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THESIS

**U.S. STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND GEORGIA'S
PROSPECTS FOR NATO MEMBERSHIP**

by

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March 2015

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MEMBERSHIP**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Many observers in NATO and European Union (EU) countries hold that Russia is attempting to challenge the increasing Western influence in Central and Eastern Europe and reassert itself as a regional and global superpower. The 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine provide evidence in support of this theory. Twelve Central and Eastern European nations have nonetheless joined NATO since 1999, and others have pledged their membership aspirations. This fact alone suggests that a general fear of Russian aggression persists among Central and Eastern European nations, and that NATO enlargement is both justified and welcomed. This thesis examines Georgia's prospects for NATO membership and assesses U.S. strategic interests in this regard. To accomplish this, this thesis analyzes Georgia's geostrategic importance and investigates links between Georgian and U.S. foreign policies as they relate to NATO enlargement. As regards Georgia, the key questions concern the extent to which the United States supports Tbilisi's candidacy for Alliance membership, and whether the United States and its NATO Allies are willing to accept the risks and responsibilities that would be incurred with Georgia's NATO membership. This thesis concludes that U.S. decisions regarding Georgia's candidacy for NATO membership will be of critical importance.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AEECA	Assistance to Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia
ANP	Annual National Program
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CRS	Congressional Research Service
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EUCOM	European Command
EUMM	EU Monitoring Mission
FDI	foreign direct investment
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FSB	Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation
FY	fiscal year
GAF	Georgian Armed Forces
GATT	General Agreement on Tariff and Trade
GD	Georgian Dream
GDP	gross domestic product
GHP	Global Health Programs
GIZ	German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation
GTEP	Georgia Train and Equip Program
HADR	humanitarian assistance and disaster response
HMMWV	highly mobile, multi-wheeled vehicles

IMET	International Military Education and Training
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INCLE	International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement
IDP	internally displaced person
IPAP	International Partnership Action Plan
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
KFOR	Kosovo Force
LM	liaison mechanism
MAP	Membership Action Plan
MCA	Millennium Challenge Account
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MoD	Ministry of Defense
MRAP	mine resistant ambush protected
NACC	North Atlantic Cooperation Council
NADR	Nonproliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NGC	NATO-Georgia Commission
NIC	Neutral Identification Card
NRF	NATO Response Force
NSC	National Security Concept

OEF	Operation ENDURING FREEDOM
OIF	Operation IRAQI FREEDOM
OCC E&F	Operational Capabilities Concept Evaluation and Feedback Programme
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PARP	Planning and Review Process
PfP	Partnership for Peace
SDR	Strategic Defense Review
SEX	special economic zone
SMR	State Minister for Reintegration
SSOP	Sustainment and Stability Operations Program
TRANSCOM	Transportation Command
UN	United Nations
UNM	United National Movement
UNOMIG	United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
U.S.	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USN	United States Navy
WTO	World Trade Organization
WB	World Bank
WEU	Western European Union

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This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Yvonne, for her patience and support during this busy time in our lives. I only hope one day I can do the same for you. With all my love, thank you.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines Georgia's prospects for NATO membership and provides insight into U.S. strategic interests in this regard. To accomplish this, this thesis analyzes Georgia's geostrategic importance and investigates links between Georgian and U.S. foreign policies as they relate to NATO enlargement. Additionally, this thesis analyzes Georgia's progress toward NATO membership as assessed by the Alliance, as well as related events that indirectly affect Georgia's membership aspirations, such as the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and the increasing influence of the European Union (EU) in Central and Eastern Europe. This thesis investigates the hypothesis that U.S. decisions regarding Georgia's candidacy for NATO membership will be of critical importance.

A. SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH

Strategically located in the Caucasus Mountains along the borders of present-day Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey, Georgia has historically served as an economic and military "land bridge" linking Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Due to its strategic location on the eastern shore of the Black Sea, one empire after another has fought for, and conquered, Georgia—first the Romans, followed by the Persians, the Arabs, the Turks, the Mongols, the Ottomans, the Russians, and finally the Soviets. Prior to 1991, Georgia had witnessed a mere three years of independence in nearly 800 years (1918–1921), the last 190 of which (with the exception of the above-mentioned three years) were under Russian, and later Soviet, control.¹

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, Georgia officially gained its independence. However, since then, little has changed in the struggle for regional control. Not only has Georgia continued to serve as the "land bridge" between powerful actors, but Western influence has continued to increase as well, owing in part to post-Cold War containment of Russian influence and the growing involvement of Western companies in the South Caucasus energy market. Additionally, in the last

¹ "The World Factbook: Georgia," Central Intelligence Agency, last accessed January 12, 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>, under "Introduction."

decade, Georgia has served as a military transportation hub for the U.S.-led coalitions in Iraq and Afghanistan. These factors (and others) have prompted NATO and EU powers to strengthen their political ties with Georgia, to support Georgia's membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO), and to consider its potential membership in NATO and the EU.²

This increasing Western influence, however, has not been without contention, as witnessed in the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict and subsequent Russian recognition of the breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which comprise approximately 20 percent of Georgia's territory. Russian military forces have since increased their presence in these regions, and Berlin Wall-style barriers have been constructed along Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's borders with the part of Georgia not under Russian military control.³ When combined with Moscow's signing of the *Treaty on Alliance and Strategic Partnership* with Abkhazia in November 2014⁴ and the ongoing events in Ukraine (including Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea),⁵ tensions between Russia and the NATO and EU powers have increased accordingly.⁶ The current perception among many NATO and EU powers is that Russia is attempting to challenge the increasing Western influence in Central and Eastern Europe and reassert itself as a regional and global superpower.⁷ This has led observers to question whether discord between Moscow and the West about Georgia's quest for NATO and EU membership might become comparable to Cold War levels of antagonism.⁸

² Jim Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Political Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests* (CRS Report No. RL33453) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 2, 2014), 1–70.

³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴ Federica Mogherini, "Statement," *European Union*, November 24, 2014, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2014/141124_01_en.htm.

⁵ Matt Smith and Alla Eshchenko, "Ukraine Cries 'Robbery' as Russia Annexes Crimea," *CNN*, March 18, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/18/world/europe/ukraine-crisis/>.

⁶ Natalia Zinets and Dmitry Madorsky, "U.S. Says Russia Must Pull Convoy from Ukraine or Face More Sanctions," *Reuters*, August 22, 2014, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/08/22/uk-ukraine-crisis-idUKKBN0GL1VH20140822>.

⁷ "Russia Profile," BBC, Last accessed November 28, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17839672>.

⁸ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 1–65.

Critics of NATO enlargement contend that the induction of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland into the Alliance in 1999, followed by Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004, and Albania and Croatia in 2009, has done little more than serve as a catalyst for a resurgent, and increasingly nationalist, Russian foreign policy.⁹ However, twelve Central and Eastern European nations have nonetheless joined the Alliance, and others have pledged their membership aspirations.¹⁰ Furthermore, in June 2014, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine signed an Association Agreement with the EU.¹¹ One might conclude from these facts alone that a general fear of Russian aggression persists among Central and Eastern European nations, and that NATO enlargement is not only justified, but also welcomed. As regards Georgia, the key questions that remain are as follows: To what extent does the United States support Tbilisi's candidacy for Alliance membership? Are the United States and its NATO Allies willing to accept the additional risks and responsibilities that would be incurred with Georgia's NATO membership?

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The current literature regarding Georgia's prospects for NATO membership can be broken down into three categories. Within these categories, there is a general consensus that Georgia faces a number of significant challenges in its bid to join NATO, including Moscow's recognition of the breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia's faltering attempts at democratization, and Georgia's need for additional defense reforms. Additionally, there is a general consensus that Moscow's current leadership has demonstrated its resolve to prevent continued NATO enlargement into Russia's historic sphere of influence, and that any future attempt at NATO

⁹ James Kirchick, "Russia Hasn't Been 'Encircled' by the West: Vladimir Putin Simply Wants to be Able to Invade His Neighbors at Will," *BBC*, April 8, 2014, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/04/08/nato_expansion_didnt_set_off_the_ukrainian_crisis.

¹⁰ "A Short History of NATO," NATO, last accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.nato.int/history/nato-history.html>.

¹¹ "EU Forges Closer Ties with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova," European Union, June 27, 2014, http://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2014/270614_association_agreement_en.htm.

enlargement in the post-Communist space will be accompanied by an increase in Russian opposition.

The first category of literature consists largely of official documents from NATO and the Government of Georgia, and officially-sponsored studies, notably works by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). This literature generally focuses on assessing Georgia's quantifiable progress toward meeting NATO membership requirements. Since 1994, when Georgia joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, Georgia has actively pursued reforms in areas such as democratization and defense. However, owing in part to economic, military, and political realities inherent in former Soviet states, these reforms have been slow and subject to frequent setbacks. Georgia has nonetheless maintained its commitment to achieving NATO membership, as is evident by Georgia's continued support of coalition operations in Kosovo with the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) and in Afghanistan with the NATO-led RESOLUTE SUPPORT,¹² as well as by its pledge to provide continued "financial support for the long-term sustainment of the Afghan National Security Forces."¹³

As regards membership criteria, according to the 1995 *Study on NATO Enlargement*, there are no rigid criteria for joining the Alliance. However, there are certain conditions that can hinder or prevent membership accession, such as unresolved territorial disputes, failures in democratization, or an unreformed defense institution.¹⁴ In this regard, with the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict and subsequent Russian occupation of the breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia's membership

¹² Jim Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement: Issues and Implication* (CRS Report No. RS22829) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 6, 2009), 1–12; Jim Nichol, *Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests* (CRS Report No. RL34618) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 3, 2009), 1–39; Jim Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests* (CRS Report No. 97–727) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, June 21, 2013), 1–43; Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 1–70; Adriana Skorupska and Konrad Zasztowt, "Georgia's Local Government Reform: How to Escape from the Soviet Past (and How Poland Can Help)," *The Polish Institute of International Affairs*, No. 4 (87) (February 2014), http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/Georgias_Path_to_NATO.pdf, 1–6.

¹³ "NATO-Georgia Relations," NATO, June 2014, http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2014_06/20140602_140602-Media-Backgrounder_Georgia_en.pdf.

¹⁴ "Study on NATO Enlargement," NATO, November 5, 2008, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm, under Chapter 1.b.7.

aspirations suffered a major setback.¹⁵ Since then, however, tensions between Tbilisi and Moscow have stabilized, and, owing in part to financial and military assistance provided by individual NATO and EU member states, Georgia has continued to implement necessary democratization and defense reforms. It remains to be seen if Georgia will find a political resolution to its territorial disputes. However, should these disputes be resolved, Georgia's primary membership obstacle would (in theory) no longer be a factor. Given Georgia's dedication and progress toward meeting NATO conditions, with continued assistance from individual member states, notably the United States, some observers maintain that Georgia will eventually achieve NATO membership.¹⁶ In 2013, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, then the NATO Secretary General, said, "if you [Georgians] continue your efforts, and with our help, Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration will only be a matter of time."¹⁷

The second category of literature focuses on how individual NATO member states are not ready for Georgia to become a member due primarily to the associated risk of provoking a conflict with Russia, but also due to ongoing economic recession and political turmoil in NATO and EU member states.¹⁸ Since the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, Russia's increasingly aggressive foreign policy has openly challenged the status quo. From its deliberate conduct of deniable "hybrid" warfare in Ukraine¹⁹ to its politicized attempts to create organizational rivals to NATO,²⁰ the International

¹⁵ Nichol, *Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008*, 1–39; Damon Wilson, "Georgia's Path to NATO," *Atlantic Council*, February 2014, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/Georgias_Path_to_NATO.pdf, 1–6.

¹⁶ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 1–43.

¹⁷ Anders Fogh Rasmussen, "NATO and Georgia—On the Right Path" (speech, National Library of Georgia in Tbilisi, Georgia, June 27, 2013), http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_101755.htm.

¹⁸ Liz Alderman and Alison Smale, "Divisions Grow as a Downturn Rocks Europe," *The New York Times*, August 29, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/30/business/international/European-economy-tries-to-find-its-way.html?_r=0.

¹⁹ "Hybrid War—Hybrid Response?," NATO, last accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2014/russia-ukraine-nato-crisis/Russia-Ukraine-crisis-war/EN/index.htm>.

²⁰ Alexander Yakovenko, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Allies of a New Type," *RT*, September 12, 2014, <http://rt.com/op-edge/187360-sco-economic-humanitarian-cooperation>.

Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (WB),²¹ Russia has continued to challenge the West's power and legitimacy. While the threat of Russian aggression has increased, the ongoing economic recession has prompted most NATO member states to reduce defense expenditures,²² thus decreasing NATO's overall ability to defend itself militarily against Russia.

According to the NATO website,

the effects of the [global] financial crisis and the declining share of resources devoted to defence in many Allied countries have exacerbated this imbalance [that is, NATO's over-reliance on the United States for essential defense capabilities] and also revealed growing asymmetries in capability among European Allies. France, Germany, and the United Kingdom together represent more than 50 per cent of the non-U.S. Allies defence spending, which creates another kind of over-reliance within Europe on a few capable European Allies. Furthermore, their defence spending is under increasing pressure, as is that of the United States, to meet deficit and indebtedness reduction targets.²³

When combined with recurrent secessionist campaigns in the United Kingdom (Scotland) and Spain (Catalonia),²⁴ the implications for the Eurozone of the results of the 2015 Greek Parliamentary elections,²⁵ and the U.S. pivot to the Asia-Pacific,²⁶ it would appear overall that there is little political willingness among NATO and EU member states to face off militarily against Russia.

