



GEORGIAN FOUNDATION FOR  
STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

## CONTEMPORARY GEORGIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS: KEY FEATURES OF THE EVOLUTION

ARCHIL GEGESHIDZE

74

EXPERT OPINION





საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობათა კვლევის ფონდი  
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## **EXPERT OPINION**

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*Dedicated to the 25th anniversary  
of the Georgian-American relations*

Georgia and the United States mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of bilateral relations. December 25, 1991, when the then-U.S. President George Bush (Senior) announced his decision to recognize the independence of the former Soviet republics, including Georgia, can be regarded as the starting date of these relations.<sup>1</sup> In March 1992, diplomatic relations were established, followed by the opening of the U.S. Embassy in Georgia on April 23. In turn, the Georgian Embassy in the U.S. began to function in August 1993. Since then, step-by-step, a routine process of building bilateral relations has been evolving. Today, it is safe to assume that the cooperation between Georgia and the United States is businesslike and of a friendly nature, while being exemplary in the wider region.

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Over the past 25 years, the Georgia-U.S. relations have developed mainly on the basis of the objective reality, which has been linked to the U.S. interests in the region, on the one hand, and the needs of Georgia's security and welfare, on the other. Often, the referred interests and needs were in agreement so that, over time, the bilateral relations have acquired a strategic character. It is important to note that certain amendments in the bilateral agenda were introduced by alternating democratic and republican administrations in Washington or by the nature of change of government in Georgia. However, a personal factor has also often been important. Eduard Shevardnadze played a decisive role in the formation of the initially favorable attitude to independent Georgia on the part of the U.S. Government. This was due to the immense political capital that he earned as a constructive partner of high ranking U.S. interlocutors at the final stages of the Cold War. The ruling elite, including the President, the entire administration and Congress, showed a pronounced respect for and faith in Shevardnadze personally.<sup>2</sup> Soon, the referred benevolence grew into a strong empathy as the outline of Georgia's strategic choice began to shape. In this context, of essential importance, among others, were Georgia's role and the personal contribution of its leader to the creation of an East-West Energy Corridor running through the South Caucasus.

Later, M. Saakashvili and his team, especially Z. Zhvania,<sup>3</sup> managed to establish personal, often friendly relations with the leading representatives of the American establishment, who were fascinated by the Rose Revolution ideals. These personal relationships significantly facilitated the intense deepening of bilateral relations.<sup>4</sup> The historic visit of the U.S. President George W. Bush to Georgia in May 2005 was the most vivid manifestation of close cooperation initiated between the two countries. In the days of the visit, just one-and-a-half years after the Rose Revolution, George W. Bush called Georgia “a beacon for democracy”, while several months before, Senators J. McCain and H. Clinton nominated M. Saakashvili (together with the Ukrainian President V. Yuschenko) for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Since 2012, when a change of government took place in Georgia and subsequently the power was constitutionally redistributed between the executive and legislative branches,<sup>5</sup>*de-personification* of the bilateral relations has commenced. In spite of the fact that the U.S. establishment welcomed the fact of a first ever change of government in Georgia through elections, it was no longer in euphoria as it had been in the wake of the Rose Revolution.

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Initially, the Georgia-U.S. relations were purely *aid*-related. As a rule, the aid was *financial*, although *humanitarian* assistance (mainly wheat and fuel) was also frequently rendered by the United States. Over time, for the purpose of modernizing infrastructure and/or improving the institutional setup, the share of *technical assistance* increased. The aid was especially effective in 1995-1998, when Georgia was successfully implementing the reforms agreed upon by international financial organizations and supported by the U.S. government.

In general, 1995-1999 was an important period in the recent history of Georgia, because it was then that the country made a strategic choice.<sup>6</sup> The choice, in itself, was a set of interrelated and mutually determining fundamental decisions of political, economic and energy nature. Firstly, a political decision to ensure bringing Georgia to the focus of western strategic interests has to be mentioned.<sup>7</sup> By the mid-90s, it had become obvious that post-Soviet Russia was terminally ill with *neo-imperial* intentions, and remaining alone with her would make it very difficult

for Georgia to follow the development path of the civilized world, let alone retain sovereignty and independence. Accordingly, Georgia had to fulfill the 'century old dream of its ancestors and re-join Europe'.<sup>8</sup> Soon, Georgia became a member of the NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, within which, in fact, the *defense* co-operation with the United States made its first steps. In a short time, Georgia has become the most active participant in the Program. In parallel, the legal framework of bilateral military cooperation quickly began developing. In 1997, a very important framework agreement was signed concerning cooperation in the area of prevention of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the promotion of defense and military relations. According to the agreement, among others, the foundation was laid for the program on reducing the biological threat, whereby a cutting-edge central referral laboratory of public health ('The Lugar Laboratory') was built in Tbilisi. In fact, this has been a network of the labs working toward detection of factors causing particularly dangerous infections and putting them under epidemiological surveillance. The estimated volume of U.S. investments in the project amounted to \$300 million. Importantly, aside from the mentioned framework agreement, several other intergovernmental and interagency documents were also signed within 2-3 years, paving the way to a number of new programs. Within the State Partnership Program alone hundreds of activities were undertaken, including staff visits and exchanges, combined exercises, visits and exchanges of representatives of ground, naval and the air forces, training courses, seminars and events with the joint participation of the National Guard of Georgia and the U.S. State of Georgia. The Security Assistance Program<sup>9</sup> has been very important and is still relevant in many ways: it provides an opportunity for dozens of Georgian servicemen to receive top-class education in U.S. military schools of varying profile; 10 military helicopters and two coast guard boats were handed over to Georgia, and more. Of special note is the creation of a bilateral format of dialogue on security, and meetings of the bilateral working groups.

