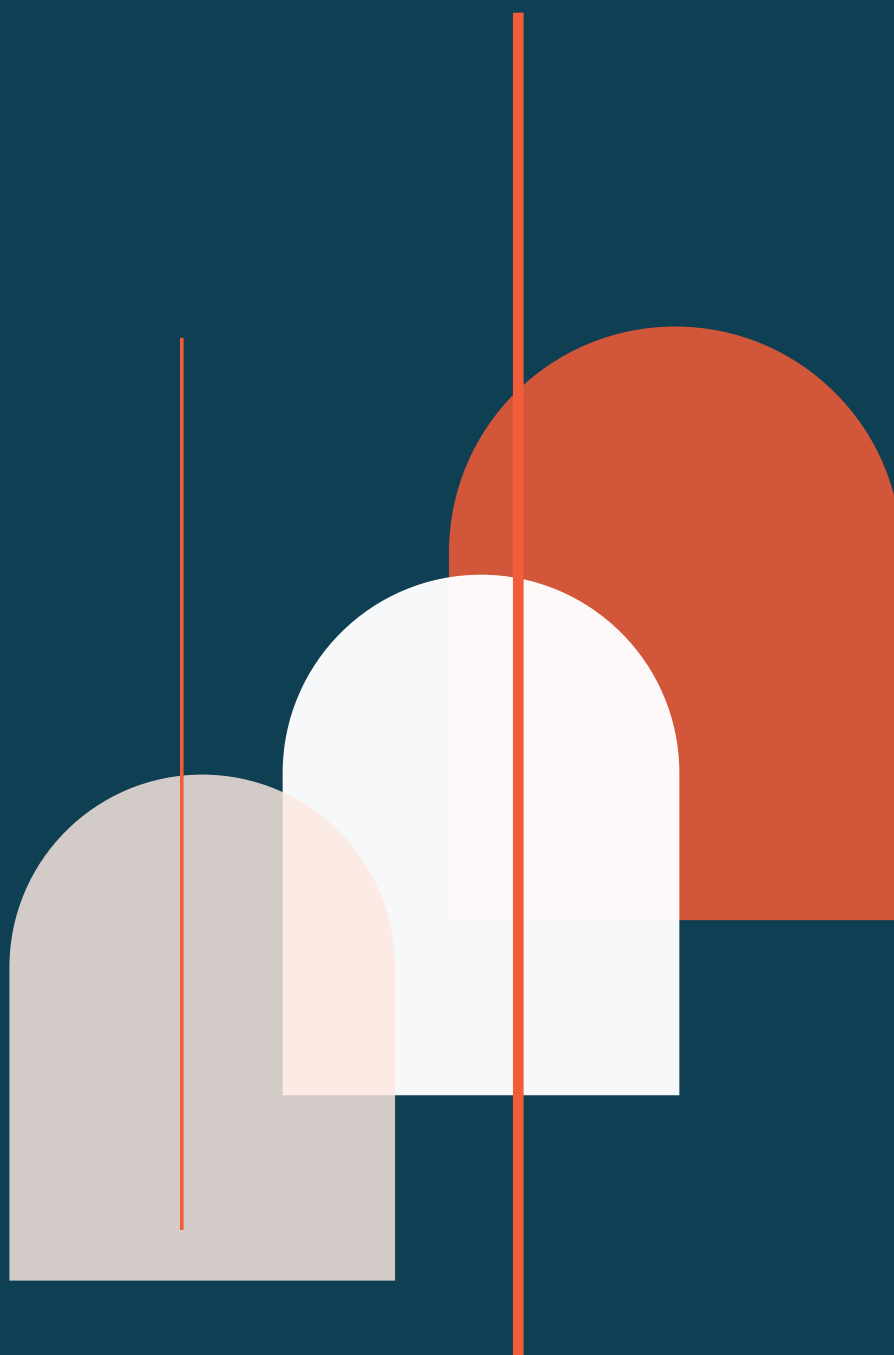
As such, although there exists a noticeable similarity in political perspectives and narratives between the Georgian radical right and Russian political discourse, young supporters of the radical right in Georgia appear to draw more inspiration from perceptions of transformations in the West. This inspiration stems from both examples of "positive occurrences," such as the victory of Trump, as well as perceptions of "negative developments," including high rates of immigration and the legalization of gay marriage. Unlike in Russia or other authoritarian regimes, it is these Western dynamics that seem to exert a greater influence on the ideological orientation and mobilization of radical-right youth in Georgia.

## MAIN FINDINGS SUMMARIZED - INTERVIEWS

- Simplified perspectives on national representation: In this perception, two homogeneous and antagonistic groups vie for representation, offering a sense of usefulness and urgency for youth inclined toward radical-right ideas
- Perception of zero-sum game: Respondents perceive a zero-sum game situation, legitimizing their actions within the context of bipolar societal powers
- The perception of a critical situation and bipolar antagonism is therefore a salient motivational factor for inquiring youth. In this confrontation, a clash is perceived to be taking place between morally correct ("us," "conservatives") and immoral, unreligious ("them," "liberals") powers
- The democratic practice of discussion, debate, and compromise is neglected via interpreting political matters in "moral" terms and contextualizing the possibility of a dialogue within the aforementioned bipolar confrontation of homogeneous and morally-charged groups (us and them)
- Young adults are attracted to right-wing radicalism as an alternative to mainstream ideologies, offering different solutions and perspectives on societal issues. Radical-right groups offer alternative narratives beyond mainstream discourse, which resonate with individuals seeking perspectives outside of the norm
- Mobilization strategies are affected by electoral plans, with both online and on-site mobilization tactics employed
- Perception of local and transnational reality revealed in antagonism affects interest in far-right ideas and narratives.
- Events and political transformations in the West are viewed negatively, amplifying their own cultural identity and sense of responsibility.
- Therefore, although there exists a noticeable similarity in political perspectives and narratives between the Georgian radical right and Russian political discourse, young supporters of the radical right in the country appear to draw more inspiration from perceptions of transformations in the West
- Frustration with social issues is attributed to the pro-Western orientation of the country, reflected in anti-establishment narratives
- Young adults seek ideologies offering a sense of belonging and purpose in response to contemporary sociopolitical landscapes
- Nationalism provides a sense of belonging and augments national pride, creating a sense of selffulfillment for young adults
- Fear is related to matters of identity and culture, state interests, external influence on the cultural framework, local liberal influences, and security issues
- Fears related to security, derived mainly from the memories of war and intertwined with anti-Western and anti-liberal narratives, take an important part in this construction, alongside identity-related fears amongst the youth
- While the majority of respondents narratively deny the incorporation of violence as a tool in their activities, situational definition and relativism toward violence are observed
- The rights of minorities are disregarded and deemed illegitimate in the narrative juxtaposition with values such as the "honor and history of the country"
- Online harassment, while narratively delegitimized, is not classified as violence.

*SECTION VI*

**DERADICALIZATION AND  
DISENGAGEMENT**



## DERADICALIZATION AND DISENGAGEMENT

The concepts of deradicalization and disengagement relate to the instruments for reducing individual commitment to radical and/or extremist causes and minimizing participation in violent activities (Horgan 2009). Those two concepts have been widely deployed, albeit with conceptual inconsistencies and faulty entanglements (Altier et al. 2014). It is thus important to clarify that while interrelated, these concepts of deradicalization and disengagement are significantly different from each other, especially as they take shape in practical terms. Moreover, these policies and concepts usually relate to the aspect of violence within groups classified as extremist, therefore depicting a practice of somewhat limited application. As seen above, even if violence is sometimes not narratively legitimized or individually adopted by radical-right supporters and groups, it still appears in a complex and multidimensional association with the radical right's activities, both online and on-site.

Disengagement refers to the behavioral process of distancing or exiting an extremist (and/or radical) group or movement, and it can be motivated by various internal and external factors (Bjørge 2009). The process of disengagement is manifested in different forms and phases: permanent or temporary, psychological or physical, as well as an individual or collective decision (Koehler 2016). Disengagement processes are related to the logic developed within Social Identity Theories, in particular the influences of social groups on individuals and the matters of group permeability and status of membership (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Usually, experts distinguish between three different subsequent phases in which disengagement from radical and extreme right groups occurs (Horgan 2009; Koehler 2016):

- ▶ *The doubt phase:* When individuals start to question their commitment to an extremist ideology or group. This may occur due to exposure to counter-narratives, the impact of push factors, or an increasing disillusionment with internal group dynamics;

- ▶ *The decision-making phase:* When individuals begin to contemplate the possibility of leaving the group;
- ▶ *The normalization phase:* Successful disengagement typically involves reintegration into mainstream society. This phase requires the rebuilding of previous connections or the establishment of new ones.

Importantly, it is crucial to minimize psychological after-effects and prevent stigmatization of the disengaged individual. It should be noted that these phases are not necessarily discrete or straightforward, insofar as individuals might navigate within or "get stuck" at a certain phase for a long period of time. For instance, the process of disengagement in some cases might be followed by the gradual deradicalization of the individual, particularly if the person was influenced by alternative ideological counter-narratives.

Deradicalization is conceptually more complex as it entails a fundamental transformation of extremist beliefs and drastic shifts in ideological foundations (Horgan and Braddock, 2010). Scholars like Tore Bjørge and John G. Horgan outline two main types of deradicalization: a "narrow" version, focused on rejecting ideological violence, and a "broad" version, which includes the denunciation of an entire worldview that legitimizes extremist violence (Bjørge and Horgan, 2009). On a psychological level, deradicalization efforts fall into two broad categories: first, direct approaches that explicitly attempt to modify ideological beliefs; and second, indirect approaches, which address individual factors together with the environment that influences extremist behavior. Thus, direct deradicalization methods attempt to challenge radical or extreme ideologies with counter-narratives. Meanwhile, indirect methods are primarily focused on reducing external and motivational forces that drive radical behavior by creating a change in existing social and institutional paradigms (Webber et al. 2020).

Furthermore, the processes of deradicalization and disengagement are influenced by a complex interplay of internal and external factors, referred to as “push and pull” factors. Bjørgo defines “push factors” as negative social influences and conditions that make membership in a group unattractive and unpleasant. Individuals often become disillusioned with extremist groups due to a variety of internal factors. These include disappointment with the group leaders: whether spurred by corrupt practices, questionable decision-making, or with unattainable goals, this feeling often erodes trust in the activities of a particular group or movement. Furthermore, in cases where a group’s methods become increasingly violent or morally repugnant, an individual might experience a deep internal conflict which may eventually cause them to move away from the group. Finally, internal conflicts and hostile internal group dynamics can also be decisive when it comes to individual disillusionment. In addition to these “internal push factors,” some external factors may also play a vital role in the process of deradicalization as well as disengagement. These external factors encompass the following:

- ▶ increased pressure from the state and law enforcement, especially for relatively new members;
- ▶ “competitive loyalty between the internal group connections and existing social connections of a particular individual”: this factor is particularly influential in societies with strong horizontal connections and a relatively strong institution of family (Webber et al. 2020, 59).

While the aforementioned identifiable tendencies exist, push factors tend to be rather individualistic, requiring more customized deradicalization interventions. In turn, the programs and activities that counter radicalization focus on different phases of the radicalization process itself. For example, prevention measures focus on the “entry” phase, in which a person becomes interested in an extremist ideology or becomes a member of a group (Feddes 2015). In

contrast, disengagement measures focus on motivating an individual to leave an extremist group (behavioral change): the so-called “exit” phase. So-called EXIT programs aim to reintegrate radicals into society, or at least dissuade them from using violence. These types of programs focus on changing behavior as well as on cognitive changes (such as changes in belief systems) (Feddes 2015). EXIT programs address practical, social, and cognitive elements of disengagement/deradicalization; they can be organized in the form of group or individual mentorship, training, or educational activities (Christensen 2015).

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Deradicalization and disengagement activities offer potential alternatives to forceful countermeasures. However, they need to be carefully balanced, ensuring that human rights and civil liberties are not violated (Bjørgo and Horgan 2009). The risk of abuse by security agencies and the ethical complexities of attempting to modify an individual’s religious or ideological beliefs also need to be minimized (Aggarwal 2013). Additionally, some experts argue that governments tend to adopt research results selectively and legitimize only specific elements of them, while often intentionally ignoring others (Silva 2018). In this regard, from a theoretical perspective it is preferable to separate deradicalization programs from law enforcement and delegate them directly to social service providers. At the same time, the latter approach may reduce the level of efficiency of such programs, due to a lack of coordination and other practical issues. In addition, there is a discussion concerning the resources being devoted disproportionately. Other arguments claim that it might be much more effective in the long term to focus on early prevention among at-risk groups, rather than engaging with already radicalized individuals. Hence, while the necessity of approaching the problem is observed at many state and non-state levels, the issue of responsibility—as well as that of ethical concerns and human rights—prevail in the discussion.



## INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

### EUROPEAN UNION

The first official public document to refer to “violent radicalization” was “Communication: Prevention, preparedness and response to terrorist attacks,” issued in 2004 after the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in Madrid. For a long time, EU strategies to deradicalization were mostly focused on security-based approaches. For the last decade, there has been a significant shift in EU approaches toward a more comprehensive and preventable model. The EU’s updated tactics extend beyond the hard security dimension and focus on the areas of education, employment, and social inclusion. This wide array of activities is often described as “preventing violent extremism” (PVE) or “countering violent extremism” (CVE) (Bąkowski 2022). EU preventive efforts focus on three main areas:

- ▶ *Primary prevention:* Aim to address broad societal problems like discrimination and poverty, which contribute to radicalization;
- ▶ *Secondary prevention:* Specifically targeting people who are at risk of becoming radicalized;
- ▶ *Tertiary prevention:* Preventing those already radicalized from committing further acts of violence. This includes programs promoting both disengagement and deradicalization.

It must be noted that relevant EU policy documents outline the secondary and supportive role of the European Union and highlight the responsibility of the member states to prevent and detect radicalization. At the same time, through initiatives like the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN), the EU liaises directly with frontline practitioners (social workers, local authority representatives, and prison officers).

In general, the EU tends to focus on coordinating and facilitating cooperation among the member states, with tangible financial assistance including research and program-based activities (Bąkowski 2022).

Similar multi-agency initiatives are also seen in the EU at the member-state level. One example from a former EU member state is the UK’s Prevent strategy

and its Channel program, which involve collaboration between educators, healthcare professionals, and law enforcement to identify individuals vulnerable to radicalization and offer tailored support plans (HM Government 2023). Another good example of a well-established state-initiated program within the EU is EXIT-Deutschland, founded in 2000. Specifically targeting individuals seeking to leave right-wing extremist movements, the program offers a unique blend of practical support, psychological counseling, and ideological disengagement strategies. EXIT-Deutschland’s assistance ranges from helping individuals relocate for their own safety, providing legal or employment support, to facilitating access to therapy for addressing the trauma often associated with extremist involvement (Firstlinepractitioners.com 2024).