²¹ Jon Hartley, "The BRICS Bank is Born Out of Politics," *Forbes*, July 28, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jonhartley/2014/07/28/the-brics-bank-is-born-out-of-politics>.

²² "NATO Funding," NATO, last accessed January 28, 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_67655.htm, under "Voluntary Indirect Funding of NATO."

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "Scottish Referendum: Scotland Votes 'No' to Independence," *BBC*, September 19, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-29270441>; "Catalonia Vote: 80% Back Independence - Officials," *BBC*, November 10, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-29982960>.

²⁵ Dennis Lynch, "Greek Election Results 2015: Syriza Wins by Comfortable Margin in Historic Elections," *International Business Times*, January 25, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/greek-election-results-2015-syriza-wins-comfortable-margin-historic-elections-1794076>.

²⁶ Kurt Campbell (Assistant Secretary, Department of State), interview by Robert Kagan, last accessed January 12, 2015, transcript, The Foreign Policy Initiative, <http://www.foreignpolicy.org/content/obama-administrations-pivot-asia>.

The third category of literature focuses on how Moscow regards Georgia as within its historic sphere of influence and on Moscow's resolve to prevent continued NATO enlargement and "bring about a less U.S./Western-centric system."²⁷ According to Moscow, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, continued NATO and EU enlargement has not only been unwarranted, but has also threatened the economic and territorial integrity of Russia. From this perspective, Moscow's actions in Georgia and Ukraine are justified.²⁸ Within this category of literature, however, there are varying opinions about whether Moscow's actions positively or negatively affect Georgia's membership aspirations. While to some extent Moscow's actions in Georgia²⁹ and Ukraine³⁰ have served to revitalize the Alliance, thus making Georgia's membership more likely, its actions have also exposed NATO's weakness—the challenge of achieving consensus.³¹ It remains to be seen whether the Alliance will reach consensus in support of Georgia's bid to join NATO.

While the current literature offers valuable insight into Georgia and its progress toward, and likelihood of obtaining, NATO membership, it generally fails to look at Georgia (and the world) from a historical perspective. Since the days of the Roman Empire, the Caucasus has served as a battleground between competing ethnicities and ideologies, each trying to assert its dominance over an increasingly geostrategic region.³² Today's contest between Russia and NATO is arguably comparable.

²⁷ Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Spheres of Interest, Not Influence," *The Washington Quarterly* 32:4 (October 2009): http://home.comcast.net/~lionelingram/555_Russias_Sphere_of_Interest_09oct_Trenin.pdf, 5.

²⁸ Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber, "Shoigu Says NATO and Terrorism Russia's Top Challenges," *The Moscow Times*, November 11, 2013, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/shoigu-says-nato-and-terrorism-russias-top-challenges/489311.html>.

²⁹ Nichol, *Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008*, 1–39.

³⁰ "Hybrid War—Hybrid Response?"

³¹ Damon Wilson, "A U.S. Strategy for Europe's East," *RT*, November 13, 2013, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/a-us-strategy-for-europe-s-east>.

³² "The World Factbook: Georgia," under "Introduction."

C. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

As regards the likelihood of Georgia obtaining NATO membership, two hypotheses must be examined. The first is that Georgia will obtain membership; however, the most important aspect of this hypothesis is not that membership *will* occur, but rather *when* it will occur and under what circumstances. According to the 1995 *Study on NATO Enlargement*, there are no rigid criteria for achieving NATO membership. Rather, all that is ultimately required is consensus among existing members.³³ However, this is where matters become gray. NATO decisions regarding the accession of West Germany into the Alliance in 1955 set the precedent for granting NATO membership to an aspiring nation with unresolved territorial disputes.³⁴ Similarly, NATO's vague definitions of democratization and defense reforms leave room for interpretation.³⁵ In effect, Georgia's prospects for achieving NATO membership have less to do with its ongoing disputes and domestic reforms than with the willingness of NATO member states to accept additional risks and responsibilities. Thus, the question becomes, at what point would NATO member states be willing to accept the risks and responsibilities associated with allowing Georgia to join the Alliance? With an increasingly aggressive Russian foreign policy threatening not only the sovereignty and territorial integrity of non-NATO Eastern European nations,³⁶ but also Europe's access to Russian and Azeri energy,³⁷ some observers contend that it is only a matter of time before NATO will be forced to act, be that through economic, military, or political means. Given Georgia's current progress toward meeting membership conditions, with continued U.S. support for Tbilisi's candidacy, Georgian membership may eventually be achieved.

The second hypothesis is that Georgia will never obtain NATO membership. With several NATO member states currently suffering from economic recession and political

³³ "Study on NATO Enlargement," under Chapter 1.b.7.

³⁴ "A Short History of NATO," under "A Treaty for Our Age."

³⁵ "Study on NATO Enlargement," under Chapter 5.b and 5.d.

³⁶ Nichol, *Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008*, 1–39; Smith and Eshchenko, "Ukraine Cries 'Robbery.'"

³⁷ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 1–70; Natalia Zinets, "Ukraine Warns Europe of Russian Gas Cut-Off: Moscow Denies," *Reuters*, August 27, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/08/27/us-ukraine-crisis-gas-idUSKBN0GR0W120140827>.

turmoil,³⁸ it appears that the only point the Alliance is able to achieve consensus on is its unwillingness to provoke a conflict with Russia over a peripheral country that, some observers argue, offers little more than an insecure hub for energy and logistics.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

Evidence to support this thesis has been obtained primarily via an in-depth case study of Georgia. The purpose of this case study is to investigate links between Georgian and U.S. foreign policies as they relate to NATO enlargement and to examine Georgia's prospects for NATO membership. This has been accomplished primarily by examining official documents from NATO and the Government of Georgia, officially-sponsored studies (notably works by the Congressional Research Service), research by prominent international scholars, and statements by NATO and by government officials from Georgia and the United States. Analyzing these sources has clarified overlapping objectives and long-term goals, as well as individual and national positions.

E. THESIS OVERVIEW

Chapter II of this thesis provides an historical overview of Georgia's demographic, economic, political, and military situation, including Georgia's WTO accession, natural resource capacity, and strategic location within the Eurasian Transport Corridor for energy resources. Chapter III of this thesis analyzes U.S. strategic interests in Georgia and how these interests have shaped, and will probably continue to influence, Georgia's domestic and foreign policies. Primary U.S. strategic interests in Georgia include post-Cold War containment of Russian influence, Georgia's path to democratization, the build-up of Georgia's national and collective defense capacity, and the Eurasian Transport Corridor.³⁹ This chapter focuses on financial and security assistance provided by the United States, Georgia's military contributions to operations

³⁸ Alderman and Smale, "Divisions Grow."

³⁹ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement*, 1–12; Nichol, *Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008*, 1–39; Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 1–43; Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 1–70.

authorized by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and led by NATO, and the U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership.

Chapter IV of this thesis offers a brief overview of the 1995 *Study on NATO Enlargement*. This chapter also analyzes Georgia's motivations for, and progress toward, NATO membership, as well as several ongoing issues that could undermine Georgia's prospects for NATO membership. These issues include Georgia's unresolved territorial disputes in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia's faltering democratization, and Georgia's need for additional defense reforms.

Chapter V of this thesis offers conclusions.

II. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF GEORGIA

This chapter discusses several aspects of Georgia, including its demography, economy, energy, World Trade Organization status, politics, and the military.

A. DEMOGRAPHY

According to a census conducted in July 2014, the population of Georgia, excluding the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, was approximately 4,935,880. Geographically limited by the greater Caucasus Mountains to the north and the lesser Caucasus Mountains to the south, the majority of Georgia's population lives along the western border (adjacent to the Black Sea), and along the east-west running valley extending through the center of the country toward Tbilisi (the capital) and Azerbaijan. As of 2011, approximately 52.8 percent of Georgia's population lives in major cities such as Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi, and Rustavi, with approximately 25 percent living in Tbilisi alone (1.175 million). Between 120,000 and 200,000 people live in Kutaisi, Batumi, and Rustavi, respectively. Of note, Batumi is the capital of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, a region located in southwest Georgia along the border of Turkey and adjacent to the Black Sea.⁴⁰

According to a census conducted in 2002, Georgia is comprised primarily of ethnic Georgians (83.8 percent). The majority of non-Georgian ethnic groups, such as the Azeris (6.5 percent), Armenians (5.7 percent), and Russians (1.5 percent), live in the center of the country along the north-south running transportation corridor (river and railway), as does the large South Ossetian population in the center north. While Georgia's official language is Georgian, only 71 percent of the population speaks Georgian. Ethnic Russians comprise a mere 1.5 percent of the population; however, the percentage of Russian speakers is 9 percent, with Azeri and Armenian speakers comprising 13 percent of the population. Since the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have each changed their official languages (Abkhaz and Ossetian, respectively); however, the majority of their populations speak Georgian. When viewed on a map, these facts

⁴⁰ "The World Factbook: Georgia," under "People and Society."

effectively split Georgia down the center into two ethnic and linguistic Georgian halves, with minority groups controlling the center.⁴¹

According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), in 2014, the average life expectancy in Georgia was 75.72 years⁴² (79.4 for females and 70.2 for males⁴³). This relatively long life expectancy can be largely attributed not only to Georgia's continuous dedication of a large portion of its gross domestic product (GDP) to health expenditures (9.4 percent in 2011), but also to improvements in the purification of drinking water and sanitation facilities. Both of these factors have also significantly reduced Georgia's childhood mortality rate.⁴⁴

That being said, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia's population growth has steadily declined.⁴⁵ Between 2008 and 2012, the use of hormonal contraceptives increased by approximately 99.7 percent.⁴⁶ As of 2010, 53.4 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 44 use some form of contraceptive.⁴⁷ With a fertility rate of 1.77 children born per woman, Georgia's population growth rate is negative 0.11 percent (as of 2014), ranking Georgia 206 out of 233 nations surveyed with the smallest population growth rate.⁴⁸ According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, this translates into a significantly smaller population younger than 20 years of age compared to those between the ages of 20 and 29.⁴⁹ With 33.8 percent of the population

⁴¹ "The World Factbook: Georgia," under "People and Society."

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ The World Bank, "The World Bank Group–Georgia Partnership Program Snapshot," October 2014, <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Georgia-Snapshot.pdf>, 10.

⁴⁴ "The World Factbook: Georgia," under "People and Society."

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ National Statistics Office of Georgia, "Women and Men in Georgia: Statistical Publication," 2013, http://www.geostat.ge/cms/site_images/files/english/health/women%20and%20men%202013-Analytical.pdf, 19.

⁴⁷ "The World Factbook: Georgia," under "People and Society."

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ National Statistics Office of Georgia, "Population," last accessed February 5, 2015, http://geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=473&lang=eng.

between the ages of 20 and 24 (and 14.6 percent of the total population) unemployed⁵⁰ and 9.7 percent of the population below the poverty line (as of 2013),⁵¹ it is likely that a large portion of Georgia's future elderly population will lack long-term financial security. As of 2014, Georgia is one of the poorest of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries.⁵²

B. ECONOMY

According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia and the CIA, in 2013, 9.4 percent of Georgia's GDP originated from agriculture, such as the cultivation of grapes, citrus fruits and hazelnuts. In comparison, 73 percent of Georgia's GDP originated from services, such as energy logistics and tourism. The remaining 17.6 percent was derived from small-scale industry, such as the production of alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages, metals, machinery, and chemicals, as well as the mining of manganese, copper, and gold.⁵³ However, according to the CIA, in 2006, 55.6 percent of Georgia's labor force was employed in agriculture, compared to 35.5 percent in services and 8.9 percent in industry. This disparity in sectoral employment—more than half of the population is employed in agriculture—has resulted in a continued rise in income inequality among Georgia's population.⁵⁴

According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, Georgia's major exports include motor cars, Ferro-alloys, copper ores, nuts, and wine, the majority of which (51 percent) go to CIS countries. In 2014, Azerbaijan accounted for 19 percent of Georgia's exports, while Armenia, Russia, Turkey, and the United States accounted for 10 percent, 10 percent, 8 percent, and 7 percent, respectively. In terms of imports,

⁵⁰ National Statistics Office of Georgia, "Employment and Unemployment," last accessed February 4, 2015, http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=146&lang=eng.

⁵¹ National Statistics Office of Georgia, "Living Conditions," last accessed February 4, 2015, http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=188&lang=eng.

⁵² The World Bank, "The World Bank Group," 9.

⁵³ National Statistics Office of Georgia, "Gross Domestic Product of Georgia: 2013," November 17, 2014, http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/files/english/nad/pres-relizi_2013_ENG_daz.pdf; "The World Factbook: Georgia," under Economy.

⁵⁴ "The World Factbook: Georgia," under "Economy."

