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## **THE MAIN THREATS TO GEORGIA’S NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE MODERN PERIOD AND THE COUNTRY’S MAIN PRIORITIES**

**Abstract:** *The paper discusses the main theoretical and practical aspects related to national interests and national security. It analyzes the various political, military, economic, social, demographic, ecological, and other threats and challenges that Georgia faces, as well as the main priorities of Georgia’s national security at the present stage, in order to ensure the country’s independence and strengthen its statehood.*

**Key words:** *Georgia, national security, national interests, threats, challenges, independence, sovereignty*

### **Introduction**

Since the restoration of independence on April 9, 1991, the Georgian Defense Forces have participated in two asymmetric wars, one symmetric war, and several low-intensity conflicts to protect their territorial integrity. As a result of these wars, Georgia lost control over 20% of its territory<sup>2</sup>. The territories of Georgia are occupied by the Russian Federation. The conflict regions of Georgia are not simply a territorial dispute or an ethnic conflict; they are a conflict arising from geopolitical interests, the solution to which lies in the concession of the national interests of the Russian Federation. The concession of national interests by Russia to Georgia signifies the Kremlin’s concession of its geopolitical position in the Caucasus and the Black Sea region, which is why Russia is making a concerted effort to maintain its influence over Georgia.

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<sup>2</sup> N. Chitadze, *Geopolitics*, Tbilisi 2011.

Topic relevance – Georgia is among those states whose past and present are connected with the struggle for self-preservation. Since the restoration of independence, Georgia has been in a practically constant state of war with one of the most aggressive states in the world, which, in addition to nuclear weapons, has used practically all the means at its disposal against Georgia, both in conventional and unconventional wars. Given its territorial scarcity, military conflicts for Georgia are not simply a territorial dispute, but a matter of existence or non-existence. Therefore, such studies, which may provide some kind of assistance to national security, are of great importance, because Georgia's success or failure, and existence or non-existence, depend on such knowledge.

### **Purpose of the work**

The purpose of the selected research topic in the context of Georgian national security is to:

- Identify domestic and international factors and actors affecting the Georgian national security environment.
- Determine the likely consequences of the ongoing military-political processes and power distribution in the world and in the region.

### **Objective of the work**

The task of the selected research topic in the context of Georgian national security:

- Assessment of the Georgian national security environment based on recent political processes.
- Identification of military threats to Georgian national security.

### **Research questions**

1. Which international factors affect Georgian national security?
2. Where do military and non-military threats to Georgia come from?
3. What are the main priorities of Georgian national security?

### **Methodology**

When developing the topic, the following was used:

The concept of “political realism”, the principles of which are based on the struggle of states for power, holds that the main driving force for the main actors of international relations is national interests. The main principle of political realism is the balance of power. Each state seeks to gain an advantage and strengthen its own power.

‘Rimland’ – a priority area for the development of civilization. The famous geopolitician Nicholas Spykman developed Mackinder's approach and formulated

ed the famous thesis “He who dominates the ‘Rimland’, dominates the world”. This principle is used in the process of forming a new world order, in the context of the ongoing struggle.

We used Joseph Nye’s concept of “soft power” as the most important lever of political action in the process of forming a new world order, with all its three components.

## **Research methods**

Qualitative research methods were used in the work on the paper:

- Historical-descriptive.
- Discussion of theoretical material.
- Analysis and drawing conclusions.
- Content analysis.

## **National security strategies**

### **National interests**

In domestic and foreign policy, the concept of “national interests” is so popular that it is used to justify and justify any political action. This concept has acquired a special, even some kind of mystical connotation. National interests are recognized as the cornerstone of “high politics”. “High politics” is a necessary condition for the existence and development of a sovereign state. The so-called implementation of “national goals” and “national perspective” is carried out as a result of determining national interests, with their consistent protection (obviously, the necessary adjustments are also meant here).

National interests are the key concept of foreign policy. Modern so-called, in an anarchic international system, where there is no supremacy of international law and no supreme authority capable of serving as the guarantor of international order and peace, sovereign states pursue such a foreign policy as, in the opinion of their governments, follows from their national interests. which, taking into account the values prevailing in the modern international system, means the political and, consequently, the growing economic power of states<sup>3</sup>.

The concept of national interests is associated with the school of political realism. He is his firstborn. This concept is a key element of the political realism belief system. At the same time, it was the least studied and could not go beyond

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<sup>3</sup> H.J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York 1948.

the level of general formulations. According to P. Reynolds, the concept of “national interests” is generally unsuitable, since it does not have an exact meaning. In addition, it is impossible to establish the national interests of a particular country, and politicians use this concept to deceive society and themselves. Despite the foregoing, this concept turned out to be very viable and is still widely used in the theory and practice of international relations.