### APPLICATION TO GEORGIA AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering existing best practices and the multifaceted nature of the threat posed by the spread of radical right ideologies amongst vulnerable groups, especially young people, a comprehensive multidimensional approach is required in order to address the problem at state, societal, and group dimensions. Moreover, international practices show the need to adjust policies to local settings and tailor them to research-based findings, as well as the sensitivity of sociopolitical contexts. Observing the findings from the Georgian case analyzed above, it must be noted that collaboration between governmental agencies, civil society organizations, and academic institutions is essential for developing holistic and sustainable solutions to radicalization. Moreover, based on the research findings and observations of the activities, experience of engaging in violence shall not be a single denominator for utilizing deradicalization approaches and policies insofar as the application of violence is flexible and situational for the radical right groups and supporters in the country.

In these terms, deep social, informational, and political polarization must be contextualized for developing tailored approaches to the issue of deradicalization of youth and young adults in Georgia. Moreover, sensitive matters such as religious associations and

group belonging should be prudently evaluated in developing these policies. While these require intersectoral collaboration and research-grounded policy discussion, listed below are several suggested recommendations applicable to the Georgian case and contributive to developing a general approach to the issue.

### **Long-Term Prevention Strategies**

While disengagement and deradicalization efforts are crucial, long-term prevention strategies focusing on early intervention are equally important. Investing in education, building community resilience, and addressing underlying socioeconomic grievances can help prevent individuals from being initially drawn to radical ideologies. As seen throughout the research findings, feelings of alienation and a need to belong appear at the juncture of radical-right association across the surveyed youth.

### **Tailored Activities and Programs on Diverse Political Ideologies**

Tailored activities and programs aimed at raising awareness of diverse political ideologies are essential for the case-tailored policies. These types of programs/activities should be implemented with a precise scope and aim to open the discussion on political ideologies on different scales. As seen throughout the study, an absence of discussion of political issues at home and at school, as well as the feeling of limited access to the spectrum of ideologies, contribute to increased interest in “hidden” or “unpopular” ideological inclinations amongst youth. A balanced discussion of the spectrum of ideologies and their historical contextualization could be a platform of scrutiny available to youth to test their interests and answer questions otherwise addressed by biased actors (in this case, radical-right groups). Programs should be focused on educational activities in order to increase participants’ critical thinking skills regarding political ideologies.

### **Programs on Raising Awareness of Radical-Right Ideologies**

Related to the recommendations above, the educational programs implemented via extra-curricular

education could provide a space for raising youth awareness about radicalization and extremism as these relate to their daily lives. Such an approach would entail not only a historical discussion on the influence of radicalization tendencies in the region, but also on the immediate effects of radical and extremist groups for countries like Georgia. In this way, the feeling of being neglected in society, as well as the sense of usefulness via practicing radical-right ideas (as identified throughout the research), would be critically scrutinized and addressed.

### **Youth-Oriented Programs Encouraging Active Participation in Society**

Based on the findings, a sense of social inclusion and group acceptability is an essential need among young adults vulnerable to radicalization. As such, it is essential to promote a sense of inclusion and space for self-expression in order to foster a feeling of belonging and purpose outside of radical-right circles. These could be materialized via supporting small- and large-scale community initiatives that offer young adults a space of belonging and association, all the while contributing to their feeling of contribution to the wider society.

### **Integration of Psychological Support**

Given the psychological complexity involved in disengagement and deradicalization, it is crucial to incorporate mental health support into programs. This can include counseling or therapy sessions to address the emotional challenges individuals may face during their transition away from radical and extremist ideologies.

**While these recommendations are education-dominated, the research findings are applicable for claiming responsibility by the state, media, and non-governmental sector.**



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# ANNEX

TABLE 1 - ANALYTICAL CODEBOOK OF THE STUDY

Codebook
Age
Education
Occupation
Affiliation/ Additional comment
<b>Motivational Factors: Why are the youth becoming involved in the radical, frequently violent, movements and activities?</b>
Motivation - search for an alternative
Motivation - Ideological Inclination
Influence of the religious institutions
Peer influence
Sense of deprivation
Sense of Fear
International Aspect/Perspective
Defending "Georgianness"
<b>Involvement in Violence</b>
Definition of Violence
Online Harassment
Justification of violence
Sense of impunity
<b>What are the main mobilization strategies utilized by the radical right in the elections' year?</b>
"Pyramid" recruitment
Online ideological
Online organizational
On-site organizational
On-site ideological
<b>Main self-mobilization factors</b>
Online information
Decision to get involved



# THE “MIDDLE CORRIDOR”: GEORGIA AS A PART OF CHINA’S WESTPOLITIK

Authors: **Irakli Javakhishvili**

# THE “MIDDLE CORRIDOR”: GEORGIA AS A PART OF CHINA’S WESTPOLITIK

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## ABSTRACT

The project of the “Middle Corridor” which is a component of China’s “grand strategy”, is an important instrument of Beijing’s *Westpolitik*. Georgia, in turn, has a significant place in this project, due to its favorable geopolitical location. Through the regions of Central Asia and the South Caucasus, China will create various land connections with the European Union, which will also serve as an alternative to the Russian route. This will be the shortest way from China to Romania – the “Middle Corridor”, which will pass through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the South Caucasus, and the Black Sea. In the same sense, the Anaklia deep-water port can become an essential node in the functioning of the Corridor, especially if its construction is carried out by a Chinese company (it will have not only an economic, but also a significant political weight). However, regardless of the possible economic benefits that Georgia may receive from the “Middle Corridor” project, including through the Anaklia port, such a shift in foreign policy priorities of Tbilisi may cause irreparable damage to the country’s aspirations to join the EU and, in general, completely alienate it from the Western democratic world. At the same time, the benefits of the Middle Corridor project will be much greater for China (in proportionality) than for Georgia, particularly in the light of the fact that Beijing often shows dishonesty in bilateral agreements and partnerships, and often applies economic and political leverage to the contracting party.

## INTRODUCTION

China’s growing power was already visible in the early 1990s. Some authors pointed out that “the rise of China, if it continues, may be the most important trend in the world for the next century” (Kristof 1993, 59). It is obvious that such prophecies turned out to

be more or less true. China has become one of the global powers whose influence and interests are not limited to Asia but rather reach other regions and continents. In the third millennium, China’s combination of political, economic, and military profiles is often referred to as Beijing’s “grand strategy” (Wang 2008). Some people called it peaceful development, while others viewed it in terms of an “unpeaceful rise” (Mearsheimer 2006). In any case, Beijing has global visions that are not purely based on political-military power, but also include significant economic and cultural dimensions.

An integral part of China’s “grand strategy” is the Middle Corridor connecting China with Europe. European leaders are increasingly concerned with this project as it can become an alternative to the Northern Route (linking China with the European markets via Russia) which is now suspended due to the sanctions against Russia. The Middle Corridor covers the regions such as Central Asia, the Caspian, the South Caucasus, and the Black Sea. At the same time, European leaders hope to reduce Russia’s influence by implementing this project. This is another reason why European Leaders are increasingly engaged in Central Asia (Komilov 2022). However, it should also be noted that not only European countries will benefit from the implementation of this Corridor, but also countries such as Azerbaijan, Iran, and Russia. For this reason, the Middle Corridor can be “a double-edged sword” (Duffy 2023) to the West. China’s *Westpolitik* is a rather complex strategy, since it not only involves aligning with the interests of European countries but also requires finding common points of contact with the regions of Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

In this broader picture of China’s foreign policy, Georgia can also play an important role especially after the two countries officially announced an agreement on strategic partnership on 31 July 2023. This fact

“surprised many in Georgia and in the West” (Avdaliani 2023). Some commentators note that “the consequences of the partnership are vague – as is usual with China’s “strategic partnership” deals – but, they still signify a growing interest of the Chinese giant in small Georgia” (Gerges 2023, 3). This “strategic uncertainty” can be better explained by the uncertain foreign policy of the Georgian Dream Party towards the West in recent years and, in the light of the war in Ukraine, Georgia’s intensified “flirtation” with Russia. In this sense, a partnership with China can be seen as an alternative to an obvious rapprochement with Russia.

This paper primarily focuses on qualitative methods of research, including discourse analysis, regarding the China-Georgia relations and, in particular, the potential of the Anaklia deep-water port as an integral part of Georgia’s share in the Middle Corridor project pursued by Beijing. With this kind of qualitative analysis, we will try to show the interests of China and Georgia, their policies, and ways of action. In this regard, we can now pose some research questions to better determine the main direction we intend to go to in this paper. What is the *Westpolitik* of China and how is the Middle Corridor an instrument of this policy? What is Georgia’s concern with this policy and what role can it play in the Corridor project? Finally, what can the possible consequences (and risks) of the construction of the Anaklia port be, and which party will benefit more?

#### WHAT IS THE WESTPOLITIK OF CHINA?

The “Middle Corridor” is an essential part of China’s *Westpolitik* (Western policy). If we take into account Beijing’s challenges in relations with the West, it primarily concerns security issues related to the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. As for relations with Europe in particular, China focuses on its relationship with Berlin, for “Germany is pivotal to the West because it is pivotal to China” (Gardels 2023). This means that new perspectives of rapprochement between “a German-anchored Europe” (Gardels 2023) and China may arise. In turn, such an independent policy for Germany may express the formation of the plurality of power centers in the world.

The Belt and Road Initiative focuses on economic aspects and targets the European economies in need of infrastructural projects – Central, Eastern, and Southern European Countries. These regions can be “a gateway to Western European markets” (Gruebler 2021, 579). This is one of the examples of how China tries to influence the world markets and to “replace” the neoliberal hegemonic economy. Beijing develops its economic ties within the “17+1” initiative (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia, Greece, Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania + China). Central and Eastern European region is “a hub for China’s access to Europe and the only route through which to reach the European market” (Üncel and Güner 2021, 52; Vangeli 2017, 104). Non-EU countries also aspire to establish close relations with China but it is too early to talk about tangible results.

China’s growing influence in Central and Eastern European countries is determined by four factors:

- ▶ *The establishment of bilateral economic relations with Central and Eastern European States given growing Chinese investment opportunities;*
- ▶ *And in view of the severe financial crisis;*
- ▶ *The establishment of a network of bilateral and multilateral relations, as exemplified by the intergovernmental and transgovernmental forum “Cooperation between China and Central and East European Countries” (16+1);*
- ▶ *The political cooperation between China, Central, and Eastern European countries includes fostering political relations, which may impact ongoing EU-China disputes such as the arms embargo (European Parliament 2015, 37).*

Most European countries have already developed strategic approaches to Beijing, and only a few of them have published “an official China strategy” (Bartsh and Wessling 2023, 10). Such developments were the consequence of “an overexpansion of Chinese interests in Europe” (Cole 2020, 122) since 2016. Cole (2020) describes Chinese-European relations during the past forty years as an expression of

the “carrot and stick approach” (p. 123). To make it clearer, he points out that “when an economic partner takes a political step of which Beijing disapproves, it applies economic penalties to the nation it blames” (Cole 2020, 123). In this way, Chinese-European relations can be characterized by a multiple of imbalances while this kind of penalties has already been imposed on the countries like Norway.

A constituent part of China’s *Westpolitik* is its relationship with the countries of the European Eastern Partnership (EaP). Beijing is steadily increasing its trade and investment in the region. Although its trade is more intense with Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine (with the latter before the war), the South Caucasus region is geopolitically very important for the trade route that connects China with Europe. According to the World Bank, since 2005, China’s trade volume with Georgia has increased nearly 885% (Popkhadze 2021). In addition to its favorable geopolitical location, the South Caucasus region is “the shortest corridor from China’s westernmost province of Xinjiang to the European Union (EU)” (Avdaliani 2023b). However, China’s interest in the region should be seen in a wider context: the geopolitical importance of the Black Sea Basin is increasing in the twenty-first century; the interests of Russia, the West (the NATO and the EU), and (already) China intersect here simultaneously.

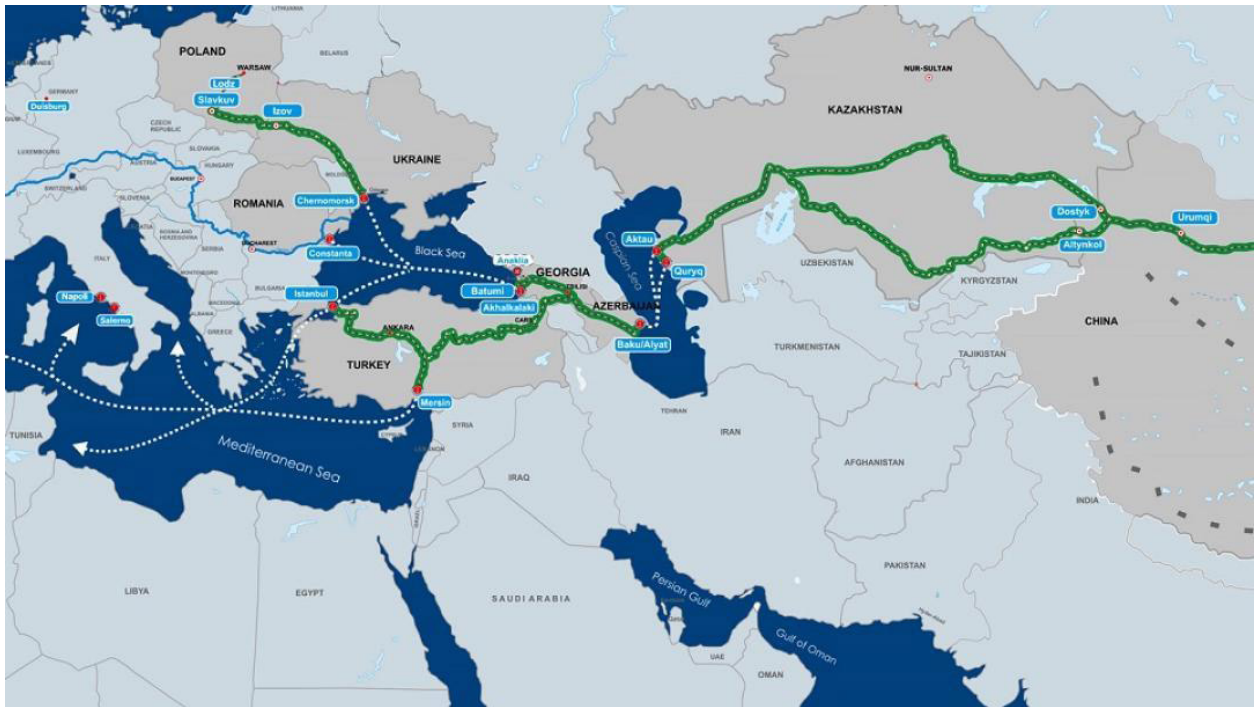
Kumukov and Luzyanin (2024) mention that China has a very pragmatic foreign policy in the South Caucasus region, establishing close relations with all the countries of the region regardless of conflicts or wars between some of them (Armenia and Azerbaijan), and that “such diplomacy ensured China’s attractiveness as a serious unbiased partner, while shattering the illusion that it could be seen as a geopolitical ally at the same time” (p. 186). Others believe this is a real challenge to the West which tries to “build an On-Ramp to the BRI in the strategic region of the South Caucasus” (Fawn and Bruder 2022, 351). In any case, the BRI (the Belt and Road Initiative) has remained a strong instrument in the hands of Beijing. At the same time, the transit potential of the South Caucasus is visible in the geopolitical vision of Beijing, and the latter accordingly formulates its foreign policy strategy towards the region.