Georgia primarily receives petroleum, motor cars, gases, medicaments, and telephones, roughly half of which (47 percent) come from non-CIS and non-EU countries. In 2014, Turkey accounted for 20 percent of Georgia's imports, while China, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Ukraine accounted for 9 percent, 7 percent, 6 percent, and 6 percent, respectively.⁵⁵

Prior to the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict,

Georgia's economy sustained GDP growth of more than 10% in 2006–07, based on strong inflows of foreign investment and robust government spending. However, GDP growth slowed . . . and sunk to negative 4% in 2009 as foreign direct investment [FDI] and workers' remittances declined in the wake of the global financial crisis. The economy rebounded in 2010–13, but FDI inflows, the engine of Georgian economic growth prior to the 2008 conflict, have not recovered fully.⁵⁶

According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, Georgia's real growth rate peaked at 12.6 percent in 2007; however, in 2008 and 2009, it dropped to 2.6 percent and negative 3.7 percent, respectively.⁵⁷ Thanks to international aid pledges for Georgia's rebuilding,⁵⁸ Georgia's real growth rate climbed to 6.2 percent and 7.2 percent in 2010 and 2011, respectively. Between 2012 and 2013, Georgia's real growth rate slowed to 6.4 percent and 3.3 percent, respectively, marking a gradual decline.⁵⁹

In terms of tax revenue, "Georgia has historically suffered from chronic failure to collect."⁶⁰ In 2004, the Georgian government took steps that "simplified the tax code, improved tax administration, increased tax enforcement, and cracked down on petty corruption."⁶¹ Additionally, the government reformed the traffic police and implemented a fair examination system for entering the university system. In doing so, the Georgian government not only succeeded in increasing tax revenue, but through continued

⁵⁵ National Statistics Office of Georgia, "External Trade." last accessed February 4, 2015, http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=137&lang=eng.

⁵⁶ There are currently over 1 million migrant Georgian workers living in Russia. Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 12; "The World Factbook: Georgia," under Economy.

⁵⁷ National Statistics Office of Georgia, "Gross Domestic Product of Georgia: 2013."

⁵⁸ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement*, 4–5.

⁵⁹ National Statistics Office of Georgia, "Gross Domestic Product of Georgia: 2013."

⁶⁰ "The World Factbook: Georgia," under "Economy."

⁶¹ Ibid.

enforcement, hopes to attract additional “foreign investment [as well], with a focus on hydropower, agriculture, tourism, and textiles production.”⁶² “In 2014, the World Bank assessed Georgia as having made the most progress among 189 countries over the period since 2005 in making business regulatory reforms and 15th worldwide in the overall ease of doing business.”⁶³ Georgia currently ranks first out of 26 Eastern European and Central Asian countries in the overall ease of doing business.⁶⁴ Additionally, according to Transparency International’s 2014 report, Georgia ranked first out of 19 Eastern European and Central Asian countries on the Corruption Perception Index, and 50th worldwide. That is, Georgia was perceived as the least corrupt of the 19 Eastern European and Central Asian countries rated, but more corrupt than 49 other countries in a global comparison involving 175 countries.⁶⁵

C. ENERGY

Georgia has historically imported nearly all of its natural gas and oil products from Russia. However, due to financial assistance provided largely by the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as Georgia’s increasing efforts to either refurbish its existing hydroelectric power plants or build new ones, Georgia is now able to meet nearly all of its domestic energy requirements without depending on Russia.⁶⁶ That being said, according to the World Bank, Georgia “still relies on seasonal electricity exchanges with a single neighboring country [Azerbaijan], which undermines the security of its supplies and poses a risk of seasonal electricity shortages.”⁶⁷ However, by shifting its imports toward Azerbaijan, Georgia has been able to reduce its dependence on Russian energy resources and limit the effects of Russian-induced gas supply interruptions.⁶⁸

⁶² “The World Factbook: Georgia,” under “Economy.”

⁶³ Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, “Doing Business 2015: Going Beyond Efficiency,” 12th Edition, 2014, http://economy.ge/uploads/ek_ciprebshi/reitingebi/reitingebi_eng/Doing_Business_2015_eng_1.pdf, 2.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Transparency International, “Corruption Perceptions Index 2014,” 2014, http://economy.ge/uploads/ek_ciprebshi/english/CPI_2014-ENG.pdf.

⁶⁶ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 53–54.

⁶⁷ The World Bank, “The World Bank Group,” 14.

⁶⁸ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 53–54.

As part of the Eurasian Transport Corridor, Georgia maintains strategic significance to world powers, particularly Russia, the United States, and European nations. According to Richard Morningstar, then the U.S. Special Envoy for Eurasian Energy, “U.S. policy encourages the development of new Eurasian oil and gas resources to increase the diversity of world energy supplies,”⁶⁹ thereby allowing European countries to diminish their energy dependence on Russia.⁷⁰ Construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline (both completed in 2006), as well as the construction of the Kars-Akhalkalaki Railroad (scheduled for completion in 2014), “are part of a [Georgian and U.S.] strategy to capitalize on Georgia’s strategic location between Europe and Asia and develop its role as a transit point [between Azerbaijan and Europe] for gas, oil, and other goods.”⁷¹ Additionally, the expansion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline, “as part of the Shah Deniz II Southern Gas Corridor project [with Azerbaijan], will result in a \$2 billion foreign investment in Georgia, the largest ever in the country. Gas from Shah Deniz II is expected to begin flowing [to Georgia] in 2019,”⁷² and eventually to Europe.

D. GEORGIA AND THE WTO

In 1994, members of the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT) granted Georgia observer status. The following year, however, the GATT transformed into the WTO, and a new negotiations process became necessary. In June 1996, Georgia applied for membership to the WTO and expressed its desire to become a full member. Later that year, Georgia received observer status in the WTO. Over the next three years, a series of multi-lateral and bi-lateral negotiations took place between Georgia and 30 member states, during which details were worked out regarding “rates of coherent tariffs on imports of goods, conditions of access to the commodity markets and obligations in the

⁶⁹ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 54.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ “The World Factbook: Georgia,” under “Economy.”

⁷² Ibid.

services trade field.”⁷³ On 6 October 1999, the WTO General Council signed the protocol on the accession of Georgia to the WTO. On 20 April 2000, the Georgian government ratified the protocol, and on 14 June 2000, Georgia became the 137th member of the WTO.⁷⁴

As a full member, Georgia was in the position of considering whether to approve Russia’s 2011 bid for WTO membership; however, concerns over market access along Georgia’s border with Russia (including the breakaway regions) quickly became points of contention. In keeping with the 1994 free trade agreement signed by Georgia and Russia⁷⁵ (placed under review in July 2014 for suspension by Russia’s Ministry for Economic Development⁷⁶), Georgia and the WTO argued that Georgia should establish customs clearance posts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to increase the transparency of cross-border trade. However, Russia refused to resolve these concerns, claiming that the establishment of these posts was unrelated to WTO accession and political in nature. On 9 November 2011, Georgia and Russia signed a trade monitoring agreement that “cleared on of the last major obstacles to Russia being invited to join the WTO.”⁷⁷ According to the CRS Report by Jim Nichol,

the trade monitoring agreement calls for customs observers at three ‘trade corridors’ on the Georgia-Russia border, two running through the breakaway regions and the third running through the uncontested Zemo Larsi-Kazbegi border crossing. In regard to the breakaway regions, a terminal will be located at Russia’s border with the region, and another at Georgia’s border with the region. A private firm will be hired and managed by Switzerland to check statistics on customs clearance. Georgia and Russia will provide data to the firm, which will forward the data to the WTO.⁷⁸

⁷³ “Georgia and WTO,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Government of Georgia, last accessed January 28, 2015, http://mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=548.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 13.

⁷⁶ Liz Fuller, “Russia Hits Back at Georgia over Trade Agreement with European Union,” *Radio Free Europe: Radio Liberty*, August 2, 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/georgia-russia-eu-agreement-free-trade/25478788.html>.

⁷⁷ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 13.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Russia became a full member of the WTO in August 2012.⁷⁹

E. POLITICS

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and the subsequent fleeing of the then-president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze assumed control of Georgia. Initially chosen as head of the ruling State Council in January 1992, and later as speaker of the legislature in late 1992, Shevardnadze became Georgia's president in 1995. However, between 1992 and 1995, Georgia underwent intense secessionist conflict in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, which largely negated the democratic and economic reforms implemented during his rule.⁸⁰ After eight years in office, "mounting public discontent over rampant corruption and ineffective government services, followed by an attempt by the incumbent Georgian Government to manipulate national legislative elections in November 2003 touched off widespread protests that led to the resignation of Eduard Shevardnadze."⁸¹ This so-called "Rose Revolution" led to new elections, after which the U.S.-educated Mikheil Saakashvili became the first democratically-elected president of Georgia.⁸²

Under President Saakashvili's rule, the Georgian government began taking steps toward decentralization and democratization. In 2004, the Georgian government ratified the European Charter on Local Self Government, a Council of Europe document designed to promote "the idea of local government as a basic element of democracy, and emphas[ize] the inclusion of the citizens in local democracy."⁸³ Two years later, in 2006, the Georgian government undertook radical reforms to consolidate Georgian territory from 1,000 small local units to 69 larger units. However, reformers failed to take on the issue of financial and political emancipation for local governments, which was a crucial factor for Georgia's democratization. Considering that there were no legal mechanisms in place to ensure a fair distribution of state resources, local governments remained

⁷⁹ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 13.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸¹ "The World Factbook: Georgia," under "Introduction."

⁸² Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 1.

⁸³ Skorupska and Zashtowt, "Georgia's Local Government Reform," 2.

financially dependent on central authorities. This dependency gave central authorities leverage to persuade local electorates to vote for the ruling party. Ironically, according to opinion polls, more than half of all Georgians stated that they were unaware of these reforms.⁸⁴

In further attempts to reform local government, the Georgian government drafted legislation for the establishment of five self-governing cities, each with locally-elected mayors, as well as for the “direct election of the governors of the nine regions of Georgia, and of the heads of local municipalities.”⁸⁵ However, due to internal opposition, Tbilisi became the only Georgian city to assume this new organizational structure, whereas other cities could now elect local councilors, who would then elect mayors. “Provincial governors remained as presidential appointments, made in agreement with [the] Prime Minister.”⁸⁶ While further reforms were brought to Parliament in 2012 designed to create additional self-governing cities and increase the accountability of regional governors, these too were either marginalized or defeated by internal opposition.⁸⁷ In effect, the 2006 reforms demonstrated that Georgia was moving “toward centralization, rather than decentralization.”⁸⁸

In November 2007, a “government crackdown on political oppositionists led Saakashvili to step down as president in the face of domestic and international criticism to seek a mandate on his continued rule. He was reelected president in January 2008 with 53% of the vote.”⁸⁹ In August 2008, however, Russia invaded Georgia and quickly defeated the Georgian military. Russia’s subsequent recognition of the breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states prompted Saakashvili to introduce “new democratization initiatives as a means to strengthen Georgia’s sovereignty and independence and thereby prevent Russia from subverting

⁸⁴ Skorupska and Zashtowt, “Georgia’s Local Government Reform,” 2–3.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 2–3.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁹ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 1.

Georgia's statehood."⁹⁰ These initiatives included reforms in agriculture, trade, employment, infrastructure development, and tourism.⁹¹

In October 2011, billionaire philanthropist Bidzina Ivanishvili entered into politics, bringing the divided opposition together under his Georgian Dream (GD) coalition.⁹² The result was an intense political standoff between Saakashvili and Ivanishvili involving issues such as citizenship and political contributions. Under President Saakashvili, the government sought to bar Ivanishvili from running for political office, and began seizing Ivanishvili's financial assets. Amendments to the constitution were approved that limited campaign contributions; however, observers viewed this as a way of constricting Ivanishvili's new party. After nearly six months of political tension, multi-million dollar fines, and the seizure of numerous telecommunication assets and facilities owned by the Ivanishvili family,⁹³ GD won a majority of seats in the October 2012 "parliamentary election and removed UNM [United National Movement] from power. Conceding defeat, Saakashvili named Ivanishvili as prime minister and allowed Georgian Dream to create a new government."⁹⁴

Under Ivanishvili, the government sought to introduce "'large-scale reforms in all strategic directions,' including changing the constitution to bolster parliamentary power, restructuring the Interior (police) Ministry and depoliticizing the Interior and Defense Ministries, promulgating a new national security strategy, and modernizing the economy."⁹⁵ Furthermore, the Georgian government also proclaimed that "the United States is Georgia's main ally and that foreign policy objectives include EU and NATO."⁹⁶ Over the next several months, however, the new government began arresting UNM party officials, a move that many U.S. and EU officials deemed politically

⁹⁰ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 1.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1–2.

⁹² "The World Factbook: Georgia," under "Introduction."

⁹³ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 4.

⁹⁴ "The World Factbook: Georgia," under "Introduction."