It was a clear sign of successfully developing relations in the military sphere that the U.S. Secretary of Defense visited Georgia for the first time in 1999. During the visit, further plans<sup>10</sup> to expand military cooperation were outlined. In particular, a decision was made to commission a Georgian platoon to the peacekeeping operation in Kosovo. This was the starting point of Georgia's subsequent participation in military missions across the

wider region, namely in Iraq and Afghanistan. When Georgia joined the post-9/11 U.S.-led international anti-terrorist coalition, a special training program<sup>11</sup> was established for Georgian servicemen in 2002. The program also had a political meaning as it was the first time U.S. military instructors had come to work in the post-Soviet space. In the same year, at the NATO summit in Prague, Georgia officially declared its goal to join the Alliance.

An important component of the strategic choice was to build an East-West transit corridor. It all started in 1993 with the Brussels Declaration, which laid the foundation for a regional program called TRACECA. The program was designed to integrate the transport infrastructure of the South Caucasus and Central Asia with transport systems in Europe. Dozens of investment projects were undertaken within TRACECA, including on the territory of Georgia.<sup>12</sup> Also noteworthy are the projects that have been carried out beyond TRACECA. First, negotiations were begun between Georgia and Turkey about building a railway between Akhalkalaki and Kars, and rehabilitating the existing line between Tbilisi and Akhalkalaki. Second, the energy aspect of the transit corridor was developed. The signing of the “contract of the century” laid the foundation for the new stage of the centennial history of Caspian oil production. Initially, a consortium of 11 companies from seven countries started building a state-of-the-art 870 km long oil pipeline from Baku to the Georgian coastal settlement of Supsa. The \$600 million facility was commissioned in 1999 and was expected to help export Azeri early oil to European markets. Construction of the pipeline was accompanied by a serious geopolitical boom because the routing of the Baku-Supsa pipeline would bypass Russian territory- for the first time in Caspian oil history. If not for the active involvement of the U.S. government, overcoming Russian resistance would have been hard to imagine. In turn, the Baku-Supsa pipeline paved the way for more ambitious projects - the construction through Georgia of a larger capacity oil pipeline Baku-Ceyhan and the South Caucasus gas pipeline. Again, contrary to overt or covert sabotage on the part of Russia, active U.S. backing proved crucial, and on the sidelines of the 1999 Istanbul OSCE summit, the leaders of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey and couple of Central Asian countries, together with the U.S. President Clinton, signed an agreement on implementing these two extremely important energy projects.<sup>13</sup> The small geopolitical war over Georgia’s transit energy corridor was ended successfully. One of the attendant consequences was that Georgia gained an important transit function and thus firmly secured

its place on the mental maps of the European decision-makers and the Washington establishment.

In the context of Georgia's strategic choice, the OSCE summit also had another meaning. Sometime earlier, as Russian border guards were withdrawn from the Georgian-Turkish border, and Georgia itself withdrew from the CSTO, the negotiations on closure of four former Soviet, latterly Russian, military bases in Georgia intensified. At the summit, primarily due to mounting diplomatic pressure from Washington, the Kremlin agreed to start closing down its military bases.<sup>14</sup>

The year of 1999 was notable also because of Georgia's accession to the Council of Europe. One year later, Georgia became a member of the WTO. The crowning moment of this period was the official statement of Georgia in 2002 of its goal to join NATO. This was the culmination, when Georgia's pro-Western orientation became clearly univocal and a strategic choice was finalized.

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The late 90s was marked by negative trends in the domestic politics of the country. Powerful groups in pursuit of corrupt interests had prevailed in the ruling elite, the pace of reforms slowed down and the country plunged into total stagnation. Accordingly, so changed the emphases in the aid policy. Now, more attention was paid to the *strengthening of democratic institutions* and *improving governance*. It should be noted that larger chunks of the aid package were directed to civil society in an attempt (together with other donors) to "upgrade from outside" the corrupt and distrusted government institutions. Such tactics, however, failed, and then came the Rose Revolution.

The Rose Revolution was an important landmark in Georgia-U.S. relations. The *personification* of relations facilitated further increasing the scale and widening the scope of aid programs. However, with the growth of the aid package, the purposefulness of the assistance programs also changed. As a matter of fact, many civil society activists, who had been recipients of a large share of aid prior to the Revolution, joined the ranks of the newly formed ruling elite. The assistance programs previously assigned to civil society sector development followed the trajectory: they "went after" former recipients, as the latter started to occupy government posts.



It was a kind of agreement between the donors and the government that in the changed circumstances the aid money would be spent more efficiently if targeting the government. Until the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, the Georgian government effectively used personal ties to preserve this pattern of aid. However, the government monopoly on the aid package eventually yielded negative results: on the one hand, the civil sector grew feeble and critical thought regarding ongoing reforms was effectively suppressed; on the other hand, inadequately large resources were directed to the procurement of combat weaponry and to staging military exercises and maneuvers near the conflict zones. Consequently, the already tense relations with the *de facto* administrations in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali further deteriorated a fact that, regrettably, was not duly assessed in Washington.<sup>15</sup>

In the meantime, essential changes took place after the Rose Revolution in the field of *military* cooperation between the two countries. As early as 1999, Georgia started to send military servicemen to peacekeeping missions first in Kosovo and then in Iraq and Afghanistan. This contribution was made first at the platoon then company level. Subsequently, especially after the Rose Revolution, the number of Georgian military servicemen significantly increased, above all in Iraq, exceeding 1,110 men in 2005. Such a sharp rise, apart from the political will proper, was due to GTEP. In 2005, the program changed its name to continue as the Georgia Sustainment and Stability Operations Program (GSSOP).<sup>16</sup> The program was aimed at training the military contingent for participation in the peacekeeping operations in Iraq.