## THE “MIDDLE CORRIDOR” AND GEORGIA

In November 2023, the World Bank issued a special report focusing on the role of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in the trade network between China and Europe. Additionally, it identified the priorities of this Corridor. The report states that “the Middle Corridor (MC) is a multimodal transport corridor connecting China to Europe, which has been receiving elevated attention following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine” (World Bank 2023, 5). As the World Bank Regional Director for the South Caucasus Rolande Pryce said, by 2030 the Corridor “can triple trade volumes ... to 11 million tons as compared with 2021 levels” (Satubaldina 2024).

In September 2023, Chinese Ambassador to Georgia Zhou Qian reiterated China’s interest in infrastructure projects in Georgia, including The Anaklia Deep-Water Port project. According to him, “generally speaking, we, Chinese companies and Chinese enterprises have interests in all infrastructure projects, the ‘Belt and Road’ and ‘the Middle Corridor’”. If conditions are good, Chinese companies have no problem to participate in the construction of Anaklia Port or other Projects” (Civil Georgia 2023). On the other hand, Georgian Prime Minister at the time, Irakli Garibashvili, emphasized the fact to make the Middle Corridor “more attractive” stating that “the Middle Corridor is critical for China-Europe logistics because we have no other choice but the Northern Route”, and that “the Middle Corridor is important for the future prosperity of Georgia” (Agenda 2023). In December 2023, the same ambassador pointed out geopolitical importance of Georgia: “in my opinion, the greatest advantage of Georgia is its geographical location – it is located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia and has signed free trade agreements with China, the European Union and the surrounding regions. I would also like to point out that exploiting this advantage requires coordination and joint support between China and the EU” (Agenda 2023b). The words are a good proof that Georgia is an integral part of China’s *Westpolitik*.





Source: **Caucasus Watch**. 22 June 2022. <https://caucasuswatch.de/en/insights/the-rebirth-of-the-middle-corridor.html>

In recent years, the Northern Route carried much more cargo from China to Europe than the corridor through the Caucasus. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 had a great impact on changing this reality. By 2030, the Middle Corridor should work almost at full capacity, for which Georgia's infrastructure should also be fully functional (so that it can freely carry heavy flows). One of the biggest challenges for its functioning is the security situation in the region. In January 2024, the train made a nearly 3200-mile journey from Xian, China, to the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, foretelling the opening of the Middle Corridor project (Pannier 2024).

### THE ANAKLIA PORT AS A NODE OF THE MIDDLE CORRIDOR?

By the end of May 2024, it will be known which company will build the Anaklia deep-water port project – Swiss-Luxemburgish or Chinese-Singaporean (JAMnews 2024). It would be hard to deny that this kind of investment is sometimes made in the terms of geopolitics. Thus, if the Chinese company wins the tender, China may use the mentioned economic project for political purposes as well. Obviously, from this

point of view, the Anaklia port can become one of the important nodes of the Middle Corridor. Due to its growing geopolitical weight, China is interested in Black Sea ports (including Batumi and Poti) (IISS 2023), and the possible construction of the Anaklia port by a Chinese company could even make it a serious competitor to Turkish ports. In case of such a development, it can be unequivocally said that the mentioned step will be anti-Western and anti-European from the Georgian authorities.

Some experts fear that "granting control of the planned Anaklia deep-sea port to China could be a strategic mistake for Georgia", because it "may inadvertently align us more closely with Russia, posing geopolitical risks" (Front News Georgia 2024). If this hypothesis is not completely true (in relation to Russia), it is certainly clear that the growth of China's influence on the economic and perhaps political sphere of Georgia will be an anti-Western move. Rather, China's main geopolitical ambition is to reduce the influence of the United States and Europe in as many regions of the world as possible, and impose its own rules on countries. It is unlikely that Beijing will oppose Russia's interests in the South Caucasus region; on the contrary, if we consider the

confrontation between China and the United States in a global context, with the possible transfer of control over the Anaklia port to Beijing, Georgia may find itself in the anti-American camp.

There is no doubt that the Anaklia deep-water port will significantly increase cargo turnover from Central Asia to Europe and vice versa, and at the same time Georgia's transit capacities. Since 2018, after the Georgia-China Free Trade Agreement entered into force, the trade turnover between the two countries has increased and, in light of this, the Anaklia port, especially built with Chinese investment, will be an important key point of this trade. The Anaklia port will certainly contribute to increased exports from both Central Asia and China. On the other hand, there may be dangers too: the port, and the territory of Georgia as a whole, may become a transit route for sanctioned Russian imports or, more generally, shipping between Georgia and Russia may be restored (Oxford Analytica 2023). It should be added that the development of the events will significantly depend on the results of the parliamentary elections in Georgia in October 2024. If the Georgian Dream Party wins again in the elections, they will be free to make a choice in favor of the Chinese company, which naturally means reducing the influence of Washington and Brussels in the region as a whole.

## CONCLUSION

The "Middle Corridor", which passes from Southeast Asia and China through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the South Caucasus, the Black Sea, and Türkiye, and reaches Southern and Eastern Europe, is an important part of China's "grand strategy" and its *Westpolitik*. Due to its favorable geopolitical location, Georgia is one of the essential links in this big project, especially with the potential of Anaklia Port. The rapprochement between Beijing and Tbilisi has become evident since 2018, when a Free Trade Agreement between the two countries was signed. The "Middle Corridor" has gained even more importance since the beginning of 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine and thereby significantly disrupted trade between China and Europe via Russia. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine shed more light on Georgia's foreign policy priorities or changes in these priorities; namely, its "flirtation" with Moscow and "deviation" to the East, that is, to Beijing.

China shows more interest in Georgia and the South Caucasus region, even though it knows that the region is an object of Russia's special interest. Undoubtedly, the "Middle Corridor" is an effective instrument in the hands of China to become a competitive global power (or strengthen this status), while the benefits of participating in this project for Georgia are not so clear. At the same time, the prospect of possible construction of the Anaklia port by a Chinese company raises serious questions about Georgia's European future. This prospect means the growth of China's influence in the region, and most likely Russia's, which is inversely proportional to the interests of the West. Obviously, the implementation of the mentioned project will be a great contribution to the pursuance of China's *Westpolitik*, although it is hard to say how rational it can be for Georgia to risk undermining its relations with the West in exchange for the possible construction of the Anaklia port by the Chinese.

Finally, it is quite possible that Georgia can rationally use its role in the "Middle Corridor" project and even its strategic partnership with China. However, a direct sign of the harmfulness of this policy will be if Tbilisi's rapprochement with Beijing and its strategy has a negative impact or, in general, harms Georgia's integration into the EU.

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# CHINA'S CYBER OPERATIONS AGAINST THE UNITED STATES CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Authors: **Megi Benia**

# CHINA'S CYBER OPERATIONS AGAINST THE UNITED STATES CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

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## ABSTRACT

In 2024, the U.S. officials and government agencies openly accused China of conducting dangerous cyber operations against the country's critical infrastructure (CI). The U.S. military and intelligence agencies believe that China's cyber activities can distract the U.S. ability "to project, or defend against, military action". By initiating cyber-attacks against and preposition malware in U.S. CI facilities in close proximity of the U.S. military bases, China might be preparing for several possible scenarios, including an unexpected cyber-attack against the U.S. critical military infrastructure, which might amount to the scales of the Pearl Harbor attack of 1941. If successful, current cyber activities conducted in peacetime can disrupt the U.S. ability to properly perform its military functions during the war or crisis.

## INTRODUCTION

Protection of strategically important objects or in other words critical infrastructure (CI) on the territory of the state has always been a significant issue. Proper security of these systems increases the chances of victory in wartime and ensures an effective functioning of government services in peacetime. The rapid technological development and emergence of cyber domain as an integral part of states' strategic thinking and warfighting approaches, have drastically increased the vulnerability of CI towards foreign targeting.

Applying cyber-activities against adversaries has become a popular weapon of modern international security affairs. This approach allows states to achieve their strategic objectives with the lowest costs possible. For powers such as China with an army that lacks real-time warfighting experience, reliance on

the advanced technologies in military is of great benefit to secure victory against the U.S. which it views as a global scale strategic competitor (ODNI, 2024). Additionally, conducting an attack in cyber domain is an action, which is difficult to attribute with lesser legal consequences and insignificant damage to international positioning. At the same time, increased dependence of the military on technologies raises their vulnerability, especially in the segments of Command and Control (C2) and management of the battlefield. Actors such as China, try to exploit this crucially important element of the U.S. military – strive to modernization and necessity of meeting the current demands of international security environment.

Considering these circumstances, the article attempts to assess the possible implications of China's cyber-activities against the U.S. CI. To this end, it will try to demonstrate China's publicly known cyberwarfare capabilities and elaborate why it is considered as the "most active and persistent cyber threat" by the U.S. officials and government agencies.

## CYBERWARFARE IN CHINA'S STRATEGIC THINKING

Historically, China has always relied on the asymmetric means of warfare. Respective ideas can be found even as early as in Sun Tzu's thinkings. Thus, technological development has just accelerated the importance of operating in cyber domain as a new enabler of the hybrid approach to warfare.

In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century China started positioning itself in networked-based systems with the main aim of gathering strategic data for future modernizations (Kozlowski, 2014, 163). Kozlowski describes the initial process as chaotic, lacking institutionalized supervision. In 2004, China adopted the Military Strategy which for the first time attempted to integrate information technology in all military domains: land, air and sea (IISS 2021, 89-102). Since



then, China has been developing its strategic thinking for the military use of cyber capabilities, which also means that the cyber-related issues have become coordinated by the military, making the process more complex and centralized (Kozlowski 2014, 163).

China views cyber operations as part of the broad information operations, framing them as “informatized warfare”. According to the DOD report, China describes informatized warfare as “the use of information technology to create an operational system-of systems, which would enable to acquire, transmit, process, and use information during a conflict to conduct integrated joint military operations across the ground, maritime, air, space, cyberspace, and electromagnetic spectrum domains.”(DOD, 2023) Moreover, China considers cyber operations as part of traditional electronic warfare (Kozlowski, 2014, 163). And this is why the terms information warfare, cyber warfare, electronic warfare and even psychological operations can be used in the same context and sometimes interchangeably. China considers cyberspace as an indispensable part during the military confrontation, which might help to rapidly seize the initiative (Rovner, 2024). Such a reliance on cyber-operations can deny the enemy of the effective response ability and a precise vision of the battlefield leading to the quick Chinese victory at reasonably low cost (Rovner, 2024).

Over the years, Third and Fourth Departments of the General Staff under China’s Military Committee have overseen the offensive cyber operations (Kozlowski, 2014, 164-166). According to Kozlowski, both departments consist of several units (Kozlowski, 2014, 164-166). He argues that the Third Department is mainly responsible for the “design and development of computer network defense, attack and exploitation systems”. In addition, it “simulates the behavior of the United States and its allies in cyberspace”, and employs the most skillful and experienced mainly English-speaking specialists. At the same time, this department is responsible for obtaining and developing new IT technologies, information about Western strategies and policies to conduct effective “invigilation” of adversaries (Kozlowski, 2014, 164-166). Herewith, the work of the department is widely spread across the country with bureaus in every military region, which helps China to effectively control

foreign communications and cyber activity (Kozlowski, 2014, 164-166). Kozlowski also describes the work of the Fourth Department – sometimes known as Electronic Warfare and Electronic Countermeasure Department – which is responsible for offensive electronic warfare, jamming and counter-jamming (Kozlowski, 2014, 164-166). Nevertheless, the progress the Western powers and especially the U.S. had been making in cyber domain triggered major changes in China’s strategic thinking in this direction. In 2014, China’s President Xi Jinping introduced the concept of a “cyber great power”, which envisions the future with Chinese dominance in the telecommunications and IT more broadly (Doshi, 2021). To meet these objectives, since 2014, China has been working on respective domestic and legislative reforms to turn the country into the global cyber power (IISS, 2021, 89-102). In 2015, China adopted the first military strategy that recognized the central part of cyberspace in strategic and military policy, as well as granted a leading role to information in any conflict (IISS, 2021, 89-102). In the same year, China established Strategic Support Force (SSF) under the Military Committee (CMC), which aims to provide the centralized control over China’s strategic space, cyberspace, electronic, information, communications, and psychological warfare missions and capabilities (DOD, 2023). Within the SSF there is the Network Systems Department (NSD), also called the Cyberspace Force (CSF) and it is mainly responsible for “information operations (IO), which includes technical reconnaissance, EW, cyberspace warfare, and psychological operations” (DOD, 2023). According to the DOD report, “the NSD operates five theater-aligned technical reconnaissance bases, a number of signal intelligence bureaus, and several research institutes. The NSD provides intelligence support to the theater commands by leveraging a diverse suite of ground-based technical collection assets to provide a common operating picture to geographically dispersed operational units.” (DOD, 2023).

Even though, very little is known about China’s actual military cyber capabilities, it is highly likely that China puts great emphasis on having them and even more using them when necessary, per multiple U.S. government agencies reports and analysis. In 2023, the DOD report concluded that China has already



equipped forces and commanders with “enhanced situational awareness and decision support to win informatized wars” (DOD, 2023). Additionally, the report underlines China’s willingness and probably readiness to use “offensive and defensive cyberspace operations as a means to achieve information dominance early in a crisis or conflict” (DOD, 2023).

Apart from that, significant enablers of these operations are individuals and organizations that are operating independently but are affiliated with or supported by the Chinese government. Usually, this is very important element in the state-sponsored cyber-activities since in the identification and investigation process it is difficult to trace state involvement in the hacking and eventually to attribute the attack to the government.

#### **“THE MOST ACTIVE AND PERSISTENT CYBER THREAT” TO THE U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY**

In 2024, several U.S. high-ranking officials confirmed that China has penetrated U.S. critical infrastructure. In the testimony before the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency’s (CISA) Director Jen Easterly underlined that (CISA, 2024):

“In recent years, we have observed a deeply concerning evolution in Chinese targeting of US infrastructure. Specifically, Chinese cyber actors, including a group known as “Volt Typhoon,” are burrowing deep into our critical infrastructure to be ready to launch destructive cyber-attacks in the event of a major crisis or conflict with the United States.

CISA teams have found and eradicated Chinese intrusions into critical infrastructure across multiple sectors, including aviation, energy, water, and telecommunications. And what we’ve found to date is likely the tip of the iceberg.”