⁹⁵ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 8.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

motivated.⁹⁷ Additionally, “many heads of municipalities affiliated with Saakashvili’s party were sacked by members of local councils. Half of them very quickly switched allegiance from UNM to GD, which demonstrate[d] their total political dependence on central government.”⁹⁸

The result was an intense political standoff between President Saakashvili and Prime Minister Ivanishvili that culminated in the dismissal of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Ivanishvili physically preventing President Saakashvili’s State-of-Nation Address to Parliament.⁹⁹ “In late March 2013, GD convinced enough UNM legislators to join in a two-thirds majority vote to amend the constitution to take away President Saakashvili’s power to dismiss the sitting cabinet and to appoint a new cabinet without parliamentary approval. He [Saakashvili] had disavowed any intention of carrying out such an action during the few days that the constitution permitted it between the legislative and presidential elections.”¹⁰⁰

In May 2013, GD announced that Deputy Prime Minister Giorgi Margvelashvili would run for president under the GD party. Later that month, former Prime Minister Ivane “Vano” Merabashvili, a “UNM official and possible presidential candidate, was arrested on charges of corruption, embezzlement, and abuse of office. Several members of [the U.S.] Congress raised concerns that the arrest was politically motivated and could harm Georgia’s democratization and trans-Atlantic aspirations.”¹⁰¹ That being said, on November 17, 2013, Margvelashvili was inaugurated as president, having attained 62.1 percent of the vote,¹⁰² thus “ending a tense year of power-sharing between Saakashvili and Ivanishvili. Ivanishvili voluntarily resigned from office after the presidential succession, and Georgia’s legislature on November 20, 2013 confirmed Irakli

⁹⁷ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 6–8.

⁹⁸ Skorupska and Zashtowt, “Georgia’s Local Government Reform,” 2.

⁹⁹ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 6–8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰² “The World Factbook: Georgia,” under “Government.”

Garibashvili as his replacement.”¹⁰³ According to many outside observers, it appears that Georgia is creating a political environment where one party is predominant, and that competitive party democracy is in decline. Furthermore, while it appears that the Georgian government has become less pro-American, it is still pro-European.¹⁰⁴

F. MILITARY

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia’s military was virtually non-existent. In 1991, Georgia’s Land Forces and National Guard made up the preponderance of the Georgian Army; however, equipment and training had long since been neglected. In an effort to resurrect its armed forces, the Georgian government pursued financial assistance and training from foreign nations, notably the United States. However, owing in part to the volatility of the situation after the Soviet break-up, initial defense reforms were slow to implement. By 2004, the Georgian government had begun implementing a wide array of structural reforms designed to enhance civil-military relations, including the appointment of a civilian defense minister “to head a ministry increasingly staffed by civilians.”¹⁰⁵ Since then, coordination between security-related ministries has increased accordingly, and issues pertaining to defence policy, budget expenditures, and human rights of members of the armed forces have been systematically identified and corrected.¹⁰⁶

In 2005, the Georgian Parliament ratified the first National Security Concept (NSC) of Georgia, a document which outlines “the nation’s fundamental values, interests, threats, risks, and challenges . . . and provide[s] the major directions for national security policy as well as its foreign, social, and economic policy priorities.”¹⁰⁷ According to Georgia’s current NSC (published in 2011), Georgia’s top threats, risks, and challenges are the “occupation of Georgian territories by the Russian Federation and terrorist acts

¹⁰³ “The World Factbook: Georgia,” under “Government.”

¹⁰⁴ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement*, 2.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ministry of Defense of Georgia, *Strategic Defense Review 2013–2016*, Tbilisi, Georgia, 2013, <http://www.mod.gov.ge/documents/yzqhgsgsreeng.pdf>, 12.

organized by the Russian Federation from the occupied territories,” and the “risk of renewed military aggression from Russia.”¹⁰⁸ The 2011 NSC further states, “the Russian Federation, using its political and economic leverages, continues to inhibit Georgia from acquiring modern western defensive equipment,” and that “one of Russia’s key strategic objectives remains to gain and maintain control over regional energy sources and distribution networks.”¹⁰⁹ In this regard, the Georgian military has since shifted its methodology from a capabilities-based approach to a threat-based approach.¹¹⁰

By early 2009, in accordance with Georgia’s defense plan (*Minister’s Vision 2009*), Georgia began implementing reforms designed to increase the military’s interoperability with NATO forces and contribute to NATO-led collective security operations such as ISAF. To accomplish this, the Georgian government addressed “deficiencies in military intelligence, air and maritime defense, joint force interoperability, special forces (including to support ISAF), and combat service support.”¹¹¹ Additionally, Georgia began an intense campaign to re-equip and modernize its armed forces “with Western-made or upgraded conventional weapons, armor, aviation, and electronic equipment.”¹¹²

According to *Minister’s Vision 2013–2014*, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) reaffirmed these goals and pledged to “improve its capabilities to protect the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia [and] to participate in international operations.”¹¹³ The MoD also “declared a light infantry unit for the Operational Capabilities Concept Evaluation and Feedback Programme [OCC E&F] with the aim of eventual contribution to the NATO Response Forces [NRF].”¹¹⁴ Additionally,

¹⁰⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, *National Security Concept of Georgia*, 2011, http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=12, 7–10.

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Defense of Georgia, *Strategic Defense Review 2013–2016*, 16.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹¹ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement*, 2.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Ministry of Defense of Georgia, *Minister’s Vision 2013–2014*, Tbilisi, Georgia, 2013, <http://www.mod.gov.ge/documents/Ministers%20Vision%20Eng.pdf>, 3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

the MoD began pursuing the goal of developing and retaining a professional and motivated officer corps by not only emphasizing “the education, training, career management and social care of the GAF [Georgian Armed Forces],”¹¹⁵ but also by gradually transitioning away from the current pay-by-position system towards a pay-by-rank system.¹¹⁶

According to Georgia’s *Strategic Defense Review 2013-2016 (SDR 2013–2016)* (published in 2013), the major challenge that Georgia continues to face is its defence budget. Hindrances to increasing Georgia’s defense budget include “the absence of sufficiently qualified personnel, inefficiencies within the acquisition system and organizational and structural shortfalls.”¹¹⁷ To correct these deficiencies, Georgia plans “to develop a multi-year, programme-based Defence budget including execution and control procedures, to ensure the resources that are needed to man, equip, train and sustain the GAF are used in an efficient and effective manner. These improvements include necessary improvements to current defence acquisition and procurement systems.”¹¹⁸ In 2012, Georgia spent approximately 2.88 percent of its GDP on defense¹¹⁹ (more than any European NATO member). However, in real terms, Georgia’s 2012 defense budget was only \$451 million, which places Georgia’s defense spending well below that of the majority of NATO Allies.¹²⁰ While Georgia’s 2014 and 2015 defense budgets increased in real terms by 9 percent and 7 percent, respectively, Georgia’s defense expenditures remained at 2.2 percent and 2.1 percent of GDP, respectively.¹²¹

As regards organizational reform, in 2004, Georgia’s interior ministry troops were integrated into the armed forces. By 2007, the General Staff command system had

¹¹⁵ Ministry of Defense of Georgia, *Minister’s Vision 2013–2014*, 3.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁷ Ministry of Defense of Georgia, *Strategic Defense Review 2013–2016*, 7–8.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹²⁰ “Financial and Economic Data Relating to NATO Defence,” NATO, February 24, 2014, http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_topics/20140224_140224-PR2014-028-Defence-exp.pdf.

¹²¹ Ministry of Defense of Georgia, *Strategic Defense Review 2013–2016*, 30–31.

transitioned to a joint command staff as well. Two years later, “remaining elements of the Coast Guard—largely decimated during the Russia-Georgia conflict—became part of the border guards, organizationally under the Interior Ministry.”¹²² In 2010, the Georgian Air Force was merged into the Georgian Land Forces and renamed the Army Air Section, whereas one year later, Georgian naval forces were incorporated under the Interior Ministry with the Coast Guard.¹²³ According to the *SDR 2013–2016*, in order “to improve command and control, better optimize the allocation and use of resources, enhance training, maintain repair and sustainment and improve combat readiness,”¹²⁴ the MoD plans to establish East and West Operational Commands (each with separate intelligence and medical battalions), as well as an Air Operations Command and an Air Defense Command. Additionally, a new logistics management concept will be implemented in order to better support these new commands.¹²⁵ Furthermore, the MoD has also recommended that the Georgian Armed Forces be renamed the Georgian Defence Forces and that the Joint Staff be reorganized as a General Staff.¹²⁶

As of 2013, Georgia maintained the smallest military among those of the three South Caucasus states, with approximately 20,650 troops serving in the ground forces, air force, and National Guard. Additionally, Georgia maintains 6,300 Interior Ministry troops and 5,400 border and coast guards. According to the *SDR 2013–2016*, Georgia’s ground forces consist of “five infantry, two artillery, one engineer, one air defence and one aviation brigades [sic] and other separate units.”¹²⁷ “Most of the ground forces and air force personnel are on contracts, with the remainder conscripted.”¹²⁸ While efforts have been made since 2009 to replace military conscription with voluntary enlistment, including improvements to living conditions, pay, and social benefits designed to

¹²² Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 14.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ministry of Defense of Georgia, *Strategic Defense Review 2013–2016*, 27.

¹²⁵ Ministry of Defense of Georgia, *Minister’s Vision 2013–2014*, 26–27.

¹²⁶ Ministry of Defense of Georgia, *Strategic Defense Review 2013–2016*, 23.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹²⁸ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 14.

increase retention rates for officers and specialists,¹²⁹ conscription remains in effect in Georgia. Military conscription starts at 18 years of age,¹³⁰ and brings with it a 12-month service obligation.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement*, 5.

¹³⁰ “The World Factbook: Georgia,” under “Military.”

¹³¹ Ministry of Defense of Georgia, *Strategic Defense Review 2013–2016*, 8.

III. U.S. STRATEGIC INTERESTS

This chapter discusses U.S. strategic interests in Georgia. It is organized as follows: financial assistance, security assistance, Georgia's military contributions, and the U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership.

A. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States has been Georgia's single largest financial donor. Beginning with the Freedom Support Act, signed by President George H. W. Bush in October 1992, the United States began offering financial assistance to the South Caucasus States in order for them to become less dependent on Russia. Since 1992, the United States has provided approximately \$3.37 billion in aid to Georgia. This includes funding for Assistance to Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia (AEECA) and Agency budgets, "Foreign Military Financing (FMF), International Military Education and Training (IMET), Global Health Programs (GHP), International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE), and Nonproliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR) assistance."¹³² According to a CRS study, also included are "Section 1206 (to train and equip forces for counterterrorism and operations in Afghanistan) and other Defense Department, and agency and program funding (although some classified funding may not be reported)."¹³³ These figures have dropped in recent years—\$85.49 million in fiscal year (FY) 2012, \$67.168 million in FY2013, \$56.747 million (estimated) in FY2014, and \$53.566 million (requested) in FY2015.¹³⁴ However, Georgia nevertheless continues to rank among the top world states in terms of per capita U.S. aid, signifying Georgia's strategic importance to the United States.¹³⁵

¹³² Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 63.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

In January 2004, Congress appropriated funds for a new global assistance program, the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), which was designed to reduce poverty in countries that met certain criteria, such as economic freedom, investment in social programs, and an ongoing democratization process.¹³⁶ On September 12, 2005, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) signed a five-year, \$295.3 million agreement (compact) with Georgia with the overall objective of reducing poverty in remote Georgian regions. According to the MCC, these funds would allow Georgia to “rehabilitate key regional infrastructure, thus improving transportation for regional trade, ensuring a reliable supply of energy, and regional and municipal service delivery[, and to] . . . develop regional enterprises by funding investment and technical assistance and by increasing productivity in farms, agribusinesses and other enterprises to increase jobs and rural income.”¹³⁷ In the aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, the MCC authorized an additional \$100 million “to cover shortfalls in the original budget for the Projects and allow completion of the Projects as originally contemplated by the Compact.”¹³⁸

According to the MCC, as of June 2011, Georgia had constructed a 217 kilometer road through the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, rehabilitated 22 sites on Georgia’s South Gas Pipeline, and completed water supply projects for 5 towns. The completion of these projects not only reduced travel time for local farmers from eight hours to two hours, but also improved the security of Georgia’s gas supply in several cities. Additionally, over \$26.8 million was invested in small and medium-sized Georgian enterprises to provide long-term risk capital and technical assistance to regions outside of Tbilisi, as well as in grants and technical assistance to farmers and agribusinesses. According to the MCC,

¹³⁶ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 43.

¹³⁷ Millennium Challenge Cooperation, “Agreement: Georgia Compact Summary,” The United States of America, September 12, 2005, http://assets.mcc.gov/agreements/georgia_compact_summary.pdf, 1.

¹³⁸ Millennium Challenge Cooperation, “First Amendment to the Millennium Challenge Compact between the United States of America Acting Through the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the Government of Georgia,” The United States of America, November 20, 2008, <http://assets.mcc.gov/agreements/compact-georgia-112108-amendment.pdf>, 2.

since June 2011, this has resulted in an increase of over \$16.8 million in gross revenues for Georgians.¹³⁹

On July 26, 2013, the MCC signed an additional \$140 million agreement with Georgia with the overall objective being “to support strategic investments in general education, technical and vocational education and training and higher education that will strengthen the quality of education in Georgia, with an emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and math (“STEM”) education.”¹⁴⁰ To accomplish this, the Georgian government will “(a) improve general education quality in Georgia through: infrastructure enhancements to the physical learning environment in schools, training for educators and school managers, and support to classroom, national and international education assessments; (b) strengthen the linkage between market-demanded skills and the supply of Georgians with technical skills relevant to the local economy; and (c) support delivery of high-quality STEM degree programs in Georgia.”¹⁴¹ As of March 2015, the Final Status Report for these projects has not been published.