By this time, Georgia had already acquired a reputation as a valuable partner to participate in international peacekeeping missions. The professional and often heroic service of Georgian soldiers was properly appreciated in the U.S. military and political circles. Particularly often and openly it was mentioned by American servicemen and, therefore, in private talks they would refer to Georgia as a true friend and battle-tested ally.

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Meanwhile, the situation over the conflict zones in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region was becoming increasingly troubling. Russia reacted rather painfully to the independence of Kosovo, actively supported by the West, particularly the United States. On the other hand, the prospect of providing

MAP to Georgia and the Ukraine, which was clearly revealed in the context of the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest,<sup>17</sup> fueled motivation to resort to retaliatory steps. Georgia, from this standpoint, was the most convenient target: it was concurrently the West's darling with its U.S.-trained military and the venue for emulating the "Kosovo scenario". Therefore, by striking Georgia a "blow to the head," Russia would take the appropriate revenge on the United States and the West in general. That is why Russia tried so hard to strain the situation in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region by provoking Georgia. Against this background, the Georgian authorities, presumably hoping for U.S. support, prepared a response, including the use of armed forces.<sup>18</sup> In government circles they naively hoped that the U.S.-trained and battle-tested troops in Iraq would contribute to deterring Russia. This did not go unnoticed in the West, the United States in particular. The Georgian leader and other top officials were repeatedly warned on the level of both the U.S. President as well as the Secretary of State that whatever happened, the Georgians should not use force.<sup>19</sup> Otherwise, Georgia would have to rely on itself only and ultimately would inevitably lose a confrontation with Russia, with heavy consequences.<sup>20</sup> In spite of this, de-escalation of the situation failed and in August 2008 a short but brutal war broke out between Georgia and Russia. The pre-requisites and causes of the war, and the reasons why it could not be avoided, have been the focus of numerous reports and articles, including by an EU-mandated fact finding international mission.<sup>21</sup> Most observers agree with respect to the special interest of Russia in aggravating the situation. At the same time, however, it has been obvious that apart from Russia, the burden of responsibility should be distributed, albeit in varying degrees, to the authorities of Georgia and the de facto administrations in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, as well as to the western governments and institutions.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, a share of responsibility lies with the U.S. Administration, as it was unable to stop the escalation through diplomatic means, and failed to defend Georgia at the hottest phase of the conflict. However, the latter was more of a moral, rather than political and legally binding obligation to Georgia as the "beacon for democracy" and "battle-tested ally".

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The 2008 War, as expected, ended with severe consequences for Georgia. In addition to serious damage incurred by the military infrastructure and economy, a difficult situation arose from the humanitarian standpoint. As

a result of ethnic cleansing, tens of thousands of Georgians had to flee the Tskhinvali region, above all from the Georgian populated districts and villages. The gravest political outcome, however, was the deployment of the Russian armed forces in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region and recognition of independence of these indigenous Georgian territories by the Kremlin.<sup>23</sup> One should bear in mind that the August War and its outcomes coincided with the beginning of the well-known world financial crisis, the potential impact of which, in turn, seriously threatened the economy and Georgian statehood in general.

Despite the fact that the outgoing Bush Administration<sup>24</sup> failed to fulfill the mentioned moral obligations to Georgia, it did its best, together with European partners, to stop the hot phase of the conflict and thus, allegedly, save her from physical annihilation. Despite a sharp confrontation between the Republican and Democratic parties during the ongoing presidential elections in the United States, the perception of the inadequacy of Russian actions and sympathy for Georgia was equally characteristic of both parties. Therefore, initiatives in support of post-war Georgia easily overcame the red-tape barriers. In this respect, the most important was a \$1 billion aid package, which was prepared with the active participation of the then-Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, member of the Democratic Party, Joe Biden. Following the relevant legal procedures in the U.S. Congress, the Bush Administration managed to timely marshal the funds, which were then transferred to the Georgian government in several tranches. The purpose of this unprecedented aid package was to help stabilize the state budget, assist in the resettlement of IDPs and reconstruct war-damaged infrastructure. The mobilization of such an amount of aid on the part of the United States also inspired other donors. A special donor conference was convened on October 2008 to discuss the matter. A *Joint Needs Assessment*,<sup>25</sup> preliminarily drafted by the UN and the World Bank, prompted the participants to endorse a \$4.5 billion financial assistance package, of which the larger part was grants, the rest – low-interest credits. It was a great relief for post-war Georgia.<sup>26</sup>

A major need to design a new vision-based framework for bilateral relations was identified after analyzing the causes and consequences of the 2008 War. After the presidential elections, when it became clear that the republican administration would change, the question of ensuring the continuity of the main line of bilateral relations was put on the agenda. At the same time, it became apparent that it was necessary to introduce new

priorities on the agenda and to adjust the existing emphases of bilateral relations.<sup>27</sup> Bearing all this in mind, and again based on the aforementioned moral duties, on January 9, 2009, the outgoing republican administration signed with Georgia a Charter on Strategic Partnership.<sup>28</sup> Importantly, the document signed by the then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had been agreed with the incoming Obama Administration. On the basis of the Charter, a Strategic Partnership Commission was formed, co-chaired by the U.S. Secretary of State and the Prime Minister of Georgia. At the first session that took place on June 22, 2009 in Washington, already under the new administration, it was decided to establish four working groups in the following priority areas: Democracy and Governance; Defense and Security; Economy, Energy and Trade; People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges. The working groups were tasked to meet annually at the level of heads of agencies/departments to sum up the results of the reporting period and agree on future plans. Once a year, a plenary meeting of the Commission is held in Georgia and the USA alternately.