In his address to the Munich Security Conference, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Christopher Wray underscored the significance of China’s cyber threats (FBI, 2024):

“The cyber threat posed by the Chinese government is massive. China’s hacking program is larger than that of every other major nation, combined. And that size advantage is only magnified because China uses AI—built in large part on stolen innovation and stolen data—to improve its hacking operations, including to steal yet more AI tech and data.”

Simultaneously, National Security Agency (NSA), CISA and FBI issued a joint advisory on China’s cyber activities against the U.S. critical infrastructure (CISA et al, 2024). According to the document, Chinese cyber actors are “seeking to preposition themselves on IT networks for disruptive or destructive cyberattacks against U.S. critical infrastructure in the event of a major crisis or conflict with the United States”. In addition, the advisory revealed the list of the organizations targeted during the operations: U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA), Australian Signals Directorate’s (ASD’s) Australian Cyber Security Centre (ACSC), Canadian Centre for Cyber Security (CCCS), United Kingdom National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC-UK), New Zealand National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC-NZ) (CISA et al, 2024).

In addition to these statements, several reports confirm that China has been deliberately targeting the U.S. critical infrastructure, likely to test their own capabilities and introduce upgrades when necessary. For instance, in 2021 CISA published information about China’s cyber intrusions against U.S. oil and gas pipeline companies from 2011 to 2013, compromising 23 operators (CISA et al, 2021). Similar advisories were issued in the following years, assessing the significance of China’s cyber threat against the U.S. (CISA) In 2023, two dozen critical infrastructure entities were hit by massive cyber-attacks, including a water utility in Hawaii, a major West Coast port and Texas’s power grid (Nakashima and Menn, 2023). In May of the same year, Microsoft published a report claiming it found Chinese hacking group Volt Typhoon compromising critical infrastructure in Guam and elsewhere in U.S., listing a number of sectors, including telecommunication companies (Microsoft, 2023).

In this context, probably more important is China's ambition to target the U.S. critical military infrastructure through cyber-attacks. The U.S. government agencies have already paying special attention to this challenge. In 2023, the Department of Defense in its annual report to the U.S. Congress on Military and Security Developments Involving Peoples Republic of China, carefully overviews these developments. The report concludes that China "uses its cyberspace capabilities, not only to support intelligence collection against U.S. academic, economic, military, and political targets, but also to exfiltrate sensitive information from the critical defense infrastructure and research institutes to gain economic and military advantage and possibly for cyberattack preparations" (DOD, 2023). These activities can help them to draw precise operational picture of the U.S. defense networks, military dispositions, logistics and related military capabilities (DOD, 2023). Eventually, these cyber activities can distract the U.S. ability "to project, or defend against, military action" (DOD, 2023).

Moreover, the Threat Assessment 2024 published by the U.S. Intelligence Community describes China as "the most active and persistent cyber threat to U.S. Government, private-sector, and critical infrastructure networks" (ODNI, 2024). The report further concludes that:

"If Beijing believed that a major conflict with the United States were imminent, it would consider aggressive cyber operations against U.S. critical infrastructure and military assets. Such a strike would be designed to deter U.S. military action by impeding U.S. decision making, inducing societal panic, and interfering with the deployment of U.S. forces."

Understanding the high importance of the issue, the U.S. government agencies have undertaken several important steps. In February 2024, the U.S. President Joe Biden issued an Executive Order on Amending Regulations Relating to the Safeguarding of Vessels, Harbors, Ports, and Waterfront Facilities of the United States (The White House, 2024), which aims at protecting these critical infrastructure assets from foreign cyber manipulations. Later, in March 2024, the Department of Defense released Defense Indus-

trial Base Cybersecurity Strategy with the mission of ensuring "generation, reliability, and preservation of US warfighting capabilities by protecting sensitive information, operational capabilities, and product integrity" (DOD, 2024).

#### POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF CHINA'S "AGGRESSIVE CYBER OPERATIONS"

The U.S. Department of Defense defines critical infrastructure (CI) as "systems and assets, whether physical or virtual, so vital to the United States that the incapacity or destruction of such systems and assets would have a debilitating impact on security, national economic security, national public health or safety, or any combination of those matters (DOD)". When it comes to specific sectors involved, according to CISA, they consist of chemical sector, commercial facilities, communication sector, critical manufacturing, dams, defense industrial base, emergency services, energy, financial services, food and agriculture, government facilities, healthcare and public health, information technology, nuclear reactors, materials and waste, transportation systems, water and wastewater (CISA). In peacetime, these systems need to be maintained and strengthened with the whole-of-government and whole-of society approach to prepare the country for an armed attack or possible disaster (NATO). In wartime, these systems support military operations in all aspects. First, proper functioning of CI supports effective government communication with public and successful interagency coordination, preventing chaos and emergence of additional disturbing factors in the process of crisis management. Second, secure CI is essential for military mobility to ensure the forces ability to coordinate their actions, as well as swift movement of military personnel and equipment in a short period of time and on a massive scale (EEAS). Therefore, any type of malfunction even in one component of these facilities can have a devastating consequence for the entire country with drastic implications for the national security.

China has chosen the most aggressive approach to cyber-activities with clear understanding of their affects on U.S. military positioning. In peacetime, they choose their targets and prepare operations carefully. For instance, the decision to initiate cyber-attacks against and preposition malware in U.S. CI facilities

of Hawaii and Guam, mentioned above, is not an accident and supports far-reaching strategic objectives.

Hawaii hosts several U.S. military installations (DOD):

- ▶ *Pearl Harbor with Naval and Air missions and 160 commands, including Naval Computer and Telecommunications Area Master Station Pacific. The Harbor can accommodate the largest ships in the U.S. Indo-Pacific fleet;*
- ▶ *Marine Corps Base;*
- ▶ *Schofield Barracks – home of the 25th Infantry Division;*
- ▶ *154th wing of the Air National Guard.*

Guam is home to Andersen Air Force Base and Naval Base (DOD).

Both Hawaii and Guam are essential components of the U.S. deterrence in the Indo-Pacific, which is of special importance to China since it views the region as the primary area of the competition with the U.S.

By targeting the CI facilities in close proximity of the U.S. military bases, China might be preparing for several possible scenarios:

- ▶ *Put out of commission the telecommunication and transportation systems supporting the military bases;*
- ▶ *Disrupt necessary water and energy supply systems essential for military personnel both during the peacetime and wartime;*
- ▶ *Disrupt the network-based systems of the military which help them maintain precise operational picture;*
- ▶ *Unexpected cyber-attack against the U.S. critical military infrastructure, which might amount to the scales of the Pearl Harbor attack of 1941.*

Realization of even one component of these possible scenarios can cause significant security challenges to the U.S. and therefore its allies. For this reason, the

U.S. Government has adopted several measures listed in this article. However, it worth mentioning that China's real cyber capabilities are yet to be known, as well as the degree of their penetration in the U.S. CI systems. The decision of the U.S. intelligence agencies to openly discuss the issue and raise the alarm is clear indication of the imminent danger of these activities and the devastating scale of their possible implications.

## CONCLUSION

As it is mentioned earlier in the article, little is known about actual Chinese cyber capabilities. Publicly available materials provide only a general sense of the existing reality. Such conditions are common for authoritarian powers and China is not an exception in this regard. They try to carefully hide information, especially about the military strength and competitive edge. Nevertheless, recent reports and assessments give a plausible indication of the centrality of cyber operations in China's strategic military thinking. On the other hand, the fact that the U.S. government agencies have decided to publicly disclose China's cyber activities against the U.S. critical and military infrastructure demonstrates the significance of the issue for the U.S. and its Allies' national security systems. Ideally, while attempting to exercise the strategy of "managing competition" with China, the U.S. would have refrained from such moves. However, the decision to favor the policy of "disclosing intelligence to achieve strategic advantage" – widely used before Russia's re-invasion of Ukraine in 2022 – underlines how far Chinese operatives intruded into the U.S. computer systems posing serious security challenges.

Bearing in mind the recent developments, the article aimed to address the issue by overviewing the role of the cyber domain in China's strategic military thinking and looking for the reasons behind the U.S. official assessments to consider China as an imminent cyber threat now. Relying on publicly available information, it is wise to conclude that China's decision to initiate cyber-attacks against and preposition malware in U.S. CI facilities, especially in the proximity of the military bases, supports far-reaching strategic objectives, which can be divided into long-term and short-term goals. Hence, the article argues that by conducting aggressive cyber operations against the

U.S., China might be preparing for several possible scenarios, including 1) disruption of the telecommunication and transportation systems supporting the military bases; 2) disruption of the necessary water and energy supply systems essential for military personnel both during the peacetime and wartime; 3) disruption of the network-based systems of the military which help them maintain precise operational picture; 4) unexpected cyber-attack against the U.S. critical military infrastructure, which might amount to the scales of the Pearl Harbor attack of 1941.

And since the proper functioning of critical infrastructure is an essential component of effective military operations supporting the armed forces in all aspects, especially ensuring the swift movement of military personnel and equipment, their penetration in peacetime can disrupt the U.S. ability to perform its military tasks during the war or crisis. In case of large-scale military confrontation, malfunctioning of CI will weaken the U.S. control over the battlefield leading to the potential success of the adversary. China's increased cyber activities against the U.S. CI, including the military infrastructure supports exactly this strategic objective.

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# **MEMBERSHIP ACTION PLAN (MAP) - POLITICAL FORMALITY & THE FICTION OF MILITARY DETERRENCE?**

**Authors: Shalva Dzebisashvili**



# MEMBERSHIP ACTION PLAN (MAP) - POLITICAL FORMALITY & THE FICTION OF MILITARY DETERRENCE?

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"If the political ends are vague or unspecified, how can you choose methods and means that are fit for purpose" - Colin Gray<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Since the Bucharest summit declaration that promised the NATO-membership to Ukraine and Georgia, the option of the membership action plan (MAP) - formally the only mechanism for joining the alliance - became increasingly controversial, politicized and questionable, putting the credibility of the Alliance and its promises under the big question mark. The article doubles down on the debatable value of the MAP from the perspective of military deterrence and argues that the current version of the membership action plan does nothing whatsoever to increase the deterrent of a membership candidate, and in contrary, may lead to a much higher probability of military threat, i.e. aggression. Hence, the MAP appears to acquire a purely formal nature, with no practical applicability and military value to secure the membership process itself. Realizing this but not admitting it openly, the alliance is therefore trapped in its hesitance to decide on membership, thus effectively "donating" the veto right to a revisionist country that actively opposes the enlargement policy. The rapid inclusion of Finland and Sweden in NATO without formally activating the MAP-procedure, is reviewed as the vivid demonstration and testimony of the accuracy of arguments provided in the article.

**KEY WORDS: NATO, MAP, membership, deterrence, Russia**

## INTRODUCTION

Without doubt the notion of military deterrence occupies a major place in the general understanding of national security. Deterrence is the key factor that guarantees peace and prevents war. As General John Nicholson states, the possibility of war in different dimensions does always exist, however thanks primarily to its military prowess and flexibility, NATO creates all the preconditions to make the option of war against it unthinkable.<sup>2</sup>

During the entire period of its existence the alliance always made sure it had an effective and strong deterrence mechanism, which got even higher relevance, when from 1999 onward the membership path was offered to those countries whose military potential was pretty questionable. At the Washington Summit in 1999 the Membership Action Plan (MAP) was declared as the new and only mechanism of admitting new members into Alliance.<sup>3</sup> Despite offering political guarantees of membership to an aspirant country, MAP did not offer and specify anything explicitly to guarantee the aspirant country's security during the transitional period, and thus, to ensure or increase the "to be member country's" military deterrence. This was (still is) an obvious problem, since on the one hand NATO took the political responsibility

to ensure the membership of a candidate country, and on the other hand it left the option of extending the collective security and defence guarantee (Art.5) on a MAP-country completely open. The dubiousity of a such stance is even greater to those countries that have been firmly promised the Euro-Atlantic pro-

<sup>1</sup> Colin S. Gray, "Presentation to the 'Multiple Futures' Conference, NATO's Allied Command Transformation" (Brussels, May 8, 2009), [https://www.act.nato.int/images/stories/events/2009/mfp/mfp\\_surprise\\_prediction.pdf](https://www.act.nato.int/images/stories/events/2009/mfp/mfp_surprise_prediction.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> John W Nicholson, "NATO's Land Forces: Strength and Speed Matter," PRISM, European Security in the 21st Century, 6, no. 2 (July 12, 2016): 1.

<sup>3</sup> "Membership Action Plan (MAP)" (Press Release NAC-S(99) 066, April 24, 1999), [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_27444.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27444.htm?selectedLocale=en).



spective by the alliance, yet are under the constant political and military pressure from revisionist and authoritarian neighboring countries. Hence, ensuring the credible and effective mechanisms of military deterrence for MAP-and like countries is essential for the enlargement process, as well as for the credibility of the alliance itself. It has to be mentioned that it is much easier to implement deterrence, i.e. deny and prevent the possibility of aggression, than to enforce and compel the enemy to stop (the war), reverse and return to the status quo.<sup>4</sup> We do not intend to dwell extensively into the deep theoretical foundations of the deterrence concept (although the brief theoretical exploration will be provided), however, its basic understanding is directly linked to the credible threat and potential of using military force. This implies the application of all the components of force spectrum, including the strategic nuclear arsenal, which in fact is the major deterrence factor for strategic confrontation and conflict on global scale.<sup>5</sup>

As for Georgia the problem of effective deterrence mechanisms is even greater. Contrary to Ukraine, which is bigger and is in process of building its defence capacity while actually fighting for survival, Georgia has very few resources and does not have any options yet provided by NATO that would enhance the country's security while transitioning from MAP to a full membership. Despite the frequent declarations that it had increased military presence and force readiness wherever necessary, the alliance cannot avoid the fact that the emphasis is always made on the improvements made in force deployment and reinforcement in weaker member-states (flanks). This is however, a tacit acknowledgment of the real military threat and the absence of solid deterrence effects.<sup>6</sup> The Baltic region is the most problematic

region (flank) of NATO, even though several battle-groups have been deployed there as an essential component of the enhanced forward presence (EFP).<sup>7</sup> The core of the problem lies in the inability of the alliance to translate its gigantic military, economic and resource potential into the deterrence of aggressive actions that are limited to the short period of time and isolated operational area. NATO has the problem of distance and time, which makes it extremely difficult to provide timely assistance to its weak members, according to Swedish experts.<sup>8</sup> This can be attributed to the following crucial factors as the difficulty to reach a political consensus, rapid decision-making, coordination, and interoperability among allied nations, and ensure the presence of military capabilities on site.<sup>9</sup> For instance, the NRF (NATO Response Force) and the VJTF (Very High Readiness Joint Task Force) initiated in the framework of 2014 Readiness Action Plan (RAP) experience significant challenges in personnel and operational readiness even today.<sup>10</sup> From that perspective, the situation of Georgia can be described as dramatic, since Russia is politically ready to risk escalation and regards Georgia as the major target of its expansion, incomparably easy to conquer and unable to defend itself.