In addition to MCC funding, the European Commission (EC) and the World Bank co-hosted a donors’ conference in Brussels on October 22, 2008. The purpose of this conference was to reaffirm support for Georgia in the aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict and to garner funds for Georgia’s rebuilding. In total, thirty-eight countries and fifteen international organizations pledged \$4.55 billion in aid to Georgia for the 2008–2010 period. Of this money, the United States pledged a two-year, \$1 billion aid package “to assist internally displaced people, rebuild infrastructure, restore economic growth, and sustain investor confidence in the Georgian economy as well as foster continued democratic reform and energy security.”¹⁴² According to Nichol, additional EC and WB goals were to address “budgetary shortfalls; loans, equity, and

¹³⁹ Millennium Challenge Cooperation, “Final Status Report: Georgia Compact,” The United States of America, June 2011, <http://assets.mcc.gov/documents/qsr-2010002030605-georgia.pdf>, 1–2.

¹⁴⁰ Millennium Challenge Cooperation, “Millennium Challenge Compact Between The United States Of America Acting Through The Millennium Challenge Corporation And Georgia,” The United States of America, July 26, 2013, <http://assets.mcc.gov/agreements/compact-georgia-ii.pdf>, 1.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴² Department of State, “U.S. Pledges \$1 Billion for Georgia at Donors’ Conference,” October 22, 2008, <http://2001–2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2008/oct/111151.htm>.

guarantees to the banking sector; and core investments in transportation, energy, and municipal infrastructure that will boost economic growth and employment.”¹⁴³

B. SECURITY ASSISTANCE

In 2002, the United States implemented a \$64 million security program known as the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP). Under GTEP, the United States “provided training to 200 officers, some 2,000 soldiers, and a small number of Interior (police) Ministry troops and border guards.”¹⁴⁴ According to the U.S. Defense Department, the GTEP aimed to help Georgia “to resist pressure to allow the Russian military to pursue Chechen rebels’ into Georgia, help it combat terrorists inside the country, and block those trying to infiltrate Georgia.”¹⁴⁵ The United States also provided military equipment and weaponry, such as communications and medical gear, small arms, and uniforms. In 2004, GTEP was discontinued; however, two years later, the United States launched the Sustainment and Stability Operations Program (SSOP). SSOP was created in order to provide training for 7,800 Georgian troops, “in part to support U.S.-led coalition operations in Iraq, along with advisory assistance for defense reforms and maintenance for previously supplied helicopters.”¹⁴⁶

In the aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) began a comprehensive, multi-month assessment of Georgia’s Armed Forces, and determined that not only were Georgia’s military capabilities severely damaged, but also “in practically all areas, defense institutions, strategies, doctrine, and professional military education were found to be seriously lacking.”¹⁴⁷ According to General James Cartwright, then the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), the United States pledged to focus on the “self and internal defense”¹⁴⁸ of Georgia, and that

¹⁴³ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 23.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁴⁷ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 46.

¹⁴⁸ James Cartwright, during visit to Georgia (March 2009), quoted in Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 46.

equipment transfers would be based on requirements for Georgia's homeland defense. Similarly, according to then-Assistant Secretary of Defense Alexander Vershbow, the United States pledged to focus on "building defense institutions, assisting defense sector reform, and building the strategic and educational foundations that will facilitate necessary training, education, and rational force structure design and procurement."¹⁴⁹

In December 2011, President Obama signed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY2012, which called on the Secretary of Defense to submit a plan to Congress "for the normalization of U.S. defense cooperation with Georgia, including the sale of defensive weapons."¹⁵⁰ Based on this NDAA, the United States began supplying defensive weapons to Georgia, including highly mobile multi-wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs), mine resistant ambush protected (MRAP) vehicles, night vision devices, rifle scopes, and radios. According to Vershbow, the United States is "assisting Georgia to move along the path to having modern, western-oriented, NATO-interoperable armed forces capable of territorial defense and coalition contributions."¹⁵¹

In April 2012, President Obama signed an additional NDAA that stated that "there were two pillars of U.S.-Georgia defense cooperation: U.S. support for modernizing Georgia's armed forces; and U.S. support for Georgia's contributions to ISAF."¹⁵² According to this NDAA, discussions were underway for Georgia to not only purchase air and coastal surveillance radar, acoustic systems, and small arms ammunition, but also to enhance defense cooperation in the areas of "air and coastal surveillance and defense training, train-the-trainer instruction for non-commissioned officers, brigade command and staff training, combat engineer training, and utility helicopter training."¹⁵³ Additionally, the United States dedicated funds for the rebuilding of Georgia's Coast Guard, to include three patrol boats, a maritime information center, and the construction of a ship repair facility. According to a March 2013 statement by

¹⁴⁹ Alexander Vershbow, testimony to the U.S. Congress (August 2009), quoted in Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 46.

¹⁵⁰ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 47.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 48.

Admiral James Stavridis, USN, then the EUCOM Commander, Georgian troops had not only received “training for non-commissioned officer development, maritime interdiction operations, visit/board/search/seizure, search and rescue, maritime law enforcement, and environmental protection,”¹⁵⁴ but had also “supported Armenian-Georgian training on cross-border Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response [HADR].”¹⁵⁵

C. GEORGIA’S MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Following the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush quickly secured a pledge from the Georgian government (among other nations) to support U.S. forces in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) in Afghanistan. Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) in Iraq followed in 2003. Initial Georgian support included over-flight rights and the use of a Georgian airbase, as well as other support, such as Georgian assistance in the rebuilding of Iraq.¹⁵⁶ Over time, Georgia became a major transit route for cargo to and from Afghanistan. At its peak, Georgia’s key Black Sea port of Poti was “responsible for as much as 30% of cargoes being transported through the Northern Distribution Network.”¹⁵⁷ In 2009, then-Georgian Defense Minister Vasil Sikharulidze re-confirmed Georgia’s commitment to facilitate shipments of material to Afghanistan “within the framework of cooperation with NATO.”¹⁵⁸ In 2013, General William Fraser, then the Commander of U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM), stated that Poti would continue to serve as a strategic transportation hub during ISAF’s drawdown.¹⁵⁹

In 1999, Georgia began dispatching military personnel as peacekeepers to Kosovo in support of the NATO-led KFOR mission. Although at the peak level Georgian forces in Kosovo numbered only 182 personnel, Georgia had nonetheless begun demonstrating that it was a willing partner in coalition operations. In August 2003, Georgia began

¹⁵⁴ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 48.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 5–6.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵⁸ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement*, 6.

¹⁵⁹ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 6.

dispatching combat forces to Iraq in support of OIF. By 2008, Georgian troops in Iraq numbered approximately 2,300 (the third largest number of troops, after the United States and the United Kingdom). However, following the 2008 Russian-Georgia conflict, which cost the lives of 160 Georgian military personnel, Georgia pulled out all of its troops from both Kosovo and Iraq.

In August 2004, Georgia began deploying combat forces to Afghanistan in support of ISAF. In 2009, the United States introduced the Georgia Deployment Program-ISAF to deploy Georgian forces alongside U.S. Marines in Afghanistan.¹⁶⁰ “On November 16, 2009, Georgia sent 173 troops for training in Germany before their scheduled deployment at the end of March 2010 to support ISAF. These troops were boosted to 925 in mid-2010.”¹⁶¹ By October 2012, the Georgian government deployed an additional battalion of 749 troops to Afghanistan, bringing Georgian troop levels to 1,560 by October 2013. The following year, EUCOM “expanded the Georgia Deployment Program to train and deploy two battalions every six months to ISAF’s Regional Command Southwest.”¹⁶² According to then-Georgian Defense Minister Irakli Alasania, “Georgian troops will remain beyond 2014 to assist the Afghan National Security Forces.”¹⁶³ Furthermore, “as capabilities improve, the Georgian forces will operate independently, and a Georgian training group will be created that can largely take over from the Marine trainers.”¹⁶⁴

As of December 16, 2014, the Georgian military had approximately 750 military personnel deployed to Afghanistan, making Georgia the largest non-NATO contributor to the RESOLUTE SUPPORT mission (ISAF’s follow-on mission). Some of these troops serve under German command as a rapid-reaction force, with the remaining forces serving as base security personnel under U.S. command at Bagram Air Base. According

¹⁶⁰ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 31.

¹⁶¹ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 6.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁶³ Irakli Alasania, quoted in Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 35.

¹⁶⁴ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 31.

to Georgia's Minister of Defense, Mindia Janelidze, "this mission helps our country to get closer to [the] North-Atlantic Alliance and enhance interoperability with NATO."¹⁶⁵

D. U.S.-GEORGIA CHARTER ON STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

On January 9, 2009, the United States and Georgia signed the U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership (herein referred to as "the Charter"). According to the Charter, the United States and Georgia "share a vital interest in a strong, independent, sovereign, unified, and democratic Georgia."¹⁶⁶ Built on the principle of Georgia's commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration, the Charter was designed to increase cooperation in areas such as defense and security, economics, trade, energy, democratization, and cultural exchanges. Politically, the Charter reaffirmed the U.S. strategic interest in Georgia and sought "to counter perceptions that the United States (and the West) had acquiesced to increased Russian dominance in the South Caucasus."¹⁶⁷

While the Charter did not provide specific U.S. security guarantees to Georgia, it expanded the scope of ongoing defense and security cooperation programs to include enhanced training and equipment for Georgian forces. According to the Charter, one of the United States' primary goals is to increase Georgia's military capability and capacity in order to not only reinforce Georgia's candidacy for NATO membership, but also to increase the security of the United States, Georgia, and the South Caucasus region. While not specifically stated in the Charter, it is reasonable to infer that the purpose of these program enhancements is to be prepared to counter potential threats to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity from other regional actors, including Russia.¹⁶⁸

In addition to defense and security, the Charter was also designed "to enhance job creation and economic growth, support economic/market reform and liberalization,

¹⁶⁵ Joshua Kucera, "Georgian Troops Begin New Mission in Northern Afghanistan," *Eurasianet.org*, December 16, 2014, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/71396>, 6.

¹⁶⁶ Department of State, "United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership," January 9, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/121029.htm>, under Section II.

¹⁶⁷ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 7.

¹⁶⁸ "United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership," under Section II.

continue to improve the business climate, and improve market access for goods and services.”¹⁶⁹ To accomplish this, the United States pledged to assist Georgia with post-war reconstruction and financial stabilization, to combat poverty, and to improve Georgia’s health and education systems. Additionally, the United States and Georgia agreed to pursue both a Free-Trade Agreement (FTA) and an Enhanced Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT). In terms of Georgia’s energy market, the United States agreed to assist Georgia with increasing energy production, enhancing efficiency, and increasing the “physical security of energy transit through Georgia to European markets.”¹⁷⁰ To accomplish this, the United States promised to increase cooperation with both Azerbaijan and Turkey, thereby enabling the development of a new Southern Corridor. In doing so, both Georgia and Europe as a whole would be able to diversify their supplies of natural gas.¹⁷¹

In terms of democratization, the United States and Georgia also agreed “to work together to strengthen [Georgia’s] media freedom, parliament, judicial reform, the rule of law, civil society, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and anti-corruption efforts.”¹⁷² To accomplish this, Georgia promised to not only increase the role of independent media and objective news, but also to reinforce freedom of expression. Additionally, the United States and Georgia agreed to increase the education and training of judges, prosecutors, defense lawyers, and police officers, and to help foster constructive relations among these actors. In doing so, “transnational criminal threats such as terrorism, organized crime, trafficking in persons and narcotics, money laundering, and cyber crime”¹⁷³ would be mitigated. With respect to democratization, Georgia agreed to increase political pluralism “by encouraging the development of political parties, think tanks, and non-governmental organizations.”¹⁷⁴ Georgia also agreed to promote executive and legislative transparency and accountability by not only

¹⁶⁹ “United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership,” under Section III.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, under Section III.3.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, under Section IV.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, under Section IV.2.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, under Section IV.4.

increasing public access to government deliberations, but also by “strengthen[ing] the capacity of Georgian civil society to develop and analyze public policy, advocate on behalf of citizen interests, participate in the legislative process, and provide oversight of public officials.”¹⁷⁵

It is also worth mentioning that the U.S.-Georgia Charter is “similar to a U.S.-Ukraine Charter signed in December 2008 and a U.S.-Baltic Charter signed in 1998 with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ “United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership,” under Section IV.5.

¹⁷⁶ Nichol, *Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008*, 28.

IV. GEORGIA'S PROSPECTS FOR NATO MEMBERSHIP

This chapter discusses Georgia's prospects for NATO membership. It is organized as follows: a brief overview of the 1995 *Study on NATO Enlargement*, Georgia's motivations for and progress toward potential NATO membership, and issues hindering Georgia's potential NATO membership.

A. 1995 STUDY ON NATO ENLARGEMENT

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO found itself without an enemy. Faced with a question of relevancy, throughout the 1990s, NATO sought to redefine itself based on its two remaining mandates—preventing the revival of nationalist militarism and serving as a security framework for broadening European political integration. NATO thus began laying the foundation for “a larger, pan-European security architecture.”¹⁷⁷ In an effort to increase dialogue with Eastern European, Central Asian, and Mediterranean nations, NATO established the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) in 1991, followed by the Mediterranean Dialogue three years later. With the establishment of NATO's PfP program in 1994, a program designed to not only increase cooperation and transparency between NATO and non-NATO countries in areas such as policy-making, peacekeeping, crisis management, and humanitarian efforts, but also to assist countries aspiring to NATO membership with implementing democratic and military reforms,¹⁷⁸ it became evident that NATO was seeking to expand its presence eastward into the post-Communist space.