The Charter, in many ways, has historic significance. It was the first document according to which both sides take the obligation to coordinate their actions, mostly for the sake of strengthening the sovereignty and modernization of the public institutions of Georgia. In other words, this document provides a platform which, on the one hand, organizes the monitoring and management of programs and projects carried out in/by different government agencies, and, on the other hand, enables the parties to regularly review and agree on new areas of cooperation (in fact, the aid to Georgia from the U.S.).

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From the beginning, the Charter gained practical and political meaning. The Obama Administration maintained generally warm relations with Georgia, although, unlike the previous administration, these relations were no longer being built on personal ties. Cooperation acquired a more practical nature, becoming more routine. A major 5-year aid program under the aegis of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, aimed at rehabilitation of the road infrastructure in Samtskhe-Javakheti, kept on running, as was the case with the programs and projects supported by USAID, OPIC and other government agencies. At the same time, not much was initiated in the field of military cooperation. Moreover, following the

August War a “silent embargo” was introduced against Georgia in military-technical cooperation. In parallel, the U.S. government initiated a “reset” in relations with Russia, which prompted more prudence on the part of the Administration while dealing with Georgia on politically and militarily sensitive issues. In spite of this, the Administration continued to back the territorial integrity of Georgia, calling on Russia to comply with the obligations assumed under the well-known ceasefire agreement of August 12, 2008, and condemning the occupation of Georgia’s territories. In the meantime, Saakashvili and his team kept their personal relationships with members of Congress, as well as representatives of the think tank community and the media. In order to maximize the benefits of these relationships, lobbying organizations were used actively. It was no coincidence that, in December 2010, the Senate passed a strong resolution in support of Georgia’s territorial integrity and sovereignty.<sup>29</sup>

Importantly, the United States continued supporting Georgia as one of its largest donor states. By 2011, the U.S. aid had exceeded \$3 billion in total.<sup>30</sup>This included the funds for long-term support for Georgia’s democratic development and integration into the Euro-Atlantic community, rather than simply for post-war rehabilitation purposes.

In spite of the “silent embargo”, military cooperation as a whole was successfully carried out: more Georgian servicemen were educated in the U.S. military colleges within the framework of the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program; and the successful implementation of GTEP and SSOP<sup>31</sup> was followed by a training and deployment program<sup>32</sup> for Georgian troops for subsequent participation in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan. Georgian soldiers, trained within the program, were sent to Afghanistan in growing numbers, soon to make Georgia the highest per capita troop contributor among the non-NATO countries.<sup>33</sup> A decade-long cooperation with the Georgia National Guard (U.S.A.) continued, as did the friendly calls of the U.S. 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet ships and the Coast Guard boats to Georgian ports.

One of the topical issues of the political aspect of the bilateral agenda had been the appropriate response to the situation around Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region. Firstly, it concerned curbing, if not reversing, the process of recognition of independence of these Georgian regions; as for the Geneva International Discussions (GID), a priority was to ensure security and protection of the political and humanitarian rights of IDPs

along the administrative boundary lines. Additionally, the U.S. actively backed the Georgian government's initiatives concerning the resolution of conflicts, including the 2010 document "State Strategy on Occupied Territories – Engagement through Cooperation".<sup>34</sup> Likewise, in June 2012, at the plenary session of the U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission in Batumi, the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that the U.S. Government would accept the Status Neutral Travel Document (SNTD) as a valid document for travel to the United States for residents of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region.<sup>35</sup>

Mutual support of their positions in international organizations remained as another priority area of cooperation.<sup>36</sup> The United States has always openly backed the deepening of Georgia's cooperation with NATO, and after the 2008 War, it put more effort into this in terms of Georgia's accession to the Alliance. Thanks to strong backing by the United States, the Alliance took the decision to establish the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC). The Commission represents a forum for political consultations and practical cooperation between Georgia and NATO aimed at realizing Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations.<sup>37</sup> Since December 2008, also with the active support of the United States, Georgia has been engaged in the implementation of the Annual National Program (ANP).<sup>38</sup>

One of the landmarks in the bilateral relations during B. Obama's first presidency was a statement he made regarding the possibility of a future bilateral free trade agreement.<sup>39</sup> The statement also marked the beginning of a High-Level Trade and Investment Dialogue (HLTD) between the two countries, aimed at facilitating trade relations.

An interesting decision for Georgian citizens was the extension of multiple tourist visas up to 10 years. As for the complete abolition of visas, the U.S. side was not prepared for it, irrespective of the fact that in order to enter Georgia, citizens of the United States (as well as Europe and the countries of some other regions) already enjoyed such a privilege.<sup>40</sup>

And yet, despite this, by the end of Obama's first presidency, the main message to the Georgian authorities was to ensure the open and fair parliamentary elections scheduled for October 2012. The opposition movement in Georgia was gaining strength, to which the authorities did not always react adequately. Accordingly, the electoral environment in Georgia raised questions in Washington.