Consequently, the major question of this paper has to concentrate on the key paradox as to why NATO by introducing the MAP in 1999 and declaring it to be the only mechanism of enlargement, did pay so little attention to the radical change of the strategic situation since 2008 and 2014 and was not able to address the need for increased security (and deterrence) for aspirant countries by "updating" the MAP institutionally and conceptually? Obviously, such approach to the puzzle begs for a follow up clarification, whether the MAP-mechanism is inherently a

<sup>4</sup> Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, *Causes of War* (The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 153.

<sup>5</sup> Terry Lukianova Fink, "The Evolving Russian Concept of Strategic Deterrence: Risks and Responses," August 2017, 2.

<sup>6</sup> "The Secretary General's Annual Report 2020" (Brussels: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, 2021), 14, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/3/pdf/sgar20-en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/3/pdf/sgar20-en.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Ben LTG(Ret.) Hodges et al., "One Flank, One Threat, One Presence: A Strategy for NATO's Eastern Flank" (CEPA, Center for European Policy Analysis, May 2020), 4, <https://cepa.org/one-flank-one-threat-one-presence/>.

<sup>8</sup> Jakob Gustafsson, John Rydqvist, and Robert Dalsjö, "Deterrence by Reinforcement - The Strengths and Weaknesses of NATO's Evolving Defence Strategy" (Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), November 2019), 10, [www.foi.se](http://www.foi.se).

<sup>9</sup> LTG(Ret.) Hodges et al., "One Flank, One Threat, One Presence: A Strategy for NATO's Eastern Flank," 6.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Lucas, Ben Hodges, and Carsten Schmiedl, "Close to the Wind: Too Many Cooks, Not Enough Broth" (CEPA, Center for European Policy Analysis, September 9, 2021), <https://cepa.org/baltic-sea-security-too-many-cooks-not-enough-broth/>.

necessary tool, without which the membership of the Alliance is impossible, and all the conditions set by MAP in relevant areas, such as political (democratic institutions, justice etc.), military and resources, cannot be met outside the MAP framework. To investigate thoroughly and answer the stated questions, we will first conceptually review the importance of the deterrence concept (largely conventional, i.e. general) to NATO from the historical perspective and thus identify its principal nuances during the process of its historical development. The enlargement process of NATO, naturally, has a fundamental importance to our paper, since on the one side it sheds light on the capacity of the Alliance to cope with the strategic changes intellectually, and on another it makes clear whether the Alliance was able to translate the strategic challenges into an effective update of its major institutional mechanisms, especially the MAP. Therefore, the article puts a specific emphasis on the political and military value of the membership action plan, given the radically worsened strategic environment and formulates respective conclusions, not least by drawing attention to the reasoning of Finland and Sweden while decisively skipping the MAP-option and opting for direct membership. Since our understanding of methodology is pretty much in line with the Sartorian view of it as the analytical concept, i.e. construction that allows for proper (right) analytical tools (techniques) to be applied, the concept of deterrence is being directly put under scrutiny within the institutional framework (MAP).<sup>11</sup> It allows us not only to check the inherent institutional and policy flaws, i.e. challenges MAP was originally not designed for, but to review the institutional inertia of the Alliance, the attempts to address the conceptual deficiencies and eventually the practical reasoning of two distinct groups of states (Ukraine/Georgia and Finland/Sweden) that got different paths of membership while facing the same security (deterrence) dilemma.

## DETERRENCE AND ITS CONCEPTUAL (THEORETICAL) DEVELOPMENT

Prior to dwelling into the origins and theoretical development of the deterrence concept, it would be logical first to look briefly on definitional aspects of deterrence, its core meaning and message, so that the common understanding of the phenomenon can be constructed. Consequently, the clarity on basic definition will make it much easier for a reader to grasp the complexity and diversity of following theoretical models that attempt to reflect the limitations of the deterrence concept in a variety of military-political settings and the principles of its effective application.

As the general consensus obviously spells down that deterrence is all about the generation of fear, Kaufmann highlights the declaratory nature of deterrence, i.e. an expressed intention and interest about what is to be deterred, whereas Schelling in the respective chapter of his "The Strategy of Conflict" notes the possibility of enhanced deterrence by keeping the uncertainty about the declaratory threats.<sup>12</sup> Naturally, the military power is the major instrument that feeds deterrence, yet as the constituting element of national power it manifests itself in either compellence or deterrence, with the latter enhancing the former.<sup>13</sup> Both elements are traditionally the components of the coercive strategy, in which the coercive diplomacy is built upon deterrence or threat to use force.<sup>14</sup> So, in its essence, the deterrence is the use of threat (explicit or not) by one side to convince the other side to maintain the status quo (to deter the direct attack), and thus, as stated by Stephen Quackenbush, this phenomenon is not limited to any particular time or space.<sup>15</sup> In general, the cost-benefit calculation is an essential part of the deterrence concept, due to the fact that, as John Mearsheimer points out, the expected costs and risks (of an attack), might outweigh the

<sup>11</sup> Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," *American Political Science Review* LXIV, no. 4 (December 1970): 1038–39.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, "The Threat That Leaves Something to Chance," in *The Strategy of Conflict* (Harvard University, 1960), 187–205.

<sup>13</sup> Brain E. Fredriksson, "Chapter 2: National and Military Power," in *Globalness: Toward a Space Power Theory* (Air University Press, 2006), 14, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep13858.8>.

<sup>14</sup> Rob De Wijk, *The Art of Military Coercion: Why the West's Military Superiority Scarcely Matters* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 17.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen L. Quackenbush, "General Deterrence and International Conflict: Testing Perfect Deterrence Theory," *International Interactions* 36, no. 1 (February 26, 2010): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050620903554069>; Stephen L. Quackenbush, "Deterrence Theory: Where Do We Stand?," *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 2 (April 2011): 741, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510000896>.

anticipated benefits.<sup>16</sup> The Cold War period added an element of reassurance (later termed as extended deterrence), which required an additional effort to demonstrate to a potential adversary the military might, with which the credibility of punishment could be assured.<sup>17</sup> The problem of deterrence credibility is not new, and similar to Robert Haffa Jr. authors still try to find the best characteristics and application methods for the respective military (deterrence) strategy.<sup>18</sup> This, in fact, is very crucial, since, how militaries employ different weapons in their arsenals, matters greatly (and always will be) for general deterrence.<sup>19</sup> In the end the ultimate objective of general deterrence becomes not only to find the effective ways of enemy dissuasion and confidence negation, but to create the deterrence effect so powerful and lasting that “the hesitation to attack becomes habitual”.<sup>20</sup>

The foundation for theorizing on the conditions under which the general deterrence is likely to succeed or fail, has been provided by rational choice models, and were centered on aspects of nuclear strategy and the US nuclear assurance to allied nations in Europe and Asia.<sup>21</sup> Referring to his book (*Conventional Deterrence, 1985*) Mearsheimer admits that the scholarly debate during the first three decades of the Cold War period almost completely ignored the problem of conventional deterrence and was exclusively dominated by the question of nuclear deterrence.<sup>22</sup> Slowly after analysts started developing more general concepts

of deterrence based on the historical record of states and state policies, that would allow for hypothesis testing in the context of general deterrence.<sup>23</sup>

The distinction between the general and nuclear deterrence is absent if the level of grand strategy, i.e. strategic political calculations, is applied. However, as John Mearsheimer argues, as long as military calculations concern, the scale of damage on civilian population and infrastructure is so massive in case of nuclear war, that the difference between these two deterrence models becomes obvious.<sup>24</sup> Although for both the classic maxims of capability, credibility and communication perfectly apply, the differences play out in the military dimension depending on strategic options of denial, punishment or retaliation upon which the deterrent threat is built.<sup>25</sup> If “conventional deterrence is largely a function of military strategy”, the reality however is that military calculations do not always deter the decision-makers, and thus once again underline the political nature of war.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, as the evidence confirms, according to Gen. John E. Hyten, the Commander of the USSTRATCOM, the nuclear deterrence helped uniquely to prevent war or the escalation of conflict.<sup>27</sup> This view is supported by Colin Gray, for whom the strategic stability in the cold war era rested on the fear of second strike capabilities turning the deterrence concept into an esoteric intellectual exercise.<sup>28</sup> The work on theoretical concepts continued and several aspects pertinent

<sup>16</sup> John J Mearsheimer, “Conventional Deterrence: An Interview with John J. Mearsheimer,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (Winter 2018): 3.

<sup>17</sup> Fredriksson, “Chapter 2: National and Military Power,” 22.

<sup>18</sup> Robert P Haffa Jr, “The Future of Conventional Deterrence: Strategies for Great Power Competition,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (Winter 2018): 94.

<sup>19</sup> Mearsheimer, “Conventional Deterrence: An Interview with John J. Mearsheimer,” 5.

<sup>20</sup> Michael J Mazarr, “Understanding Deterrence,” *Perspective-Expert Insights on a Timely Policy Issue* (RAND Corporation, 2018), 2, 5, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE295.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Paul K. Huth, “Deterrence and International Conflict: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Debates,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (June 1999): 25–26, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.2.1.25>. For further readings see: Kaufman 1956; Kissinger 1957; Brodie 1959; Ellsberg 1961; Wohlstetter 1959; Schelling 1960, 1966; Snyder 1961; Kahn 1965

<sup>22</sup> John J Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1985); Mearsheimer, “Conventional Deterrence: An Interview with John J. Mearsheimer,” 3.

<sup>23</sup> Huth, “DETERRENCE AND INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT,” 26. For further readings see: Russett 1963, 1967; Quester 1966; George & Smoke 1974; Whiting 1975; for a review, see Jervis 1979

<sup>24</sup> Mearsheimer, “Conventional Deterrence: An Interview with John J. Mearsheimer,” 5.

<sup>25</sup> Jr, “The Future of Conventional Deterrence: Strategies for Great Power Competition,” 97; James J Wirtz, “How Does Nuclear Deterrence Differ from Conventional Deterrence?,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (Winter 2018): 58–59.

<sup>26</sup> Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, 63, 209.

<sup>27</sup> *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 3rd ed., vol. 11, 2017, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Colin S. Gray, “Maintaining Effective Deterrence” (*Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, August 2003*), 2,

to general deterrence had been discussed time and time again. Be it the credibility of threat (to be carried out), polarity question, order of battle, involvement or the strategic culture, the mosaic of the deterrence concept became even more evident.<sup>29</sup>

Attempts to develop a kind of perfect deterrence theory continued uninterrupted. So for instance, the role of the national missile defence had been tested, and

contrary to classical deterrence theory the research on perfect deterrence theory and other researches (also with some reservations) demonstrated its great value for enhancing deterrence and stability (this claim is also supported by US military).<sup>30</sup> The alternative to general deterrence theory, the perfect deterrence theory still had to demonstrate convincingly its superiority, given the undeniable fact that nuclear capabilities simply provide the ideal (best) deterrent, because the threat of conventional punishment, though credible, could still be ignored due to the perceived lack of capabilities to execute the threat.<sup>31</sup> Nuclear deterrence, although appearing very appealing due to the relatively small size of forces and costs needed, still had a fundamental problem with the degree of credibility of threat execution if extended to allied nations (*extended deterrence*).<sup>32</sup> If no one doubted the willingness of the US to retaliate on a nuclear attack on its territory, how “could the United States convince the Soviet Union that it would attack Moscow if Ber-

lin were attacked, particularly once the Soviet Union could strike Washington in return?”<sup>33</sup> The challenge for extended deterrence, throughout the Cold War and after, was the need to convince the adversary that the US is ready to accept high costs even in cases when the US vital interests are not at stake; doubts on US commitments would trigger worrisome and unwonted actions from allies (e.g. in European leaders opposed the US military planners in their choice of deterrence by denial, preferring strongly the deterrence concept based on the threat of punishment).<sup>34</sup>

As the Soviet Union collapsed marking by that the end of the Cold War, analysts became worried that the deterrence concept (e.g. the threat of massive retaliation) could mean nothing for a non-state actor (terrorist for instance), thus leading to a false believe that “strategic thought should focus more on the actual use of military force an less on deterrence..”<sup>35</sup> Colin Gray even concluded that the deterrence concept was generally dismissed and marginalized, and thus had to be “rescued from its current condition of semiretirement”.<sup>36</sup> It became obvious, that the deterrence concept had to be reevaluated, at least on the aspects of rationality, perceptions and specific role of leaders (incl. those of rogue states willing to take risks and gamble with the lives of their people).<sup>37</sup> Further, aspects of rational behavior in the context of time limitation and crisis situations, or the increased dynam-

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<https://doi.org/10.1037/e427282005-001>.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Donnelly, Danielle Pletka, and Maseh Zarif, “Structures of Deterrence,” in *Containing and Deterring a Nuclear Iran: Questions for Strategy, Requirements for Military Forces* (American Enterprise Institute, 2011), 16–18, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep03111.9>; Quackenbush, “Deterrence Theory,” 742. \\uc0\\u8220{}Deterrence Theory, \\uc0\\u8221{} 742.”, “plainCitation”.: “Thomas Donnelly, Danielle Pletka, and Maseh Zarif, “Structures of Deterrence,” in *Containing and Deterring a Nuclear Iran: Questions for Strategy, Requirements for Military Forces* (American Enterprise Institute, 2011

<sup>30</sup> Quackenbush, “General Deterrence and International Conflict,” 81; *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 11:22; Robert Powell, “Nuclear Deterrence Theory, Nuclear Proliferation, and National Missile Defense,” *International Security* 27, no. 4 (April 2003): 87–88, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228803321951108>.

<sup>31</sup> Wirtz, “How Does Nuclear Deterrence Differ from Conventional Deterrence?,” 71–72.

<sup>32</sup> Austin Long, “Chapter Four: Avoiding the Garrison State - Deterrence as a Strategy,” in *Deterrence from Cold War to Long War: Lessons from Six Decades of RAND Research*, 2022, 18, 22, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg636osd-af.10>.

<sup>33</sup> Austin Long, “Chapter Three: Department of Defense as Ministry of Fear - The Theory of Deterrence,” in *Deterrence from Cold War to Long War: Lessons from Six Decades of RAND Research* (RAND Corporation, 2022), 13, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/10.7249/mg636osd-af.9>.

<sup>34</sup> Shane Smith, “Implications for US Extended Deterrence and Assurance in East Asia,” in *North Korea’s Nuclear Futures* (US-Korea Institute at SAIS, 2015), 7, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep11163.3>; De Wijk, *The Art of Military Coercion: Why the West’s Military Superiority Scarcely Matters*, 154–55.

<sup>35</sup> De Wijk, *The Art of Military Coercion: Why the West’s Military Superiority Scarcely Matters*, 93, 99.

<sup>36</sup> Gray, “Maintaining Effective Deterrence,” 23.