In 1995, NATO published the *Study on NATO Enlargement*. According to this study, “NATO views security as a broad concept embracing political and economic, as well as defence, components.”¹⁷⁹ This study further states that “such a broad concept . . . must be built through a gradual process of integration and cooperation brought about by an interplay of existing multilateral institutions in Europe, such as the EU, WEU

¹⁷⁷ “A Short History of NATO,” under “A Short History of NATO.”

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., under “Be Careful What You Wish For.”

¹⁷⁹ “Study on NATO Enlargement,” under Chapter 1.a.1.

[Western European Union] and OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe], each of which would have a role to play in accordance with its respective responsibilities and purposes in implementing this broad security concept.”¹⁸⁰ In this regard, by encouraging and supporting goals such as democratic reforms, including civilian and democratic control over the military, and by emphasizing cooperation, consensus building, common defense, and transparency in defense planning and military budgets, NATO enlargement would (in theory) improve overall security in the Euro-Atlantic area.¹⁸¹

According to the 1995 *Study on NATO Enlargement*, there are no rigid criteria for achieving NATO membership. Rather, all that is ultimately required for enlargement is consensus among the existing members that the accession of a new ally “will contribute to security and stability in the North Atlantic area.”¹⁸² However, with any enlargement, the Alliance must continue to maintain military credibility in not only collective defense, but also in command structure, conventional forces, nuclear forces, force structure, intelligence, finance, and interoperability. Additionally, the Alliance must ensure that all military obligations, including those under Article 5, are satisfied in a timely manner, while taking into account the ever-changing strategic environment. Moreover, NATO itself will make decisions on enlargement on a case-by-case basis, and these decisions are not subject to veto by any nation outside the Alliance.¹⁸³

While there are no rigid criteria for NATO enlargement other than consensus among the existing members, there are certain political and military conditions that can hinder or prevent membership accession. Politically, a prospective member must demonstrate “a commitment to and respect for OSCE norms and principles, including the resolution of ethnic disputes, external territorial disputes including irredentist claims or internal jurisdictional disputes by peaceful means.”¹⁸⁴ Additionally, prospective members

¹⁸⁰ “Study on NATO Enlargement,” under Chapter 1.a.1.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, under Chapter 1.a.3.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, under Chapter 1.b.7.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, under Chapter 5.b.72.

must show “a commitment to promoting stability and well-being by economic liberty, social justice and environmental responsibility . . . , [establish] appropriate democratic and civilian control of their defence force . . . [, and undertake] a commitment to ensure that adequate resources are devoted to achieving . . . [NATO] obligations.”¹⁸⁵

With respect to operational capabilities, potential members must be able to “contribute militarily to collective defence and to the Alliance’s new missions, . . . adapt themselves to the fact that NATO’s strategy and force structure are designed to exploit multinationality and flexibility . . . [, and comply with] over 1200 agreements and publications.”¹⁸⁶ Considering that NATO’s ability to operate in a multi-national environment is largely dependent on standardization, “commonality of doctrines and procedures, interoperability of command, control and communications and major weapon systems, and interchangeability of ammunition and primary combat supplies”¹⁸⁷ must also be pursued. “Although national participation in standardization is optional, there are a number of areas, such as communication and information systems and measures to facilitate reinforcements where military necessity requires participation.”¹⁸⁸

B. GEORGIA’S MOTIVATIONS FOR AND PROGRESS TOWARD POTENTIAL NATO MEMBERSHIP

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia was faced with the task of building itself into a post-Soviet democratic nation; however, as mentioned previously, its military was virtually non-existent. Owing in part to financial assistance provided by the United States, Georgia gradually began to reduce its reliance on Russia and increase its security ties with the West. However, between 1992 and 1995 Georgia had to deal with secessionist conflicts in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. In 1994, at the same time that NATO and Russia were beginning a formal dialogue, Georgia joined NATO’s PfP program. While Georgia’s initial commitment to cooperate with NATO was a step in the right direction, its democratic and economic reforms were inadequate, and

¹⁸⁵ “Study on NATO Enlargement,” under Chapter 5.b.72.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, under Chapter 5.d.75–77.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, under Chapter 5.d.76.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, under Chapter 5.b.77.

those that did occur were largely negated by secessionist conflicts. Georgia nonetheless officially withdrew from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in 1999 and assumed full control from Russia over guarding its sea and land borders.¹⁸⁹ That same year, Georgia began sending peacekeepers to serve in the NATO-led KFOR.¹⁹⁰

In 2002, at the NATO Summit in Prague, Georgia began formal discussions regarding its aspiration to become a NATO member. These discussions accelerated following Georgia's 2003 "Rose Revolution," which brought about the democratic election of Mikheil Saakashvili as president. Under Saakashvili, Georgia began taking concrete steps toward decentralization, democratization, and defense reorganization; however, these reforms were not always successful.¹⁹¹ In June 2004, "a Special Representative of the NATO Secretary General was appointed to encourage democratic civil-military relations, transparency in defense planning and budgeting, and enhanced force inter-operability with NATO."¹⁹² Later that year, NATO signed an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with Georgia. According to Nichol, the IPAP "allowed the Alliance to provide more assistance on domestic reforms, including defense institutional and policy reforms and political reforms. After extensive public debate, the Georgian government approved a national security concept in late 2005 that committed the country to carry out the reforms outlined by the IPAP."¹⁹³ In August 2004, Georgia offered military support to NATO operations in Afghanistan with ISAF.¹⁹⁴

Throughout 2005 and 2006, Georgia generally met all the NATO-prescribed reform priorities and timelines; however, at the 2006 NATO Summit in Riga, much to the dismay of the United States, Georgia was not offered a Membership Action Plan (MAP). Rather, NATO "reaffirmed support for an 'Intensified Dialogue' to assist Georgia in

¹⁸⁹ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 14.

¹⁹⁰ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement*, 1.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 49.

¹⁹³ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement*, 1.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

implementing reforms.”¹⁹⁵ In 2007, the U.S. Congress approved the NATO Freedom Consolidation Act, under which the United States designated Georgia as “eligible to receive security assistance under the program established by the NATO Participation Act of 1994.”¹⁹⁶ More importantly, however, the NATO Freedom Consolidation Act urged NATO to extend a MAP to Georgia.¹⁹⁷ Unfortunately, owing in part to President Saakashvili’s resignation in 2007 over concerns regarding the government’s suppression of demonstrations and closing of some media, NATO member states turned down Georgia’s request for a MAP at the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, Romania.¹⁹⁸ According to the Bucharest Summit Declaration, “NATO welcomes Ukraine and Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO . . . MAP is the next step for Ukraine and Georgia on their direct way to membership. Today we make clear that we support these countries’ applications for MAP.”¹⁹⁹

In 2008, Saakashvili was re-elected as the President of Georgia.²⁰⁰ According to a poll held at the same time as the presidential election, 77 percent of Georgians believed that Georgia should join NATO. Additionally, “the majority of opposition parties also supports [sic] Georgia’s eventual accession to NATO.”²⁰¹ As this wording implies, not all parties shared this policy objective. According to Irina Sarishvili (who ran as a losing candidate in the January 2008 presidential election), “Russia would retaliate against Georgian membership in NATO by never permitting Georgia to peacefully regain authority over Abkhazia and South Ossetia.”²⁰² Moreover, according to Nichol, “some

¹⁹⁵ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 15.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement*, 1–2.

¹⁹⁹ NATO, “Bucharest Summit Declaration,” par. 23, last accessed January 28, 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm.

²⁰⁰ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement*, 2.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁰² Sarishvili quoted in Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement*, 2.

Georgians oppose joining NATO because they allege that the Alliance will condition membership on Georgia accepting the independence of the separatist regions.”²⁰³

Four months after the 2008 Bucharest Summit, Russia invaded Georgia and destroyed much of its military infrastructure. Russia’s subsequent recognition of the breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states led many Western and Georgian observers to claim that “NATO’s failure to offer Georgia a MAP [at the April 2008 NATO summit had] emboldened Russia’s aggressiveness toward Georgia . . . Others consider that NATO’s pledge that Georgia eventually would become a member, as well as Georgia’s ongoing movement toward integration with the West, spurred Russian aggression.”²⁰⁴ In both cases, NATO member states raised “heightened concerns that Georgia was not ready to be granted a MAP because of the destruction of much of its military infrastructure by Russia, the uncertain status of the breakaway regions, and the uncertain quality of conflict decision-making by Georgia’s political and military leadership.”²⁰⁵ According to Nichol, the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict “necessitated both a fundamental shift in Georgia’s defense strategy to accentuate territorial defense and at least partial changes in the assistance provided by NATO allies.”²⁰⁶

While the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict postponed Georgia’s prospects for NATO membership, it also revitalized NATO’s involvement with Georgia. In September 2008, the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) was formed. Three months later, NATO offered Georgia an Annual National Program (ANP). Both of these steps were designed to help Georgia move toward eventual NATO membership.²⁰⁷ The following month, the United States and Georgia signed the U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership. According to Georgian military analyst Irakli Sesiashvili, “Georgia’s prospects for joining NATO have significantly improved thanks to the signing of this charter . . . After the USA

²⁰³ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement*, 6.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰⁵ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 50.

²⁰⁶ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement*, 5.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

commits to ensuring our country's security and tries to settle relations with Russia at the political level, it [Georgia] will very quickly meet the relevant standards . . . In such a situation, Europe will simply not be able to say no to Georgia joining NATO.”²⁰⁸

Since the 2008 Russian-Georgia conflict, Georgia has continued to transform its Armed Forces. Georgia's defense reform objectives within the Planning and Review Process (PARP) have facilitated improved financial management in the Ministry of Defense (MoD), assisted in reforming the intelligence structure of the armed forces, and ensured that a credible SDR was conducted which incorporated lessons learned from the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict.²⁰⁹ With assistance from NATO and the United States, Georgia has continued to increase the military's interoperability with NATO forces and contribute to NATO collective security and operations. Additionally, Georgia has continued to re-equip and modernize its armed forces with Western-made or upgraded conventional weapons, armor, aviation, and electronic equipment. In April 2010, Georgia began contributing to NATO's Operation ACTIVE ENDEAVOR. Later that year, NATO initiated the first annual Military Committee meeting with Georgia and opened a NATO Liaison Office in Tbilisi.²¹⁰

Georgia's conduct of transparent and peaceful parliamentary and presidential elections in October 2012 and October 2013, respectively, were welcomed as concrete steps towards meeting Euro-Atlantic standards. While NATO “Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen praised Georgia for making progress in meeting conditions for NATO membership, including by increasing freedom of expression, economic growth, and military reforms, and by combating corruption,”²¹¹ at the Lisbon, Chicago, and Wales NATO Summits (2010, 2012, and 2014, respectively), Georgia was not offered a MAP. According to the 2014 Wales Summit Declaration,

Georgia's relationship with the Alliance contains the tools necessary to continue moving Georgia forward towards eventual membership. Today

²⁰⁸ Sesiashvili quoted in Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement*, 6.

²⁰⁹ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 15.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

we [NATO] have endorsed a substantial package for Georgia that includes defence capacity building, training, exercises, strengthened liaison, and enhanced interoperability opportunities. These measures aim to strengthen Georgia's defence and interoperability capabilities with the Alliance, which will help Georgia advance in its preparations towards membership in the Alliance.²¹²

While the goal of eventual Georgian membership has been consistently reaffirmed, the reluctance of the Alliance to offer Georgia a MAP suggests that NATO member states are generally unwilling to provoke conflict with Russia.

C. ISSUES HINDERING GEORGIA'S POTENTIAL NATO MEMBERSHIP

In his 2014 article entitled "Georgia's Path to NATO," Damon Wilson contends that, "today, many allies remain ambivalent about future enlargement. The current aspirants—Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Macedonia, and Montenegro—all face serious challenges."²¹³ For Georgia, these challenges include its unresolved territorial disputes in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, its faltering democratization, and its need for additional defense reforms. Additionally, ongoing events in Ukraine have demonstrated that Moscow's current leadership is unwilling to permit continued NATO enlargement into the post-Communist space, and that any future attempt at NATO enlargement will be accompanied by an increase in Russian aggression. Unfortunately for Georgia, this is a risk that many NATO member states are currently unwilling to accept. When combined with recurrent secessionist campaigns in the United Kingdom and Spain,²¹⁴ the implications for the Eurozone of the results of the 2015 Greek Parliamentary elections,²¹⁵ and the U.S. pivot to the Asia-Pacific,²¹⁶ it would appear overall that there is little political willingness among NATO and EU member states to face off militarily against Russia.

²¹² NATO, "Wales Summit Declaration," par. 93, last accessed January 28, 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

²¹³ Wilson, "Georgia's Path to NATO," 2.

²¹⁴ "Scottish Referendum;" "Catalonia Vote."

²¹⁵ Lynch, "Greek Election Results 2015."

²¹⁶ Campbell, interview by Robert Kagan.