The 2012 parliamentary elections were held against the background of tough political confrontation. The incumbent government did all it could to secure the image of the competing political force – the coalition Georgian Dream and its popular leader Bidzina Ivanishvili– as having a pro-Russian orientation and thus, prior to the elections, to raise its own profile in the eyes of western governments and organizations. As the most important front line of the internal political confrontation in Georgia passed through Washington, the local establishment was the natural target of this message. Safe to say, the task was completed successfully<sup>41</sup> - a large part of the establishment came to view the new Georgian Dream government with suspicion, believing that Prime Minister Ivanishvili was a friend of, or was indeed indebted to, Vladimir Putin and, accordingly, Georgia’s foreign policy orientation was soon to change. The defeat of M. Saakashvili’s political group as an outcome of the elections was so unexpected by the misinformed establishment, that the elections soon came to be labeled as “surprise-elections”.

In the wake of the change of government, as the legal prosecution of former officials from the previous government started, doubts regarding Georgian Dream began to grow. Special attention was drawn to an attempt by an influential congressman to amend the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act.<sup>42</sup> The amendment required that continuation of cooperation with Georgia was conditioned by the suspension of political persecution and release of the political prisoners.<sup>43</sup> Doubts especially intensified where violation of the indictment rules or improper use of pre-trial detention were seen to have occurred. For good reason, the establishment was noticeably sensitive to the cases of initiating criminal proceedings and/or indicting former President M. Saakashvili.<sup>44</sup> Several high-profile cases were even included in the 2014 Georgia Human Rights Report of the Department of State.<sup>45</sup> By this time *depersonalification* of relations has virtually ended. Moreover, the relations between the leaders of the two countries became almost totally confined to the exchange of congratulatory letters on national holidays.

Despite such an unfavorable background seemingly interfering with the continuation of friendly relations established between the two countries over the years, the events slowly but methodically continued moving in the right direction. The successful presidential elections in 2013 and

the ensuing end of the notorious “cohabitation”<sup>46</sup> led to the first positive emotions toward the new authorities. In this context, what also mattered was the initiation of profound justice reforms.<sup>47</sup> The most important aspect, though, was the strong will of the new Georgian government to move towards fulfillment of the Euro-Atlantic aspirations and to maintain Georgia’s active contribution to the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan. The new Georgian authorities have never thought to abandon any commitment to NATO, the United States or any Western government. Quite the contrary, they have even more loudly expressed their readiness and willingness to speed up NATO and EU integration and to deepen the bilateral relations. The climax was the June 27, 2014 signing of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, which pulled the rug from under every “doubting Thomas” who had thus far questioned the pro-Western orientation of the new government.<sup>48</sup>

Additionally, the approval of a Substantial NATO-Georgia Package (SNGP)<sup>49</sup> at the 2014 NATO Summit further strengthened the image of the Georgian authorities. The central component of the Package was a new mechanism of cooperation – the Joint Training and Evaluation Center – JTEC.<sup>50</sup> Also, at the summit, Georgia was singled out from the group of NATO aspirant countries as “the most interoperable partner” and, together with four other partner countries (*Sweden, Finland, Australia, and Jordan*) of the Alliance, was invited to join the Enhanced Opportunity Partner’s Group. All this was done thanks to the active support of the United States.

As for the bilateral cooperation, the pre-existing dynamics have continued and further enhanced, as planned by the working groups of the U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership. Notably, three plenary sessions and over ten working group meetings were held in 2014-2016. Of late, the dialogue in the framework of the working groups has become more result-oriented, since an increasing number of specific programs and projects have been initiated. Today, the United States has the most robust and thematically diverse bilateral agenda with Georgia compared to any other it has in the region. Only through the USAID, the number of ongoing programs/projects is 50 units.<sup>51</sup> The number of OPIC-supported projects in agriculture, the tourism industry, and franchising in the retail trade industry is increasing. Since 2015, the Corporation has raised the ceiling of corporate financing/insurance by \$100 million, and now the figure totals \$500 million.



It is safe to say that a milestone of the decade was the signing of the agreement between the Government of Georgia and the Anaklia Development Consortium<sup>52</sup> in September 2016 about building a deep-sea port and free industrial zone on the Georgian coast. By 2020, some \$2.5 billion will have been invested in the Georgian economy, and the transit potential of the country will rise sharply. Importantly, a major U.S. holding, *The Conti Group*, is part of the consortium, which may be an indication of the potentially increasing interest of the U.S. corporate community toward the South Caucasus and beyond.

In 2015, the House of Representatives of the U.S. Congress registered the Georgia Caucus,<sup>53</sup> uniting up to forty Congressmen from both parties. As a result of active collaboration with the Caucus, it has become possible to initiate a bi-partisan resolution in support of Georgia's territorial integrity, which, in September 2016, was adopted with an unprecedented number of votes (410).<sup>54</sup> The Resolution is remarkable also because it calls for eternal commitment on the part of the United States never to recognize the occupation of Georgia's territories or the independence of its breakaway regions. Rather important provision in support of Georgia is also contained in the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act.<sup>55</sup>

A recent landmark event in the bilateral relations was the official visit to Georgia of the U.S. Secretary of State.<sup>56</sup> The visit preceded the NATO summit in Warsaw and thus underlined once again U.S. support to Georgia's integration into the Alliance. Its primary outcome, however, was the signing of a Memorandum on Deepening the Defense and Security Partnership between the United States of America and Georgia.<sup>57</sup> This is the most important policy document signed after the 2009 Charter on Strategic Partnership. The Memorandum once again reaffirms and expands the United States' and Georgia's long-term and efficient cooperation in the defense and security areas by focusing on defense capacity building, military and security cooperation, and information sharing. On the basis of the Memorandum, implementation of the Georgia Readiness Program is soon to begin, which in turn will open up a new process of training and equipment in order to further enhance the defense capacity of Georgia. As the Memorandum states, Georgia will be supported in the acquisition of defense articles and related services that improve the interoperability, sustainability, and deployability of Georgia's armed forces, as well as its self-defense capability. Interestingly, this formally confirms the removal of the "silent embargo", which in fact was lifted some time ago.