<sup>37</sup> Gray, 8, 21; Mazarr, “Understanding Deterrence,” 7.



ics of brinkmanship contributed to the widening focus of analysis.<sup>38</sup> Other deterrence strategies came to light and appear promising. For instance, the conventional “tripwire” model relied on vertical escalation to deter, but, in fact, it turned out to promote the risk of nuclear attack and similar to the past lacked the same credibility.<sup>39</sup> The problem of deterrence became so obvious that instead of containing the conflict and deterring aggression, it actually supported the escalation of conflict to a much higher, unwanted scale.

Interest in deterrence, and particularly, in extended deterrence was renewed as Russia became increasingly revisionist in the post-soviet area and its aggressive actions against NATO and its partners went beyond the conventional realm to include cyber and other hybrid methods.<sup>40</sup> Russia and more assertive China, along with the prospects of Iran becoming a nuclear power, constituted the major focus of analysis, in which structure of leadership, leader’s perceptions and willingness of a regime to pursue the risky and costly course of action, despite the peaceful status quo, do significantly matter.<sup>41</sup> Lessons from game theoretic approach to deterrence and six de-

acades of research and analysis in RAND Corporation rendered results that are not that different from the classical deterrence and have strong resemblance of the late Cold War period, in which the deterrence strategy is regarded effective only if it is understood and believed by the enemy (e.g. strong option of disarming first strike).<sup>42</sup> Colin Gray, for instance, concludes that every deterrence approach is specific and must be employed as a part of a broader strategy of influence; however, the conventional land forces, willingness to accept high cost of action (“the man on the scene with a gun”) and the ability of not being scared by the threat of WMD, constitute the elements of effective deterrence.<sup>43</sup> Even in the case of small states the independent deterrent capability is still vital, and coupled with the resolve of the allies to intervene, the aspect of credibility turns to the essential determinant of successful deterrence.<sup>44</sup> In the end, the post-Cold War conventional deterrence, as Robert Haffa Jr. argues, must be decoupled from the nuclear threat, intense, offensive and overwhelming both in punishment and denial.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Powell, “Nuclear Deterrence Theory, Nuclear Proliferation, and National Missile Defense,” 88.

<sup>39</sup> Jr, “The Future of Conventional Deterrence: Strategies for Great Power Competition,” 104.

<sup>40</sup> Todor Tagarev, “Theory and Current Practice of Deterrence in International Security,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 18, no. 1–2 (2019): 6,9, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.18.1-2.00>.

<sup>41</sup> Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, 211; Mearsheimer, “Conventional Deterrence: An Interview with John J. Mearsheimer,” 7; Thomas Donnelly, Danielle Pletka, and Maseh Zarif, “Assessing the Prospects for Deterrence,” in *Containing and Deterring a Nuclear Iran: Questions for Strategy, Requirements for Military Forces* (American Enterprise Institute, 2011), 19, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep03111.10.London>, “ISBN”: “0-8014-9346-3”, “number-of-pages”: “296”, “publisher”: “Cornell University Press”, “publisher-place”: “Ithaca, London”, “title”: “Conventional Deterrence”, “author”: “{{“family”: “Mearsheimer”, “given”: “John J”}}, “issued”: “{“date-parts”: [“1985”, 8]”}”, “locator”: “211”, “label”: “page”}, “id”: “2173”, “uris”: “{“http://zotero.org/users/1312293/items/2YB2T3KN”}”, “itemData”: “{“id”: “2173”, “type”: “article-journal”, “container-title”: “Strategic Studies Quarterly”, “issue”: “4”, “language”: “en”, “page”: “3-8”, “source”: “Zotero”, “title”: “Conventional Deterrence: An Interview with John J. Mearsheimer”, “volume”: “12”, “author”: “{{“family”: “Mearsheimer”, “given”: “John J”}}, “issued”: “{“date-parts”: [“2018”], “season”: “Winter”}”, “locator”: “7”, “label”: “page”}, “id”: “2171”, “uris”: “{“http://zotero.org/users/1312293/items/RSR74Y3W”}”, “itemData”: “{“id”: “2171”, “type”: “chapter”, “container-title”: “Containing and Deterring a Nuclear Iran: Questions for Strategy, Requirements for Military Forces”, “language”: “en”, “page”: “19-38”, “publisher”: “American Enterprise Institute”, “source”: “Zotero”, “title”: “Assessing the Prospects for Deterrence”, “URL”: “http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep03111.10”, “author”: “{{“family”: “Donnelly”, “given”: “Thomas”}}, “family”: “Pletka”, “given”: “Danielle”}, “family”: “Zarif”, “given”: “Maseh”}”, “accessed”: “{“date-parts”: [“2022”, 10, 14]”}”, “issued”: “{“date-parts”: [“2011”]”}”, “locator”: “19”, “label”: “page”}”, “schema”: “https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json”

<sup>42</sup> Roger B. Myerson, “Force and Restraint in Strategic Deterrence: A Game-Theorist’s Perspective,” (Fort Belvoir, VA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, November 2011), 24, <https://doi.org/10.21236/ADA474684>; Austin Long, “Deterrence Then and Now,” in *Deterrence From Cold War to Long War: Lessons from Six Decades of RAND Research* (RAND Corporation, 2008), 65, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg636osd-af.13>.

<sup>43</sup> Gray, “Maintaining Effective Deterrence,” viii, x, 30, 31, 34.

<sup>44</sup> Ian Bowers, “Small State Deterrence in the Contemporary World” (Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 2018), 1, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25795>; Quackenbush, “Deterrence Theory,” 760.

<sup>45</sup> Jr, “The Future of Conventional Deterrence: Strategies for Great Power Competition,” 106.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF DETERRENCE

As already mentioned, the basic idea of deterrence is linked to the assured ability of inflicting the intolerable level of damage (costs) to the aggressor, instilling fear and forcing him to reject the idea of aggression beforehand.<sup>46</sup> Often the need to demonstrate directly the military capabilities, with which the potential of effective defence and military response is underscored, is unavoidable must. And it is far more difficult to implement the *extended deterrence*, when one side tries to influence the behavior of another, in the context of a third party.<sup>47</sup> This clearly resembles the situation around new member states, in which by application of the deterrence mechanisms NATO had (has) to convince Russia about the futility of military aggression once the decision of granting the MAP to Georgia is made.

During the cold war the western experts were convinced that the enemy should never have had any calculated hope of military success with risks marginal and tolerable.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, the conclusion

was drawn that along with the intensive international cooperation the successful deterrence had to include credible actions, the accurate assessment of threat, clear communication (indication) of response intention as well as of effective military capabilities.<sup>49</sup> So for instance, in 1961 the alliance responded to the growing military threat on its northern and southern flanks with the concept of *Allied Mobile Force* (AMF). It was based on the ability of rapidly moving multiple enhanced battalions to Norway and Turkey, where they already had the pre-assigned operational areas and all the necessary stockpiles and storages of ammunition and equipment.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, it is obvious that the differing geopolitical contexts create different perceptions of effective deterrence, i.e. the actions that seem sufficient for successful deterrence in one case, can completely fail with regard to another. Alternatively, it can be expected that some countries are ready to accept the risks associated with the existing low level of deterrence. The study done by RAND corporation in 2018 looked into the cases of successful deterrence since 1945 and concluded that deterrence works if:<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup> ViljarVeebel, "NATO Options and Dilemmas for Deterring Russia in the Baltic States," *Defence Studies* 18, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 231, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2018.1463518>.

<sup>47</sup> Paul K. Davis, ed., *New Challenges for Def Planning: Rethinking How Much Is Enough* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1994), 197.

<sup>48</sup> Davis, 211.

<sup>49</sup> "NATO Options and Dilemmas for Deterring Russia in the Baltic States," 233.

<sup>50</sup> Martin Zapfe, "NATO's 'Spearhead Force,'" ed. Christian Nünlist, *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, no. 174 (May 2015): 2.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Mazarr et al., *What Deters and Why: Exploring Requirements for Effective Deterrence of Interstate Aggression* (RAND Corporation, 2018), 87, <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2451>; Hans Binnendijk and Conor Rodihan, *Geometries of Deterrence: Assessing Defense Srrangements in Europe's Northeast* (Atlantic Council, Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, 2020), 13, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Geometries-of-Deterrence-Report-Web.pdf.10,22>], "issued": {"date-parts": [{"2018"}]}, "locator": "87", "label": "page"}, {"id": "2087", "uris": ["http://zotero.org/users/1312293/items/5LUXUM4V"], "itemData": {"id": "2087", "type": "book", "abstract": "The conventional military threat from Russia towards Europe most acutely affects a number of frontline Nordic and Baltic states from the Barents Sea in the Arctic through the Baltic Sea region: Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, and Sweden. Since Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014, these countries, in concert with other Euro-Atlantic allies and partners, have concentrated on strengthening their own defenses and on developing and enhancing eight sets of different defense cooperation arrangements. As the only two non-NATO and militarily nonaligned nations in the region, Finland and Sweden's role in regional security and their level of cooperation with these and other partners poses challenges as well as opportunities for deterrence and defense in Europe's northeast. The authors assess the contributions of each of these arrangements against an ideal or \"gold standard\" for conventional military deterrence, before evaluating the arrangements collectively and offering recommendations to further strengthen deterrence for Finland, Sweden, and indeed for all of Northeastern Europe", "ISBN": "978-1-61977-095-9", "language": "en", "note": "OCLC: 1157111659", "number-of-pages": "37", "publisher": "Atlantic Council, Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security", "source": "Open World-Cat", "title": "Geometries of Deterrence: Assessing Defense Srrangements in Europe's Northeast", "title-short": "Geometries of deterrence", "URL": "https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Geometries-of-Deterrence-Report-Web.pdf", "author": [{"family": "Binnendijk", "given": "Hans"}, {"family": "Rodihan", "given": "Conor"}], "accessed": {"date-parts": [{"2022", 8, 1}], "issued": {"date-parts": [{"2020", 5}], "locator": "13", "label": "page"}], "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}]

- ▶ a big nation (US) is usually involved;
- ▶ specific negative consequences for aggressor are highly likely;
- ▶ the local force (military) balance is unfavorable for the aggressor.

If these conditions are not in place, it might be possible, as Robert Jervis aptly remarks, that the aggressor can execute a controlled and growing pressure and create *faits accomplis* locally that are very difficult to change and require much more efforts and resources.<sup>52</sup> NATO had always an issue with late response. It took years if not decades to establish joint commands and HQs, and establish itself as an *Organization*.<sup>53</sup> Within this transformational process, the *Harmel Commission* created in 1967 strongly demanded to create the adequate number of capable combat ready forces as the major component of deterrence.<sup>54</sup> As a result of allied efforts, nobody doubted in the Kremlin that despite the numerical superiority of soviet forces, the soviet military attack would be met with a massive combined conventional response of the alliance that would include the option of nuclear escalation and thus rule out any possible (incl. theoretical) gain for the Kremlin whatsoever.<sup>55</sup>

#### ENLARGEMENT POLICY AND DETERRENCE

After the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and especially, during the Clinton administration the spirit of the *Enlargement Study* (1995) fundamentally supported

the NATO-expansion despite the economic and military weaknesses of potential new members.<sup>56</sup> Since Russia found itself in a very precarious economic situation, was military degrading and heavily dependent on the western financial aid, the Alliance was not really concerned with the issue of Russian threat and the military deterrence related to the new members, thus often regarded itself as a kind of new "conflict prevention and management organization".<sup>57</sup> Enlarging NATO was no longer considered as primarily extending defence/security umbrella; however, questions on self-defensibility of new members, capacity of old members to come to military aid, interoperability and costs of enlargement were not simply dismissed, leading to the significant criticism and rejection of the very enlargement idea as being too costly and even damaging to the overall security environment.<sup>58</sup> Even by 2002 the agenda of the alliance and its predominantly European member-states was primarily occupied by issues and challenges of the 1990ies, rather than creating combat capable units ready to be deployed and positioned for combat operation in a matter of days.<sup>59</sup>

It is not surprising that the membership action plan (MAP) introduced in 1999 was a largely political instrument to condition the membership status by democratic achievements and military interoperability of a candidate country's armed forces. Indeed, the accession mechanism developed in the period, where no serious military threat was considered, hardly, if at all, meets the necessary preconditions of the universally successful deterrence model. In today's context

<sup>52</sup> Robert Jervis, "Rational Deterrence: Theory and Evidence," *World Politics* 41, no. 2 (January 1989): 187, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010407>.

<sup>53</sup> "The fear of imminent war made the Allies put 'O' in NATO". HonkanenKaroliina, "The Influence of Small States on NATO Decision-Making. The Membership Experiences of Denmark, Norway, Hungary and the Czech Republic." (Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), November 2002), 22, [www.foi.se](http://www.foi.se).

<sup>54</sup> "NATO 2030: United for a New Era," Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General (Brussels: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, November 25, 2020), 7, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> Binnendijk and Rodihan, *Geometries of Deterrence*, 13–14.

<sup>56</sup> "NATO - Study on NATO Enlargement," NATO, 1995, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_24733.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_24733.htm).

<sup>57</sup> "Special Press Briefing on the Enlargement of NATO: Rationale, Benefits, Costs and Implications" (the U.S. Department of State, February 24, 1997), <https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/eur/970224special.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Richard L. Kugler, *Enlarging NATO* (RAND Corporation, 1996), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR690.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR690.html); Thomas S. Szayna, *NATO Enlargement, 2000-2015* (RAND Corporation, 2001), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR1243.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1243.html); Amos Perlmutter and Ted Gallen Carpenter, "NATO's Expensive Trip to East," *Foreign Affairs*, January - February 1998, 77, no. 1 (n.d.): 2–6.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Mihalka, "NATO Response Force: Rapid? Responsive? A Force?," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 04, no. 2 (2005): 68, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.04.2.09>.



it leaves a pretty troubling picture, in which no matter before or after granting MAP, there is no guarantee at all that either a single component of the mentioned list or all together will be applied to an aspirant country. All this makes one look at MAP and its value as the membership-mechanism with great suspicion, even more as it was formally acknowledged as the only mechanism of membership. The problem manifests itself in the simple logic, i.e. membership rationality, in which despite the political promise of membership the candidate country can lose much more (independence, statehood or territory) by adopting MAP due to its predominantly political nature and no chance of getting additional defence guarantees, i.e. deterrence whatsoever. One may argue and respond to this that since MAP never was designed and regarded as the mechanism of providing more security during the so-called transitional period of membership, it is not its primary objective to address today's strategic challenges. This line of argumentation holds no ground both in the logic and institutional context. First, the mechanism that seriously increases risks for membership has logically little if any attractiveness for future members, therefore will most likely never be utilized. Secondly, every successful institutional (organizational) framework implies the necessity to revise, update and renew its institutional mechanisms, even more if external factors require so. The fact that MAP was created nearly 25 years ago, by no means implies that its original purpose and design should not have been revised and amended to meet the requirements of today. The radical change of the strategic environment after 2008, and 2014 should have automatically necessitated the comprehensive review of the membership action plan and its ability to ensure the mission it was originally created for (without causing more problems).