Wilson further reports that, “disturbingly from Tbilisi’s perspective . . . most policymakers within the Alliance accept the inevitability of states of the Western Balkans joining the Alliance. However, despite the commitment at the 2008 NATO Bucharest summit that Georgia will become a member, many allied capitals harbor deep suspicions about whether this statement is credible.”²¹⁷ While there are no rigid criteria for NATO membership, consensus among existing members is required,²¹⁸ a goal not easily achieved in Europe’s current geopolitical climate. What this implies is that, in effect, Georgia’s prospects for achieving NATO membership have less to do with its ongoing disputes and domestic reforms than with the willingness of NATO member states to accept additional risks and responsibilities. Thus, the question becomes, at what point will NATO member states be willing to accept the risks and duties associated with Georgia joining the Alliance?

1. Georgia’s Unresolved Territorial Disputes in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia

In August 2008, four months after NATO refused to offer Georgia a MAP at the Bucharest Summit, Russia invaded Georgia and quickly defeated the Georgian military.²¹⁹ According to Georgia’s *State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation* (herein referred to as “Georgia’s *State Strategy*”), Russia has since increased its military presence “in and beyond the two occupied regions [of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia], including areas that were [previously] under Georgian government control.”²²⁰ Among these territorial encroachments was Russia’s temporary border expansion into Abkhazia (allegedly to increase security during the 2014 Winter Olympics²²¹) Russia’s ongoing construction of fences along the borders of

²¹⁷ Wilson, “Georgia’s Path to NATO,” 2.

²¹⁸ “Study on NATO Enlargement,” under Chapter 1.b.7.

²¹⁹ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 8.

²²⁰ Government of Georgia, *State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation*, January 27, 2010, http://www.government.gov.ge/files/225_31228_370287_SMR-Strategy-en.pdf, 5.

²²¹ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 8.

Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia,²²² and Russia's deployment of border guards from the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB) along the administrative boundary lines of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.²²³

In addition to territorial encroachments, Moscow also vetoed the extension of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and hindered consensus on extending the OSCE's military monitoring in Georgia.²²⁴ More recently, in November 2014, Moscow and the de-facto government of Abkhazia signed the *Treaty on Alliance and Strategic Partnership*,²²⁵ a move that further complicated "the peaceful reintegration of the occupied territories into Georgia's constitutional ambit,"²²⁶ and, as some observers contend, foreshadows Moscow's future intention to formally annex Abkhazia (and South Ossetia). According to the *National Security Concept of Georgia*, when combined with "the presence of Russian military forces in the occupied Georgian territories, and the construction and strengthening of military bases there, [Russia has, in effect,] create[d] a staging-ground for provocations and a bridgehead for a possible renewed military aggression."²²⁷ Through its actions, Moscow has made apparent its intention to prevent Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration and to "forcibly return Georgia to the Russian political orbit."²²⁸

Since the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, Georgia has taken concrete steps toward achieving the peaceful withdrawal of Russian forces and the reintegration of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, including "engage[ment] with the occupying power [Russia], within the framework of the Geneva process."²²⁹ In order to "promote interaction among the divided populations of Georgia . . . and to ensure that residents of

²²² "NATO Criticises Russia for Expanding its Border into Georgia," *EurActiv.com*, February 6, 2014, <http://www.euractiv.com/europes-east/nato-criticises-russia-expanding-news-533308>.

²²³ Government of Georgia, *State Strategy on Occupied Territories*, 5.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Mogherini, "Statement."

²²⁶ Government of Georgia, *State Strategy on Occupied Territories*, 6.

²²⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, *National Security Concept of Georgia*, 8.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Government of Georgia, *State Strategy on Occupied Territories*, 15.

Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia enjoy the rights and privileges available to every citizen of Georgia,”²³⁰ and in keeping with Georgia’s *State Strategy*, the Georgian government created the *Action Plan for Engagement* (herein referred to as ‘Action Plan’). According to this Action Plan, the Georgian government will pursue “*four dimensions* of engagement—humanitarian, human, social and economic—that encompass a comprehensive range of programme areas, with projects falling under one or more programmes.”²³¹ Among these program areas are humanitarian relief, natural disasters, inter-community relations, preservation of cultural heritage and identity, free flow of information, human rights, youth activities, education, healthcare, environment, trade, joint production, communications, and infrastructure.²³²

Additionally, “*seven instruments* will enable the activities the Action Plan promotes and serve the projects created under it. These instruments exemplify the bottom-up approach of the Action Plan, which rests on grassroots initiatives.”²³³ Among these instruments are the establishment of a “status-neutral liaison mechanism (LM) to facilitate communication among the Government of Georgia, the authorities in control in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and voluntary associations operating in there,”²³⁴ the creation of the Neutral Identification Card (NIC) and Travel Document, which allows “residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia greater access to social services and freedom of movement,”²³⁵ and the establishment of a trust fund “to provide grants to implementing organisations operating in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and across the division lines.”²³⁶ Additionally, Georgia will establish a joint investment fund (JIF) to better “support businesses that promote local economic development, generate employment and build commercial ties between

²³⁰ Government of Georgia, *State Strategy on Occupied Territories*, 3.

²³¹ Government of Georgia, *Action Plan for Engagement*, July 3, 2010, <http://www.smr.gov.ge/docs/doc214.pdf>, 2.

²³² *Ibid.*, 4–5.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

communities on both sides of the division lines,”²³⁷ a cooperation agency (CA) “to enable and facilitate interactions across the division lines,”²³⁸ and a financial institution (FI) “that will allow for accounts setup and maintenance, cash transfers and other legal transactions,”²³⁹ as well as Integrated Social-Economic Zones (ISEZ) to create demand for cross-border goods and services.²⁴⁰

In terms of specific actions that have been taken to improve the economic situations of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, the Georgian government has since enhanced cross-border trade “through the creation of logistical and legal conditions for access to markets and goods, as well as through financial incentives.”²⁴¹ Additionally, the Georgian government has improved agricultural and agribusiness productivity through the creation of special economic zones (SEZs), and has increased access to “technologies, knowledge, and finance in key fields [, such as agriculture], and established incentives for joint business activities to foster the creation of value-added businesses.”²⁴² Additionally, by encouraging the sale of products from Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia to domestic, regional, and international markets, the Georgian government has not only increased cross-border employment opportunities, but has also raised production standards and product quality to internationally-accepted levels.

As regards infrastructure and health care, the Georgian government has undertaken a campaign to not only repair existing roads, telecommunications, and supply lines of water in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, but also to repair or construct additional schools, hospitals, and housing facilities to meet the needs of the those populations. Moreover, by establishing cross-border bus connections in and around these regions, the Georgian government has ensured easier access for the populations of

²³⁷ Government of Georgia, *Action Plan for Engagement*, 7.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 8.

²⁴¹ Government of Georgia, *State Strategy on Occupied Territories*, 9.

²⁴² Ibid.

these regions to receive health care in the rest of Georgia. In this regard, the Georgian government has also made certain medical programs available “to the residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, including programs for vaccination, response to pandemics, maternity and childcare, and the prevention and treatment of tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, and drug abuse.”²⁴³ Additionally, efforts are underway to ensure that social security and other benefits are available to residents of these regions.²⁴⁴

In terms of education, the Georgian government is working to ensure that education is made available in the native languages of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While Georgian textbooks have been made available for the Georgian-speaking populations in these regions, additional textbooks are being developed in both Abkhaz and Ossetian languages, as well as in Russian.²⁴⁵ Furthermore, Abkhaz- and Ossetian-language training has been made available in Georgian schools and universities,²⁴⁶ and one thousand English-language instructors have been provided throughout these regions.²⁴⁷ Moreover, efforts are underway to not only ensure that populations of the regions are able to pursue education in the rest of Georgia (should they so desire), but also to ensure that residents of these regions are able to participate in “international education and exchange programs available to citizens of Georgia, as well as Georgian presidential grants and other state programs.”²⁴⁸ This includes laptops being offered to all first grade students under Georgia’s “one laptop per child” program. Through its increase of cross-border youth activities, such as sports tournaments, summer camps, and concerts, as well as its creation of youth grant programs and youth leadership programs, the Georgian government has made evident that it aims to bring Georgia’s future leaders together from across the dividing lines.²⁴⁹

²⁴³ Government of Georgia, *State Strategy on Occupied Territories*, 11.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 10.

²⁴⁶ Government of Georgia, *Action Plan for Engagement*, 10.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 13.

²⁴⁸ Government of Georgia, *State Strategy on Occupied Territories*, 10.

²⁴⁹ Government of Georgia, *Action Plan for Engagement*, 12.

As regards the protection of human rights, the Georgian government is not only “facilitating the work of human-rights activists and groups”²⁵⁰ in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, but also promoting “protection of the civil and political rights of the populations expelled from Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, as well as those currently residing in these territories.”²⁵¹ Additionally, Georgia has created mechanisms to monitor and prevent human rights violations in these regions. According to Georgia’s *State Strategy*, “given the established facts of ethnic cleansing targeting Georgian communities, special concern will be focused on the violation of the rights of ethnic Georgians.”²⁵² Moreover, the Georgian government has invited international organizations to help ensure the successful implementation and monitoring of these goals.²⁵³

In terms of legal and administrative measures, the Georgian government created the legal basis and administrative mechanisms to not only facilitate economic and trade activities between Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and the rest of Georgia, but also to ensure that appropriate international travel documents are issued for the populations of these regions. Additionally, the Georgian government has begun certifying birth, death, marriage, and education-related documents.²⁵⁴ In an effort to increase the free-flow on information between Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and the rest of Georgia, the Georgian government has not only increased usage of mass media, but also continue to promote relations among journalists through regularly scheduled meetings and relaxed border crossing procedures for journalists.²⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Georgian government has supported the introduction of Abkhaz- and Ossetian-language radio broadcasts, and has provided a “joint web portal for communication and social networking between divided communities.”²⁵⁶ In doing so, the

²⁵⁰ Government of Georgia, *State Strategy on Occupied Territories*, 13.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Government of Georgia, *Action Plan for Engagement*, 11.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

Georgian government hopes “to counter division and isolation, share perspectives, and build understanding among communities.”²⁵⁷

As regards people-to-people ties, the Georgian government is also pursuing an increase in “interaction between Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and the rest of Georgia; in particular, [by] promot[ing] and facilitat[ing] confidence-building measures among war-affected populations.”²⁵⁸ This includes increased interaction between interest groups, “former combatants, neighbors, mixed families, youth, co-workers, scholars, and voluntary associations,”²⁵⁹ as well as communities exiled by Russia. Moreover, the Georgian government has sought to protect and develop Georgia’s cultural heritage by preserving not only Georgian language, arts, tradition, and literature, but also those of other ethnic groups in Georgia, to include the populations in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. In this regard, the Georgian government passed legislation making the Abkhaz language (in combination with Georgian) one of the state languages of Abkhazia. Additionally, “by easing travel for clergy and the transport of religious articles across the division lines,”²⁶⁰ the Georgian government has begun setting the framework for the free exercise of religion.²⁶¹

While progress toward achieving the peaceful withdrawal of Russian forces and the reintegration of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia in Georgia has indeed been made, the independence of these regions remains nonetheless contested. While critics contend that Georgia’s ongoing territorial disputes create a roadblock for Georgia’s potential NATO membership, history has demonstrated that NATO membership can still be achieved under similar circumstances. NATO decisions regarding the accession of West Germany into the Alliance in 1955 set the precedent for granting NATO membership to an aspiring nation with unresolved territorial disputes.²⁶²

²⁵⁷ Government of Georgia, *State Strategy on Occupied Territories*, 12.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ Government of Georgia, *Action Plan for Engagement*, 11.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² “A Short History of NATO,” under “A Treaty for Our Age.”

Wilson has pointed out that “the zones of Germany formerly occupied by American, British, and French forces became the Federal Republic of Germany and a founding member of the Alliance. Despite this division, leaders of the Federal Republic of Germany like Konrad Adenauer did not sacrifice the commitment to a united Germany.”²⁶³ Turkey and Greece also achieved NATO membership even though the two were involved (and are still involved) in conflict with one another. Moreover, Spain obtained membership in NATO even though the status of Gibraltar was disputed—and has yet to be settled to the mutual satisfaction of London and Madrid—and both the United Kingdom and Spain have been undergoing secessionist movements for decades in Scotland and Catalonia, respectively.²⁶⁴ While Georgia’s situation is by no means exactly parallel to any previous situation—and the list goes on—NATO has shown an ability to maintain a flexible approach toward new membership accession as regards unresolved conflicts.

As previously mentioned, according to the 1995 *Study on Enlargement*, “there is no explicit official requirement that any disputes must have been settled before an invitation to join can be extended.”²⁶⁵ Rather, a nation must be actively engaged in conflict resolution.²⁶⁶ Considering the flexibility that NATO has in its decision-making process, Wilson contends that “a democratic Georgia that otherwise meets the standards of NATO membership could be welcomed into the Alliance with the understanding that Article 5 and the Washington Treaty would not be applicable to the occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Alliance members would continue to recognize Georgia’s territorial integrity.”²⁶⁷ However, Wilson adds, “many believe that Georgia’s membership in NATO is simply not viable as long as Russian forces occupy Georgian territory . . . Until Russia’s occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia ends, . . . the

²⁶³ Wilson, “Georgia’s Path to NATO,” 3.