In 2015 and 2016, Georgia hosted the training exercises *Noble Partner*. Unprecedented in scale and scope, they featured approximately 500 Georgian, 150 British and 650 U.S. servicemen accompanied by U.S. armored combat equipment.<sup>58</sup> These exercises are another manifestation of close and trustworthy relations between the two countries.

Finally, another important aspect stands out in the U.S.-Georgian relations: in parallel to security issues, the topics associated with Georgia's welfare are increasingly gaining weight. The education and healthcare spheres are to be mentioned as a first point. In 2014, a second agreement (termed as a "compact") was signed with the Millennium Challenge Corporation aimed at coping with poverty and facilitating the economic growth of Georgia by improving the quality of general education, technical and vocational education and training, and higher education. An important objective of the program is to promote the creation of the technocratic elite in Georgia.<sup>59</sup> Also important is that on the decision of the U.S. Administration, Georgia's quotas in educational and scientific exchange programs have increased. In particular, 30 percent more Georgian high school students participate in the FLEX program, while in the Fulbright program instead of five, eleven scholars and graduate students can participate. In respect to healthcare, the major novelty has been the hepatitis C elimination program, which is being carried out in Georgia by the prominent U.S. pharmaceutical company *Gilead Sciences*, operating under the supervision and guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the United States, together with the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia.<sup>60</sup> While the monetary value is about \$12-15 billion, the Program, planned to be implemented over several years, will cost almost nothing to the national budget of the country. It is aimed not only at the full recovery of patients, but also the complete prevention of the disease.<sup>61</sup>

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The Georgia-U.S. relations are developing in an ascending trajectory. Many find these relations strategic and exemplary in the region. The primary driving force behind this relationship is the growing convergence of values and strategic interests in the region. The close partnership is the conscious choice of Georgia, its population and its political class. In its turn, awareness of Georgia in the United States is growing. The establishment in Washington is well aware of the importance of a unified, democratic and

developed Georgia, not least for the sake of U.S. interests in the region. Today, Georgia is a recognized leader in the region in terms of democratic reforms and good governance; and its international rankings are constantly improving. To maintain this trend, it is necessary to create the conditions for peaceful and stable development. Therefore, the primary task of the next phase of bilateral relations is to ensure solid economic and security guarantees for Georgia's peaceful and sustainable development.

## References

1. [www.nytimes.com/1991/12/26/world/end-soviet-union-text-bush-s-address-nation-gorbachev-s-resignation.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/26/world/end-soviet-union-text-bush-s-address-nation-gorbachev-s-resignation.html)
2. Three different U.S. presidents sat in the White House during Shevardnadze's rule: respect on the part of the George H. Bush (senior) was reinforced by friendly relations established in previous years; while the attitude of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush (Junior) toward Shevardnadze came as a result of his high international prestige.
3. Zurab Zhvania, a late Prime Minister, was well known in U.S. political circles well before the Rose Revolution. He was considered the most promising politician in Shevardnadze's entourage. Later, the DC establishment met his death with great sorrow. The Senate even passed a special resolution on this sorrowful fact.
4. After the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, the priority of the George W. Bush Administration was expansion of the "free world". Accordingly, the spread of the ideals of democracy and freedom, in some cases through aid programs or through regime change, became a strategic imperative. Georgia, in the wake of the Rose Revolution and the pro-democracy rhetoric of its ruling elite, perfectly fitted Washington's political taste. As a result, the powerful inertia of support to Georgia began to emerge.
5. Pursuant to constitutional amendments that entered into force upon the end of the 2012 parliamentary elections, part of the executive power was transferred to the Prime Minister. The distribution of powers under these amendments, however, was not clearcut, resulting in unnecessary friction among top executives. This did not go unnoticed by international partners, who frequently seemed to be confused as to who to deal with in a particular matter.
6. Making a strategic choice has not been a one day affair. Instead, it was at least a short but historic process, which on the one hand was held against the background of the destructive policy on the part of Russia, and on the other, the growing dynamics of cooperation with the United States [and Western Europe], including concerted actions, consultations, technical assistance, etc.