The situation changed dramatically in 2008, and 2014, when Russia partially occupied Georgia and by annexing Crimea and Ukraine eastern provinces showed vividly its aggressive intentions. It has to be

reminded that Russia attacked exactly those countries that were promised future NATO-membership at the Bucharest summit in 2008.<sup>60</sup> Russian actions against these two countries were quick and well-coordinated with no indication of fear or expectations of any reprisal from the West.<sup>61</sup> Naturally, one may raise the question, what to expect from the Alliance, if Russia decides to test the credibility of the Alliance once the MAP is actually granted to Georgia. This is insofar important as it requires the clarification of steps to be done by NATO within the MAP-framework and sufficient enough to deter Russia. Hence, however rhetorical it may sound, the key question here is, whether there is a need to formalize a set of additional deterrence measures to strengthen the credibility and survivability of the MAP as the enlargement mechanism of the Alliance. Clearly, the performance of the Russian army in the war against Ukraine since February 24, 2022 seriously challenges the pre-war assessment of Russian military capabilities. Nonetheless, with Georgia incomparably smaller and weaker than Ukraine, Russia has a significant military advantage with combined forces stationed and regularly trained in Georgia's occupied territories and in its border proximity.<sup>62</sup>

To Russia's revisionist actions NATO responded with the creation of NRF (NATO Response Force) and the VJTF (Very High Readiness Joint Task Force) and the initiation of NRI (NATO Readiness Initiative - 4x30) in 2018 that in particular, increased the alliance military presence in the Black Sea as well.<sup>63</sup> In its design the enhanced forward presence of NATO in its eastern flank is a kind of *tripwire*, that is activated once a member-country is attacked and puts in motion the massive process of moving additional troops (incl. the nuclear ones) to the war theatre of eastern Europe.<sup>64</sup> Theoretically, the alliance has increased the deterrence by deploying more troops in the region. However, the challenges remained due to the multiple problems associated with the ability of rapidly moving large number of adequately equipped (to the

<sup>60</sup> "Bucharest Summit Declaration," Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008, Press Release (2008) 049, April 3, 2008, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_8443.htm?selectedLocale=en).

<sup>61</sup> Veebel, "NATO Options and Dilemmas for Deterring Russia in the Baltic States," 230.

<sup>62</sup> ITG(Ret.) Hodges et al., "One Flank, One Threat, One Presence: A Strategy for NATO's Eastern Flank," 12, 16–17.

<sup>63</sup> ITG(Ret.) Hodges et al., 40, 43–44.

<sup>64</sup> Gustafsson, Rydqvist, and Dalsjö, "Deterrence by Reinforcement - The Strengths and Weaknesses of NATO's Evolving

threat) units. Doubts were even bigger with regard to the adequacy of NATO-troops on site in the Baltic region, in case of a surprise attack of Russian forces.<sup>65</sup> Hence, not surprisingly, the concept of mobile tripwire became increasingly unpalatable in the doctrinal context of deterrence. It became obvious that if the chance of timely deploying a large numbers of heavy combat ready units to the remote flank of the alliance is low or close to zero (due to multiple reasons), the only alternative option of deterrence would imply the permanent stationing of additional troops beforehand, enough to deter military aggression itself. At the Wales summit in 2014 the allied nations struggled to reach the consensus on response to the Russian threat to Baltic states and took very cautious stance to the idea of permanent stationing of NATO troops in the region (all these despite the VJTF's complete inadequacy in size and the limits for SACEUR to command troops without NAC's formal endorsement).<sup>66</sup> Clearly, based on its gigantic aggregated military potential the alliance has the full capacity of massive strikes on Russian units and critical infrastructure in different geographic areas. Yet, the different approach was taken (changed after Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022) and the general thinking did not go beyond the spirit of NATO-Russia founding document of 1997, in which the alliance restrained itself from stationing a significant number of forces on the territory of new members.<sup>67</sup> This in turn created challenges in the military dimension, and obvious gaps in military deterrence, in particular.

### DOES MAP'S DELIVER POLITICALLY?

For any defence alliance the existence of a credible and working deterrence mechanism is essential to keep the peace. Hence, it is quite intriguing to see whether the concept of deterrence could also work

for those countries that have been granted MAP. If not with the same degree as in the case of full membership, the MAP-status theoretically must contribute to the better security and better effects of deterrence, than the country had before getting MAP.

Unfortunately, none of the NATO strategic documents (incl. the MAP document of 1999 itself) has any reference to the added security mechanism in relation to the MAP status. If in 1999 the chronic weakness of Russia did not require any specific need for additional security measures, the situation changed radically after 2008, in the sense that especially, for those countries that were promised NATO membership and would eventually get MAP (i.e. higher political commitment of the alliance), the risk of Russian aggression would objectively increase significantly. Therefore, the simple logic would imply the initiation of necessary steps to increase the security guarantees in order to ensure the completion of membership action plan, i.e. ensure the eventual membership. Again, even the principle of institutional adaptiveness would require NATO to look at its major mechanisms after the major geopolitical shifts, incl. MAP and identify obvious areas, where they could no longer (effectively) deliver. The document drafted by *Reflection Group* in 2020 with the aim to formulate major principles, actions and priority areas throughout 2030, does not pay any attention to the MAP-dilemma and generally refers to the partnership policy with anything but clear statements - "*Enjoy deeper strategic and mutually reinforcing connections with partners that share these principles and aspirations...*"<sup>68</sup> The *Reflection Groups* in fact, is heavily concerned with the military threats coming from Russia to Alliance's eastern flank and points towards the continuing occupation of Georgian and Ukrainian territories by Russia.<sup>69</sup> However, despite these glaring acknowledgments authors fail

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Defence Strategy," 18.

<sup>65</sup> Ben Hodges, Tony Lawrence, and Ray Wojcik, "Until Something Moves: Reinforcing the Baltic Region in Crisis and War" (CEPA - Center for European Policy Analysis, ICDS - International Center for Defence and Security, April 2020), iv, 1, [https://cepa.org/cepa\\_files/2020-CEPA-report-Until\\_Something\\_Moves.pdf](https://cepa.org/cepa_files/2020-CEPA-report-Until_Something_Moves.pdf).

<sup>66</sup> Christian Nünlist and Martin Zapfe, "NATO after Wales: Dealing with Russia – Next Steps," ed. Matthias Bieri, CSS Analyses in Security Policy, no. 161 (October 2014): acts 3–4; John R. Deni, "Disband the NATO Response Force," NATO20/2020 (Atlantic Council, Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, October 14, 2020), acts 38–39, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/nato20-2020/disband-the-nato-response-force/>.

<sup>67</sup> Rainer L Glatz and Martin Zapfe, "NATO Defence Planning Between Wales and Warsaw: Politico-Military Challenges of a Credible Assurance against Russia," SWP Comments 5 (January 2016): 3–4.

<sup>68</sup> "NATO 2030: United for a New Era," 11.

<sup>69</sup> "NATO 2030: United for a New Era," 16.

to offer any meaningful idea of how to contribute to the security of these two countries that formally enjoy the NATO special partner status. Most importantly, the Reflection Group members did not reflect on the policy gaps in the mechanism of MAP and avoided mentioning any update of the MAP concept from the perspective of enhanced security and deterrence.

The MAP-status formally elevates countries to the position of special political and military relationship, similar to those countries like Japan, Korea, Australia and even Taiwan enjoy with the US. However, contrary to the existing security dilemma of MAP-status countries, the special relationship with the US is augmented with the bilateral military aid agreement, which significantly reduces the threat of military aggression yet does not fully eliminate the problem of the sufficient military deterrence (especially in case of Taiwan). As Andrew Krepinevich Jr. aptly puts it, the essential core military component of the strategic deterrence is clear communication and signaling that the coalition forces have potential, capabilities and willingness in place to fight as long as needed to achieve the set objectives.<sup>70</sup> This would mean in the case of China, a coordinated effort between the US and Japan to deter Beijing, and if deterrence fails, to win the war.<sup>71</sup> A bit different situation was to observe in Scandinavia countries, as the additional deterrence measures of the alliance were translated into the mere pre-positioning of military stockpiles and equipment, as well as enhanced training and exercises in Norway to improve rapid deployment and reinforcement capabilities (Finland and Sweden joined the HNS-framework).<sup>72</sup> Obviously, such inadequacy of efforts was primarily caused by the existing gap between the practical needs on the ground and the absence of clear guidance on conceptual (MAP) and policy level. It led often to the odd results, when instead of fundamentally dealing with the deficien-

cies in the MAP-concept, more neutral statements were made such as the report produced by the Belfer Center of the Kennedy School (Harvard):

“Further, NATO should shift the focus of its partnership efforts from individual states to regional international organizations”.<sup>73</sup>

In the end NATO failed to tackle the problem of strategic change by means of institutional adaptation. The policy gaps created by the existing membership mechanism were manifested by the increased vulnerability of the MAP-candidates and the inability of NATO to provide more security and deterrence measures in practical terms. Thus, NATO failed functionally. This failure rendered the MAP as a predominantly formal political mechanism of enlargement. Even more, a certain conceptual paradox was established: with no existing threats, countries typically have no incentive to join the alliance; but due to the significant increase of risks and absence of any deterrence measures for countries willing to join the alliance via MAP, the enlargement cannot be fulfilled.

Some may argue that the claim of MAP generating a dangerous risk-zone until full membership, can be contested by the NATO Defence Planning Process itself, in which candidate countries are involved in and ambitious capability targets and objectives are set that are regularly reviewed every two years. This might lead to the assertion of a hypothetical contribution to NATO military deterrence and defence posture. However, it has to be mentioned that even without the MAP, Ukraine and Georgia developed instruments of integration with NATO that have no practical difference with MAP whatsoever. Whether the annual national plans (ANP), the biannual planning and review process (PARP) or the national commission/councils (NGC, NUC) all the processes within these arrangements fully copy the essence

<sup>70</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., “Archipelagic Defense: The Japan-U.S. Alliance and Preserving Peace and Stability in the Western Pacific” (The Sasakawa Peace Foundation, August 2017), 5, [https://www.spf.org/en/jpus/publications/20170810\\_1.html](https://www.spf.org/en/jpus/publications/20170810_1.html).

<sup>71</sup> Krepinevich Jr., 102.

<sup>72</sup> James Black et al., “Enhancing Deterrence and Defence on NATO’s Northern Flank: Allied Perspectives on Strategic Options for Norway” (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), ix, [www.rand.org/t/RR4381](http://www.rand.org/t/RR4381); Nünlistand Zapfe, “NATO after Wales: Dealing with Russia – Next Steps,” 3–4.

<sup>73</sup> Douglas Lute and Nicholas Burns, “NATO at Seventy: An Alliance in Crisis,” Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship (Cambridge: Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, February 2019), 33, [www.belfercenter.org/publication/nato-seventy-alliance-crisis](http://www.belfercenter.org/publication/nato-seventy-alliance-crisis).

and mechanics of MAP-structure. In practical terms it implies that MAP is expendable and can be easily replaced once a country enters deeper cooperation with the Alliance with the objective of future membership. Furthermore, it makes also very clear that those critical political criteria (democratic transformation, border disputes etc.) that originally were and are still linked to the MAP as its major responsibility area, are no less effectively addressed by mechanisms (ANP, NGC) outside the MAP-format, yet similar to those existing in the MAP. Consequently, whether Ukraine or Georgia have scored enough democratic credentials and can politically be regarded as reliable potential members, can no longer exclusively be referred to MAP as the only institutional mechanism. In fact, a parallel structure had been created that functionally replaced MAP (duplicated it) and thus made it irrelevant from the political point of view. Consequently, the MAP-status does not bring any added value even in the realm of its political and declarative significance. The decision and moment of granting the MAP itself becomes very problematic and unrealistic, due to the high certainty of increased military threat on which the alliance has no organizational, procedural, or policy wise military response ready.

### DOES MAP DELIVER MILITARILY?

As already mentioned before, the major problem for a MAP-country is the increased level of threat coming from Russia, associated with the likelihood of a rapid attack by the stronger Russian task force, creation of *fait accompli* on the ground and the consequent offer of negotiation by threatening with the alternative of war escalation, including the possibility of using nuclear weapons.<sup>74</sup> The alliance response to this scenario was quite unconvincing. It was clearly detectable in the inadequacy of strategic communication and massaging, when NATO on the one hand claimed complacently about the creation of battle groups in

the Baltic region in the context of EFP and the assurance of Art.5, yet on the other hand, it always reiterated its readiness to continue dialogue with Russia, minimize risks and increase transparency.<sup>75</sup> Challenges for the alliance were aggravated by the real problem of achieving the political consensus in NAC on the deployment of forces in the crisis region, as well as of moving those forces in the required short period (days) of time. Considering the fact that the allied defence plan for Poland and Baltic countries (Eagle Defender) was approved not earlier than 2020, not all corpses had operational areas assigned and the allied military command structure is featured by the multiplicity of command HQs, the problematic (military) nature of NATO deterrence becomes even more visible.<sup>76</sup>

All these challenges get even bigger once being put in the context of a MAP-candidate (Georgia and Ukraine being already in a war of survival). The geographic remoteness and the unfavorable local force balance (no parity in combat units) that combined with the questionable status within the NATO and EU creates solid incentives for the Kremlin to invade the country.<sup>77</sup> Whether the issue of reaching political consensus in the alliance (on granting MAP), or the necessity to develop and approve the operational plan for Georgia, the alliance will struggle quite a while to reach the solution. The military readiness of the alliance to move combat units within the required 10 days (not 30), is highly questionable.<sup>78</sup> Despite the increased importance of the Black Sea to alliance security, the deterrence measures implemented so far are incomparably weaker than in the Baltic region. Obviously, by stationing only one additional multinational brigade in Romania and increasing air and sea patrolling in the Black Sea (with no joint HQ assigned to the region by 2020), the required level of deterrence could never be achieved.<sup>79</sup> The Georgian reality puts the urgency of moving reinforcing troops rapidly, solving the challenge of stockpile

<sup>74</sup> Veebel, "NATO Options and Dilemmas for Deterring Russia in the Baltic States," act 238; Hodges, Lawrence, and Wojcik, "Until Something Moves: Reinforcing the Baltic Region in Crisis and War," act 7.

<sup>75</sup> Veebel, "NATO Options and Dilemmas for Deterring Russia in the Baltic States," 240.

<sup>76</sup> Lucas, Hodges, and Schmiedl, "Close to the Wind: Too Many Cooks, Not Enough Broth."

<sup>77</sup> Dylan Motin, "Geography, Military Balance, and the Defence of NATO's Borderlands," *Journal on Baltic Security* 6, no. 1 (June 1, 2020): 2, <https://doi.org/10.2478/jobs-2020-0002>.