²⁶⁴ Temuri Yakobashvili and Jonathan Kulicj, “Can Georgia Join NATO Without Solving the Conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia?,” *The Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation Black Sea Paper Series*, No. 3: <http://trends.gmfus.org/doc/Black%20Sea%20Paper%20No.3%20FINAL%2010-16.pdf>, 4–5.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Wilson, “Georgia’s Path to NATO,” 3.

Alliance would be importing an inevitable conflict.”²⁶⁸ In this regard, given the recent increase in Russian aggression in Ukraine, it would appear that NATO is in no hurry to grant Georgia membership regardless of whether or not Georgia resolves its ongoing territorial disputes.

2. Georgia’s Faltering Democratization and Need for Additional Defense Reforms

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia’s military and political leaders faced a difficult task. In 1991, Georgia’s military was virtually non-existent, having long been neglected. Thanks to financial assistance and training provided by foreign nations, notably the United States, Georgia gradually began to engage in a wide array of structural reforms; however, these reforms were slow and suffered constant setbacks.²⁶⁹

By 2003, the Georgian government and MoD had begun a major campaign to overhaul Georgia’s outdated defense policies. The result of this campaign was the composition of several key planning documents, to include the *National Security Concept*, the *Threat Assessment Document*, the *National Military Strategy*, the *Strategic Defense Review*, and the *Minister’s Vision*. Cumulatively, these documents—based largely on existing U.S. policies—“defined the main tasks for the Georgian army as achieving compatibility with NATO standards, acquiring the capacity for providing assistance to civil-political authorities in post-crisis rehabilitation and maintaining law and order, and, last but not least, acquiring the capacity for carrying out peace support, military operations and antiterrorist operations.”²⁷⁰ While these documents were a major step toward reforming Georgia’s military, they were not solutions in and of themselves. As a nation, Georgia faced threats very different from those confronting the majority of NATO and EU member states. According to Kríz and Shevchuk, “the probability that its

²⁶⁸ Wilson, “Georgia’s Path to NATO,” 2.

²⁶⁹ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement*, 2.

²⁷⁰ Kríz and Shevchuk, “Georgian Readiness for NATO Membership after Russian-Georgian Armed Conflict,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 44, No. 1 (2011): <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0967067X11000043>, 92.

territory [could] be attacked [was] much higher than in other parts of Europe.”²⁷¹ In this regard, the solutions that Georgia needed would take time to achieve.

Unfortunately, time was not on Georgia’s side, as witnessed by the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict. This conflict cost the lives of over 500 Georgian soldiers. The majority of Georgia’s military equipment was destroyed, as was the morale of its armed forces. While loss of equipment is easily measurable, loss of morale is not. As the Georgian government and MoD came to terms with their nation’s defeat, and the possibility of obtaining Alliance membership quickly disappeared, Georgia’s priorities for defense reform shifted accordingly. Prior to the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, Georgia’s defense policy “was oriented to territorial defence, deterrence of potential aggression and international expeditionary operations.”²⁷² However, “the Russian-Georgian conflict highlighted the importance of . . . strengthening the capability of the Georgian army to defend the homeland against direct aggression.”²⁷³ As the MoD actively pursued (and received) foreign military investment, which served to offset equipment losses incurred in the conflict, it also began dedicating a significantly larger portion of its annual budget to personnel expenditures—approximately 58.5 percent in 2009.²⁷⁴ These increased annual personnel expenditures have since continued, demonstrating the commitment of the Georgian government and MoD to form more professional armed forces.

According to Wilson, “since the 2008 war, Georgia has been an ‘A+’ NATO student.”²⁷⁵ Since 1992, the Georgian government and MoD have received billions of dollars in foreign aid and equipment, much of which has been used to better train and equip the Georgian armed forces and further develop Georgia’s defensive capabilities. Additionally, Tbilisi has placed a much stronger emphasis on attaining NATO membership and ensuring NATO interoperability. This commitment to attaining NATO membership is evident in Georgia’s continued support for NATO-led operations,

²⁷¹ Kríz and Shevchuk, “Georgian Readiness for NATO Membership,” 94.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ Wilson, “Georgia’s Path to NATO,” 1.

including a “caveat-free deployment in NATO’s post-International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Afghanistan mission.”²⁷⁶ Given Georgia’s current and ongoing defense reforms, its commitment to achieving NATO interoperability, and its continued support from other nations, notably the United States, Georgia’s prospects for NATO membership (in terms of defense capabilities) do not appear to be a major issue.

However, according to Kríz and Shevchuk, “when assessing the readiness of a country to join NATO, political criteria are [generally] given priority to military criteria.”²⁷⁷ Politically, Georgia has come a long way; however, the Georgian government continues to struggle with corruption. Moreover, embezzlement, abuse of power, and politically-motivated arrests remain commonplace. In 2003, accusations of electoral fraud prompted the overthrow of President Eduard Shevardnadze in what would later be called the Rose Revolution. In 2007, Georgia’s first democratically-elected president, Mikheil Saakashvili, resigned due to domestic and international criticism regarding a government crackdown on political oppositionists. While Saakashvili managed to get re-elected two months later,²⁷⁸ according to Zdenek Kríz and Zinaida Shevchuk, “Georgian opposition parties refused to recognize the result of the presidential election that was won by Saakashvili, calling the election rigged, and refused to cooperate or accept any positions in the government.”²⁷⁹ While the Georgian government took additional steps to combat corruption and ensure the smooth democratic transition of power, in the aftermath of the 2012 parliamentary and 2013 presidential elections, opposition parties once again made similar accusations.²⁸⁰ According to Kríz and Shevchuk, “on the whole, the custom of changing political power in ways that would be in conformity with legal and universally accepted rules has not yet become part of

²⁷⁶ Wilson, “Georgia’s Path to NATO,” 1.

²⁷⁷ Kríz and Shevchuk, “Georgian Readiness for NATO Membership,” 92.

²⁷⁸ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 1.

²⁷⁹ Kríz and Shevchuk, “Georgian Readiness for NATO Membership,” 91.

²⁸⁰ Nichol, *Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests*, 6–8.

Georgian political culture.”²⁸¹ Georgia’s political culture continues to undermine its chances of attaining Alliance membership.

As regards regional and local politics, the Georgian government has consistently taken steps toward decentralization and democratization. The government has, for example, consolidated Georgian territory from 1,000 small local units to 69 larger units, and it has made Tbilisi a self-governing city. However, owing in part to internal opposition, the effects of these reforms have been marginalized at the regional and local levels due to the Georgian government’s failure to implement corresponding financial reforms. According to Skorupska and Zasztowt, current reforms are only a half measure; in order to ensure real empowerment of the regions, the Georgian government must “clearly define the fiscal powers of local governments.”²⁸² As of March 2015, there are no legal mechanisms in place to ensure a fair distribution of state resources. The unequal distribution of resources makes regional and local governments financially dependent on the central authorities, which, in turn, gives the central authorities leverage to persuade local electorates to vote for the ruling party.²⁸³

Skorupska and Zasztowt further state that in order to pursue necessary financial reforms, the Georgian government must continue to coordinate with outside organizations, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation (GIZ), and the Open Society Foundation. Through these organizations, as well as through individual EU member states, the Georgian government can gain access to much-needed financial resources and political support.²⁸⁴

Poland has taken a leading role in this respect. By coordinating with “governmental experts, academic specialists, and representatives of Polish local and regional authorities,”²⁸⁵ the Georgian government would be able to identify the best way

²⁸¹ Kríz and Shevchuk, “Georgian Readiness for NATO Membership,” 91.

²⁸² Skorupska and Zasztowt, “Georgia’s Local Government Reform,” 6.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

to utilize the financial support it receives. According to Skorupska and Zasztowt, “Polish experts, using their experience, can help to prepare analyses of the effectiveness of the financial system, the coordination of the work of different local entities (such as NGOs, local companies and local government), the effectiveness of the local tasks, and preparation of the decentralization reform promotion programme.”²⁸⁶

For the Georgian government to meet the political requirements set forth in the 1995 *Study on NATO Enlargement* there is still much that needs to be done. According to Wilson, “to be a viable NATO candidate, Georgia must continue to build credible democratic institutions and practices, a vibrant civil society, and an independent press.”²⁸⁷ To achieve this,

Georgia will have to redistribute the powers of the executive and strengthen the mechanisms of control over it, put in place measures preventing the government from bullying the opposition, ensure that the former state television and radio stations become public entities with real independence, continue the reform of its judiciary and fight corruption. But the most important—and, at the same time, the most difficult—task for Georgia is to create a political culture that will make it possible that governments can be smoothly replaced by their opposition on the basis of free and fair elections whose results are accepted by both the winning and losing sides.²⁸⁸

Given the inherent political realities of post-Soviet states, it is unlikely that democratic reforms such as these will happen quickly. Moreover, any political reforms that do occur will likely incur corresponding set-backs. What this implies is that it is unlikely that Georgia will soon meet NATO political requirements for membership.

²⁸⁶ Skorupska and Zasztowt, “Georgia’s Local Government Reform,” 6.

²⁸⁷ Kríz and Shevchuk, “Georgian Readiness for NATO Membership,” 95.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

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V. CONCLUSION

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, Georgia officially gained its independence. However, since then, little has changed in the struggle for regional control. As a sovereign nation, Georgia views itself as being part of Europe, and believes that its only real security lies in its increased ties with the West. Since joining NATO's PfP program in 1994, Georgia has made clear its intention to break from its Soviet (and now Russian) past, and to commit itself fully to the leading Western organizations, NATO and the EU. The Georgian government has therefore actively pursued economic, military, and political reforms. However, owing in part to political realities inherent in post-Soviet states, these reforms have been slow and subject to frequent, and sometimes externally-imposed, setbacks.

While arguably beneficial for Georgia's long-term security, Georgia's Western aspirations have brought with them a steep price, as demonstrated by the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict and subsequent Russian occupation of the breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While this conflict was devastating for Georgia (over 500 Georgian soldiers were killed and the majority of Georgia's military infrastructure was destroyed), it also marked a turning point in NATO-Russian relations, and served as a rude awakening to many NATO and EU member states.²⁸⁹ According to Skorupska and Zasztowt, after the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict,

many Western leaders concluded that the Kremlin would work to prevent NATO enlargement to other post-Soviet states. Russia's more recent strong-arm tactics to dissuade Ukraine and other Eastern Partnership states from pursuing integration with the European Union (EU) indicate that Moscow is just as committed to obstructing further progress toward a Europe whole and free and preventing any more of its neighbors from joining the West.²⁹⁰

As regards Georgia's NATO aspirations, there is a general consensus among NATO member states that Georgia faces a number of significant challenges in its bid to

²⁸⁹ Zinets and Madorsky, "U.S. Says Russia Must Pull Convoy."

²⁹⁰ Skorupska and Zasztowt "Georgia's Local Government Reform," 1.

join NATO, including Moscow's recognition of the breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia's faltering attempts at democratization, and Georgia's need for additional defense reforms. Additionally, there is a general consensus that Moscow's current leadership has demonstrated its determination to prevent continued NATO enlargement into Russia's historic sphere of influence. As a result, any future attempt at NATO enlargement in the post-Communist space will be accompanied by an increase in Russian opposition. In this regard, as observed previously, in a political context that features recurrent secessionist campaigns in the United Kingdom (Scotland) and Spain (Catalonia),²⁹¹ the implications for the eurozone of the results of the 2015 Greek Parliamentary elections,²⁹² and the U.S. pivot to the Asia-Pacific,²⁹³ it would appear overall that there is little political willingness among NATO and EU member states to face off militarily against Russia. According to Skorupska and Zasztowt, "against this backdrop, many European and American policymakers are ambivalent about, if not cool to, the idea of further enlargement of either NATO or the EU as they grapple with challenges at home and see only problems among the aspirants."²⁹⁴

Given that the only real requirement for new member accession is consensus among NATO member states, the question is, at what point will the NATO Allies be willing to accept the risks and responsibilities associated with allowing Georgia to join the Alliance? With an increasingly aggressive Russian foreign policy threatening not only the sovereignty and territorial integrity of non-NATO Eastern European nations,²⁹⁵ but also Europe's access to Russian and Azeri energy resources,²⁹⁶ some observers contend that it is only a matter of time before NATO will be forced to act, be that through economic, military, or political means. However, based upon Western actions in response

²⁹¹ "Scottish Referendum;" "Catalonia Vote."

²⁹² Lynch, "Greek Election Results 2015."

²⁹³ Campbell, interview by Robert Kagan.

²⁹⁴ Skorupska and Zasztowt "Georgia's Local Government Reform," 1.

²⁹⁵ Nichol, *Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008*, 1-39; Smith and Eshchenko, "Ukraine Cries 'Robbery.'"

²⁹⁶ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 1-70; Zinets, "Ukraine Warns Europe of Russian Gas Cut-Off."

to the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, it appears that economic and political sanctions are the only avenues that NATO and EU member states are currently willing to pursue. For now, direct military action against Russia as regards Ukraine appears unlikely. However, the lack of Western military responses implies that as long as Russia is willing (and able) to pay the economic and political costs associated with its aggressive military actions against non-NATO and non-EU member states, Moscow, in effect, exercises a veto against NATO aspirants. Given the policies of most NATO Allies, barring a Russian attack on a NATO member, it is unlikely that the Alliance will grant Georgia membership regardless of the amount of support provided by the United States.

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