7. Despite the kindness toward Georgia, in the early 90s the U.S. [and Europe] regarded it more as a target of humanitarian assistance and moral-political support.
8. Alexander Rondeli - *The Choice of Independent Georgia*, in: *The Security of the Caspian Sea Region*, ed. Gennady Chufirin, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 14
9. This is an *umbrella* program which includes International Military Education and Training (IMET), Foreign Military Sales (FMS), Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and Excess Defense Articles (EDA) sub-programs.
10. Secretary Cohen, at the meeting with President Shevardnadze, expressed his satisfaction with the active participation of Georgia in the NATO PfP program and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, and for the first time suggested sending to Georgia a special group to develop a work plan with the aim of providing Georgia the Membership Action Plan (MAP). In turn, President Shevardnadze shared his vision for Georgia to become the most reliable ally of the United States in the region, similar to Israel's role in the Middle East. Secretary Cohen confirmed that strategically this vision suited U.S. interests (*From the personal notes of author's archives*).
11. The Georgia Train and Equip Program – GTEP was initially designed to train Georgian special forces to clean up Pankisi Gorge from Chechen militants. Later, the GTEP trainees were dispatched on missions outside Georgia. Overall, 2600 Georgian servicemen went through the program. For more details see: [Globalsecurity.org](http://Globalsecurity.org), [www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/gtep.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/gtep.htm)
12. The most important projects are considered the ones on construction of the “Red Bridge” on the border of Georgia and Azerbaijan and the railway ferry terminal in Poti.
13. At the time, the U.S. ruling elite paid much attention to the topic of an alternate energy transit route bypassing Russia. With the active support of the Clinton administration, the corresponding political and investment resources were mobilized for constructing the Baku-Supsa early oil pipeline, as well as for starting talks on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) larger pipeline. Thereafter, the process was continued and successfully completed during the presidency of George W. Bush. Also worthwhile noting is the support on the part of the U.S. Congress: In 1999, a group of influential senators designed a rather important bipartisan bill – the Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999, which, parallel to development of transportation links, also implied the facilitation of resolution of conflicts, financial aid and, generally, promotion of the political independence and economic development of the countries in the region. The bill was initiated by Senator S. Brownback. Among 19 co-sponsors were such well-known former or acting senators as J. McCain, R. Lugar, Ch. Hagel, G. Helms, O. Hatch, etc. See details at: [www.congress.gov/106/bills/s579/BILLS-106s579rs.pdf](http://www.congress.gov/106/bills/s579/BILLS-106s579rs.pdf)
14. According to the decision reached at the summit, the first of the four bases was closed in 2001. The second base located on the territory of Abkhazia, as Russia claimed, was also shut down concurrently, however, this fact could not be verified. As for the remaining two bases, the process of their withdrawal was delayed by the Russians on a variety of pretexts. Finally, in 2007, the last Russian soldier left the base.

15. Lincoln Mitchell, Alexander Cooley – After the August War: A New Strategy for U.S. Engagement with Georgia, *Harriman Review*, 2010, p.14. at: [www.academiccommons.columbia.edu/catalog/ac%3A138653](http://www.academiccommons.columbia.edu/catalog/ac%3A138653)
16. For details see: [Globalsecurity.org](http://Globalsecurity.org), [www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/gssop.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/gssop.htm)
17. At the summit, as a result of heated debates among the members of Alliance, it was decided that Georgia [and Ukraine] would not receive MAP. Instead, it was announced that Georgia [and Ukraine] would eventually join NATO. From that time, Georgia became a NATO aspirant country, which was equally irritating for Russia as the provision of MAP would have been.
18. Ronald D. Asmus - A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp.143-144
19. The first such warning was made in summer 2004 after a futile attempt to resolve the conflict in Tskhinvali region by force. According to U.S. Ambassador Richard Miles, serving in Georgia at the time, the primary purpose of President George W. Bush's visit to Georgia in May 2005 was to bring a clear message that the United States condemned the use of force for settling the issues between Georgia proper and South Ossetia or Abkhazia. See: The ADST Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Ambassador Richard M. Miles, p. 290 at: [www.adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Miles-Richard-M1.pdf](http://www.adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Miles-Richard-M1.pdf).
20. Asmus, *op.cit.*
21. On December 2, 2008, The Council of the European Union created a Fact Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, which after several months of work, published a report: Independent International Fact Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, September 2009. [www.georgica.tsu.edu.ge/files/05-Security/Tagliavini-2009Eng3.pdf](http://www.georgica.tsu.edu.ge/files/05-Security/Tagliavini-2009Eng3.pdf)
22. Archil Gegeshidze -The August Events: Background Factors of the Crisis, Causes and Prospects of Elimination, *in: Crisis in Georgia, 2008: Preconditions, Reality, Perspectives*, Independent Experts' Club, 2009, pp. 6-9
23. Aside from Russia, the independence of Abkhazia and so-called South Ossetia was recognized by Venesuela, Nicaragua, Nauru, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Later, Vanuatu and Tuvalu withdrew their recognition.
24. In August 2008, George W. Bush was in the final stages of his presidency and the election campaign was in full swing.
25. Joint Needs Assessment. See: [www.mof.ge/common/get\\_doc.aspx?doc\\_id=8990](http://www.mof.ge/common/get_doc.aspx?doc_id=8990)
26. Thanks to the given aid, Georgia, unlike other countries of the region, was able to practically avoid the negative impact of the global economic crisis. However, the war proper significantly damaged the national economy: the inflow of foreign investments and remittances reduced; the construction business and other branches of the economy shrank; and as a result, the index of economic development fell dramatically.