<sup>78</sup> "The Secretary General's Annual Report 2020," act 15; Lucas, Hodges, and Schmiedl, "Close to the Wind: Too Many Cooks, Not Enough Broth."

<sup>79</sup> "The Secretary General's Annual Report 2020," act 15; LTG(Ret.) Hodges et al., "One Flank, One Threat, One Pres-

and equipment prepositioning, and making the local force parity more favorable (incl. better capabilities, infrastructure and resilience) on an even higher level. Black Sea, i.e. sea (as well as land) communication lines are of critical importance for deploying forces to Georgia. It would initially require the significant increase of the Romanian military logistic capabilities and steps to protect key sea infrastructure and communications (such as Odessa, Poti and Batumi) by turning them into the protected logistical hubs.<sup>80</sup> So for instance, moving one brigade from Charleston (USA) to Antwerp involves around 3500 personnel and more than 3000 pieces of equipment being transported by 4 cargo ships within the period of 3 weeks, a period, which is significantly longer than the 5-7 days necessary to deploy a heavy brigade size unit of the VJTF.<sup>81</sup> In 2017 the deployment of the 2nd brigade combat team (BCT) to Europe included 395 pieces of heavy tracked, 976 wheeled vehicles, and 349 trailers being transported to destination.<sup>82</sup> These figures highlight the huge importance of a *host nation* country's ability to manage the logistical processes of incoming units, which can only be achieved via intensive training and exercises, as well massive investments in infrastructure and transport communications.<sup>83</sup>

The example of Nordic countries, including Finland and Sweden, can serve as a very good example of the dominance of national security considerations over criteria of political conditionality. It took Norway and Denmark not very long to conclude in 1948 that no other model except the full membership in a collective defence alliance would provide the sufficient level of security guarantees, i.e. optimal mechanisms

and capabilities of military deterrence and defence.<sup>84</sup> And in 2022 Sweden and Finland decided to join the alliance, surprisingly by skipping the only existing membership mechanism, the MAP. In line with some arguments made in the previous section of this paper about the predominantly political value (mission) of MAP, some would argue that since the political preconditions of membership had been met long before, the application for MAP-procedure was no longer needed. This claim is very problematic. Even the cursory look at official sources makes it instantly clear that it was the Russian aggression in Ukraine and fear about security that forced Finland and Sweden to quickly change their decade long stance of neutrality and apply for direct membership.<sup>85</sup> As the government of Sweden clearly points out, given the fundamentally changed security situation (Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine) it was the Government's assessment that joining NATO was the best way for Sweden to protect its security.<sup>86</sup> The conceptual problem of the serious lack of deterrence for those countries that faced the risk of being attacked by a revisionist country, became existential after February 2022, and forced Finland and Sweden to decisively reject MAP and opt for the direct NATO-membership. This was done, despite the fact that the Alliance frequently reiterated the major importance of MAP as the only mechanism of pursuing membership. Not to forget a formal bureaucratic nuance that, having all political criteria met by no means imply the possibility of generally skipping the MAP, thus formally still requiring a country to stay in "MAP-boat" albeit with a much shorter period. Scandinavian countries were always looking to enhance the deterrence effects.<sup>87</sup> The permanent internal struggle with security cost

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ence: A Strategy for NATO's Eastern Flank," acts 43–48.

<sup>80</sup> LTG(Ret.) Hodges et al., "One Flank, One Threat, One Presence: A Strategy for NATO's Eastern Flank," 48, 64.

<sup>81</sup> Hodges, Lawrence, and Wojcik, "Until Something Moves: Reinforcing the Baltic Region in Crisis and War," 11; Gustafsson, Rydqvist, and Dalsjö, "Deterrence by Reinforcement - The Strengths and Weaknesses of NATO's Evolving Defence Strategy," 12, 20, 38.

<sup>82</sup> Hodges, Lawrence, and Wojcik, "Until Something Moves: Reinforcing the Baltic Region in Crisis and War," 17.

<sup>83</sup> Hodges, Lawrence, and Wojcik, iv, v, vi.

<sup>84</sup> Karoliina, "The Influence of Small States on NATO Decision-Making. The Membership Experiences of Denmark, Norway, Hungary and the Czech Republic.," 39–41.

<sup>85</sup> Matti Pesu, "Logical but Unexpected: Witnessing Finland's Path to NATO from a Close Distance," [www.nato.int](https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2023/08/30/logical-but-unexpected-witnessing-finlands-path-to-nato-from-a-close-distance/index.html), August 30, 2023, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2023/08/30/logical-but-unexpected-witnessing-finlands-path-to-nato-from-a-close-distance/index.html>; "Sweden's Path to NATO Membership," Government Offices of Sweden, April 5, 2023, <https://www.government.se/government-policy/sweden-and-nato/swedens-road-to-nato/>.

<sup>86</sup> "Sweden's Path to NATO Membership."

<sup>87</sup> Zapfe, "NATO's 'Spearhead Force,'" 1.



calculations that once again highlight the irrelevance of MAP and the low confidence even with the NATO-Tripwire concept is evidently presented by Matti Pesu, who openly admits that "...had Russia been more successful on the battlefield, Finland might have considered it too uncertain and risky to join NATO".<sup>88</sup>

As it appears, even the minimalistic approach to the deterrence requirements for MAP candidate countries would imply the adoption of the well tested concept of the Cold War. This would not only require to improve the rapid deployment/reinforcement capabilities but, most importantly, to ensure the permanent stationing of some thousands of NATO troops (e.g. enhanced brigade) in country like Georgia, albeit initially on rotational basis. Additionally, the permanent military exercises significantly contribute to the military deterrence, as the exercise *Trident Juncture* and *Defender Europe* clearly demonstrate, with dozens of thousands of troops, transport and other equipment routinely moved across Atlantic and Europe.<sup>89</sup> These exercises revitalized the cold war exercise - *Reforger* tradition, and carry significant similarities even if extended to Georgia due to the need of military reinforcement via the Black Sea. Consequently, if MAP still remains as a membership option, the *deterrence by denial* has to be ensured and include measures similar to those implemented in Cold War Germany, that implied the (permanent) existence of sufficient and combat capable allied task force to resist soviet aggression and buy time allowing the allied reinforcement troops, especially across the Atlantic to arrive.<sup>90</sup> In the end the timely arrival and combat potential of the allied reinforcements must guarantee the inability of enemy forces to advance and force them to go defensive, which ultimately must result in allied forces' counter-attack and the general offensive.<sup>91</sup> Translated to the "updated MAP-reality", this would mean that NATO troops must arrive in the case of Georgia quickly, which can be done even faster by using Turkish land communication lines. Due to the small size of the country, and the respective in-

ability of Georgian forces to buy time, i.e., retreat (lack of operational depth), the rapid movement of the adequate number of NATO troops from Turkey into the Georgian territory becomes a simple must.<sup>92</sup> Alternatively, a divisional size force can be stationed in Georgia or in Turkey close to Georgia's borders, which naturally preconditions a consensus among allies and the strong political commitment on the Turkish side.<sup>93</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The decision to quickly grant NATO-membership to Sweden and Finland without the MAP-procedures, once again highlighted the dare reality that the quest for more security and deterrence measures could not be accomplished within the MAP-mechanism, which was never designed and updated for such purpose. From the perspective of the military deterrence, it has close to zero relevance and the requirement of military interoperability can easily be achieved outside the MAP-framework anyway, as the bilateral cooperation formats and mechanisms with Ukraine and Georgia demonstrate. In its current form MAP does not bring any value in the context of deterrence, and in contrast, by offering a transition period to the moment of full membership, it creates a "risk zone" for candidate countries with the higher probability of tensions or even military aggression. In other words, by granting MAP in its current form, NATO shows its higher political commitment to the "newcomer", yet is not able to extend the Art.5 (collective defence), which effectively incentivizes the revisionist country to more decisive actions against the MAP-applicant to prevent the membership. The Alliance is well aware of this deficiency, but for some reason decided not to address it institutionally and policy wise. As former head of the national security council of Georgia Ekaterine Tkeshelashvil points out, Russia's preparations and actions preceding the war (Russian attack on Georgia in 2008) never went unnoticed. However, the problem was the inability to find a solution

<sup>88</sup> Pesu, "Logical but Unexpected: Witnessing Finland's Path to NATO from a Close Distance."

<sup>89</sup> Hodges, Lawrence, and Wojcik, "Until Something Moves: Reinforcing the Baltic Region in Crisis and War," 4.

<sup>90</sup> Glatz and Zapfe, "NATO Defence Planning Between Wales and Warsaw: Politico-Military Challenges of a Credible Assurance against Russia," 6.

<sup>91</sup> Nicholson, "NATO's Land Forces: Strength and Speed Matter," 33-34, 42-43.

<sup>92</sup> Motin, "Geography, Military Balance, and the Defence of NATO's Borderlands," 3.

<sup>93</sup> Motin, 3.

that would “deter Russian advancement”, resulting in the Kremlin’s continued build up for military operation, while the Georgian government was waiting for “partners to propose a new negotiation plan”.<sup>94</sup>

Without the effective deterrence mechanisms neither MAP nor other integration tools will reduce the appetite of an aggressive and revisionist power, consequently leading to the opposite results and erosion of the alliance’s credibility. Any step of deeper security integration logically has to be accompanied with efforts that ensure a higher level of military deterrence. Thus, the decision of granting MAP has been linked to clear and formalized steps (political, military-operational and technical) that provide enhanced deterrence to a candidate country and are endorsed by allied nations beforehand. Successful deterrence is based on the adequacy of the troops on the ground, and the need for these troops defines the capabilities that are needed to deter.<sup>95</sup> The partial occupation of Georgia and the ongoing war of Russia against Ukraine is a vivid example of the failure of membership mechanism without efforts to enhance aspirant countries’ deterrence, while knowing well the aggressive intentions of the revisionist power. The inability of the Alliance timely and effectively to address this problem can partially be attributed to the institutional inertia of 1990ies and early 2000ies. Yet the question remains open (certainly to be searched in the political realm), why NATO never tried to update its membership-toolbox especially after 2008 and 2014 when the strategic environment changed dramatically. The best way to prevent/avoid and contain aggression is the increase in local military capabilities and the guarantee of the timely arrival of allied military reinforcements - a fundamental element of the military deterrence, as agreed by many analysts and experts.<sup>96</sup> As it seems, this conclusion was clearly shared by NATO (allies) and Sweden and Finland as well, as they simply chose to skip MAP and apply for the direct membership. Understandably, the nominal and procedural nature

of MAP could not provide better security guarantees for applicant countries, and so the option of direct membership was decided, the only option with needed security guarantees and much better military deterrence. Conceptually, by allowing Finland and Sweden to skip it, the Alliance pushed the MAP down into the level of irrelevance for situations where candidate countries feel threatened. To rectify this, the Alliance needs to demonstrate its continuing dominance across the spectrum of conflict escalation, as it used to be in the past. And this (dominance) is exactly what NATO needs to transfer into the concept of MAP, as the fundamental principle of credible military deterrence.<sup>97</sup> It is not clear what pathways the Alliance will take to deal with the membership dilemma of Ukraine and Georgia. It is, however, very clear that whatever pathway chosen, it would require the same “NATO Spirit”.<sup>98</sup> For the moment, there is no consensus reached on granting MAP to Georgia (Ukraine, most probably would no longer need it anyway). Neither is there any indication of thinking on fundamentally updating MAP to increase its military deterrence effects. It is indicative of a lack of initiative ownership in the alliance, as well as of the obvious need for a better organizational self-diagnosis. The U.S. could play again here the role of “*directorship but not dictatorship*”, by realizing and admitting the major weaknesses of the MAP as the procedural membership tool, and leading the joint effort in the alliance to quickly bridge this gap.<sup>99</sup> If this effort fails, the MAP will remain a mere hollow tool, empty of political, military and bureaucratic relevance, due to the already existing parallel mechanisms (ANP, NGC/NUC and PARP) that copy MAP-toolset and thus make its abolishment just a matter of time. Rendering MAP-mechanism dysfunctional will seriously damage the credibility of NATO itself. This explains very much why NATO quickly considered only the option of direct accession for Sweden and Finland (though, formally MAP had to be offered first), as the only way to deter Russia from escala-

<sup>94</sup> Bornio, “Revisiting the 2008 Russo-Georgian War Can Offer Lessons for Today,” *New Eastern Europe* 01–02, no. 50 (2022): 107–8.

<sup>95</sup> Mihalka, “NATO Response Force,” 68.

<sup>96</sup> “Schwere Waffen Jetzt! Replik Auf „Waffenstillstand Jetzt!“,” *Focus Online*, July 19, 2022, [https://www.focus.de/politik/ausland/ukraine-krise/96-osteuropa-experten-weltweit-fordern-schwere-waffen-jetzt\\_id\\_119428660.html?fbclid=IwAR2d08VURbEus\\_pV\\_LQ6Mtle-TTQEgyg87SxYSRoffnX8fcjueaOB3vwcA](https://www.focus.de/politik/ausland/ukraine-krise/96-osteuropa-experten-weltweit-fordern-schwere-waffen-jetzt_id_119428660.html?fbclid=IwAR2d08VURbEus_pV_LQ6Mtle-TTQEgyg87SxYSRoffnX8fcjueaOB3vwcA).

<sup>97</sup> Krepinevich Jr., “Archipelagic Defense: The Japan-U.S. Alliance and Preserving Peace and Stability in the Western Pacific,” 103.

<sup>98</sup> Karoliina, “The Influence of Small States on NATO Decision-Making. The Membership Experiences of Denmark, Norway, Hungary and the Czech Republic.,” 23.

<sup>99</sup> Karoliina, 29.



tion. Perceptions have huge importance in the field of defence and security, and in the context of military deterrence perceptions matter even more. By granting MAP, no one should doubt the willingness and capacity of the Alliance to provide more and credible military aid to a MAP-country, i.e. contribute to its successful and credible deterrence.<sup>100</sup> If this turns out to be impossible, and the only mechanism remaining at table is the current MAP, which creates the higher risk of military confrontation, the candidate countries will inevitably reject MAP and always opt for the mechanism of direct admission (membership).

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<sup>100</sup> Black et al., "Enhancing Deterrence and Defence on NATO's Northern Flank: Allied Perspectives on Strategic Options for Norway," v, summary.

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## CONCLUSION

The UGSPN Research Center concludes this annual report by reaffirming its commitment to addressing the pressing social, political, and security issues of our time. Amid complex global and regional challenges, the Center remains dedicated to advancing democratic principles, fostering informed public and academic debates, and offering practical, research-based solutions. Through rigorous analysis, collaborative initiatives, and public outreach, we strive to contribute to a deeper understanding of

the forces shaping our world and to support efforts toward sustainable and equitable development. Despite the uncertainties and crises we face, UGSPN will continue to provide insightful analysis and policy recommendations, ensuring its work remains relevant and impactful for Georgia, the region, and the global academic community. This report stands as a testament to our ongoing efforts and a foundation for the work ahead.