27. One such priority was thought to be cooperation for the purpose of promoting the non-recognition of the new reality established by recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region by Russia and several other states, as well as the de-occupation of Georgia. Additionally, more emphasis should be made on the protection of human and property rights, strengthening of the democratic institutions and decentralization of governance.
28. United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership, see [www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/121029.htm](http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/121029.htm)
29. The Resolution was authored by influential Senator, Mrs. Jean Shaheen, while the co-sponsors were the equally authoritative Senators L. Gram and J. Liberman. See the text of the resolution at: [www.congress.gov/bill/111th-congress/senate-resolution/698/text](http://www.congress.gov/bill/111th-congress/senate-resolution/698/text)
30. [www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/georgia/intro-fp-us.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/georgia/intro-fp-us.htm). As of today, the figure exceeds \$4.5 billion.
31. By 2008, several hundred soldiers had undergone training within the framework of SSOP. As a result, the number of Georgian troops in Iraq reached 2,000.
32. Georgia Deployment Program – International Security Assistance Force (GDP-ISAF): [www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/gdp-isaf.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/gdp-isaf.htm). At the time of writing, Georgia has over 12,000 military servicemen trained under the U.S. programs. Most of these troops have combat experience.
33. [www.eu-nato.gov.ge/sites/default/files/ENGLISH.pdf](http://www.eu-nato.gov.ge/sites/default/files/ENGLISH.pdf)
34. The document included many interesting ideas and was designed for use as soft power by Georgia and its partners. Despite the fact that the U.S. and Europe supported the document, it was skeptically received from the outset in Moscow, Sukhumi and Tskhinvali. The reason was the open and brazen statement in the preamble of the document that the ultimate goal of the Strategy was to reintegrate Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region back into Georgia’s constitutional ambit. The document in its entirety proved to be a non-starter since the stated goal was absolutely unacceptable for the other side of the conflict. See at: [www.gov.ge/files/225\\_31228\\_851158\\_15.07.20-StateStrategyonOccupiedTerritories-EngagementThroughCooperation\(Final\).pdf](http://www.gov.ge/files/225_31228_851158_15.07.20-StateStrategyonOccupiedTerritories-EngagementThroughCooperation(Final).pdf)
35. See text of the Joint Statement at: [www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/06/192396.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/06/192396.htm)
36. Georgia and the United States are members of such international organizations as the UN, Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, OSCE, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and WTO. Georgia is also a Permanent Observer of the Organization of American States and participant of NATO’s PfP program.
37. [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_38988.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_38988.htm)
38. The Annual National Program is the basic component of MAP and a major instrument on the path to NATO membership. It reflects the short- and medium-term perspectives of military reforms, foreign and security policy, as well as the agenda of economic development of Georgia. See: [www.eu-nato.gov.ge/en/nato/relations/integration/andp](http://www.eu-nato.gov.ge/en/nato/relations/integration/andp)

39. [www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/30/remarks-president-obama-and-president-saakashvili-georgia-after-bilatera](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/30/remarks-president-obama-and-president-saakashvili-georgia-after-bilatera)
40. Visa-free entry in the United States is limited also for the citizens of Eastern European, EU and NATO member states. The governments of these states continue to actively lobby this issue in Washington.
41. To achieve the mentioned goal, administrative resources, personal contacts and lobbying organizations were used.
42. Federal act defining the Pentagon budget.
43. In the end, the amendment was not included in the bill.
44. A senior former U.S. official, in a private conversation with the author of this article, explained the reaction of the establishment as follows: "In the history of America there have been cases of impeachment, forced resignation, even the president's assassination. However, never ever has a newly elected leader begun to pursue the predecessor. It is not in our DNA. Therefore, what is happening in Georgia is unacceptable for us".
45. Georgia 2014 Human Rights Report, Department of State [www.state.gov/documents/organization/236738.pdf](http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/236738.pdf)
46. The period from October 25, 2012 to November 17, 2013 when the top leaders of executive power - President M. Saakashvili and Prime Minister B. Ivanishvili – represented two mutually strictly opposing political forces.
47. In November 2012, a comprehensive set of amendments to the judiciary system was introduced in the Georgian Parliament, implying reforms in the labor law, justice system, criminal law, private law, protection of human rights, arbitration, and juvenile justice.
48. After Armenia, under pressure from Russia, abandoned the process of Association with the EU, and "disobedient" Ukraine was punished with the annexation of Crimea, the Georgian government's progressive commitment towards integration into the EU and NATO became more appreciated. Since then, when appropriate, the U.S. government has been much more actively lobbying Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations in both multilateral and bilateral formats of dialogue with its European partners.
49. More on the SNGP at: [www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2016\\_02/20160303\\_160209-factsheet-sngp-full-eng.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_02/20160303_160209-factsheet-sngp-full-eng.pdf)
50. The JTEC was opened on August 27, 2015 and has already hosted the first training course under the aegis of NATO. See at: [www.eu-nato.gov.ge/ge/nato](http://www.eu-nato.gov.ge/ge/nato)
51. [www.usaid.gov/georgia](http://www.usaid.gov/georgia)
52. [www.anakliadevelopment.com](http://www.anakliadevelopment.com)
53. The Georgia Caucus is co-chaired by Congressman Ted Poe (Republican from Texas) and Congressman Gerry Connolly (Democrat from Virginia).

54. [www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-resolution/660/text](http://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-resolution/660/text)
55. [www.congress.gov/114/bills/s2943/BILLS-114s2943enr.pdf](http://www.congress.gov/114/bills/s2943/BILLS-114s2943enr.pdf)
56. The visit took place on July 6-7, 2016.
57. [www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/07/259364.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/07/259364.htm)
58. [www.eur.army.mil/noblepartner/](http://www.eur.army.mil/noblepartner/)
59. The Millennium Challenge Corporation is a foreign aid agency carrying out assistance programs in 45 developing countries. Only Georgia is directing this aid resource to education rather than the development of physical infrastructure.
60. [www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/communicable-diseases/hepatitis/news/news/2015/07/georgia-sets-sights-on-eliminating-hepatitis-c](http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/communicable-diseases/hepatitis/news/news/2015/07/georgia-sets-sights-on-eliminating-hepatitis-c)
61. Statistically, up to 7 percent of the Georgian population is affected with hepatitis C. All patients with the hepatitis C virus can participate in the program. Within the program, patients are provided with free services for diagnostics and disease treatment with modern generation drugs.