Statesmen, political parties, or interested groups of the population participating in the development of the foreign policy of the state or leading this policy substantiate and substantiate their views, decisions, and policies with national interests.

### **National security**

For a sovereign state, security issues are of vital importance. Ensuring security means many things, but, above all, it is the protection and preservation of sovereignty, the integrity of the country, political institutions, and cultural identity. The concept of “national security” has many opponents. Their arguments are:

1. This concept is a powerful but very vague symbol.
2. The problem is not national security, but international security. A person should live in a safe world, not in a safe country.
3. National security is the security of the state, not the individual. Governments often use this concept to suppress dissent and opposition within a country. Due to the state’s active concern for their security, people’s security is often limited.
4. This concept is often used for the narrow interests of a certain group or person (examples: authoritarian leader, military-industrial complex, law enforcement agencies)<sup>4</sup>.

Since every sovereign state today takes care of its security, there is no universal security. Because of this, the world is “plunging” into a situation that is known as the “morning of security”. It follows logically from the anarchy of the international system of sovereign states, which means that each state is forced to ensure its security in a situation of general mistrust and the absence of a higher international authority. Therefore, each country, whether it wants it or not, is forced to strengthen its military and military-economic capabilities, because it is not sure that no one will help it. Thus, an increase in the military potential of one country forces its rival or rivals to take care of strengthening their military potential. Even the strongest

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<sup>4</sup> A. Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics Hardcover*, Baltimore 1988.

country is not in a safe position, because its rival in response is trying to improve its position, and there is no end in sight to this rivalry. The dilemma is that no matter how strong you become, your safety is still not guaranteed. This position and, absolute or not, the indomitable desire for relative security not only determine the special interest in hidden weapons and military-strategic problems but also cause wars and military-political ties. In general, ensuring one's security is considered the primary need and task of a sovereign state.

In a world where force is recognized as the most important political factor, the special attitude towards security is understandable. At the same time, it must be recognized that security issues appear in a dynamic political reality as new complex problems and dilemmas and create many mysteries for the theory and practice of international relations.

Since danger exists not only physically, but often very subjectively and is perceived differently by everyone, safety also has an important psychological aspect. The psychological aspects of security make it difficult to objectively assess and perceive it, and in many cases lead to irrational decision-making in national security priorities and policy.

Any national security strategy begins with an imaginary map of the world or region. Naturally, the perceptual maps of the world of the 18th or 19th centuries differed from similar maps of the world and its regions of the 20th century. Moreover, there is a big difference between the imaginary maps of the first half of the twentieth century and its middle, and especially the end. According to the perception of modern man, the world should appear on the map as more united and interdependent, and perhaps it is, but for people working in the field of national security, such imaginary maps should also clearly show the hierarchy of power between states, specific security relations, and conflicts, global and regional threats, strategic resources and their transportation, signs of a struggle for control over roads, and much more. National security issues continue to be a priority in the international system of sovereign states. Does this mean that everything remains the same in relations between states and nothing has changed? Partly so, but as the world changes, our view of the national security of states, as well as global or individual security, has changed significantly. First, the geography of national security has changed. This means that not only has power been dispersed in the world, but the significance of the teachings in the modern world has also decreased. The role and importance of moral principles in international politics and, consequently, in the theory and practice of national security have undergone significant evolution. While force continues to be the deciding factor, ethnic and humanitarian aspects already play a major role in international politics<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton University Press 1976.

## **National Interests of Georgia**

### **The national interests of Georgia are:**

- Ensuring sovereignty and territorial integrity;
- Development of state institutions and strengthening of democracy;
- Development of an effective system of national security.
- Strengthening national unity and civil consent;
- European and Euro-Atlantic integration;
- Ensuring stable long-term economic growth;
- Ensuring energy security;
- Ensuring regional stability;
- Strengthening the transit function of Georgia;
- Ensuring the ecological security of Georgia and the region;
- Ensuring civil integration and national and cultural identity;
- Strengthening cybersecurity;
- Ensuring demographic security.

### **Threats, risks, and challenges facing Georgia**

- Occupation of Georgian territories by the Russian Federation and terrorist acts organized by the Russian Federation from the occupied territories;
- Risk of new military aggression by the Russian Federation;
- Russia's gross interference in Georgia's internal affairs and support for anti-national and anti-Western forces in Georgia;
- Violation of the rights of internally displaced persons and refugees from the occupied territories of Georgia;
- The unstable situation in the North Caucasus;
- International terrorism and transnational organized crime;
- Economic and social challenges;
- Energy challenges;

- Cyber threats;
- Ecological challenges;
- Demographic challenges
- Challenges related to civic integration;
- Damage/destruction of cultural heritage sites<sup>6</sup>.

Based on the above, the main directions of Georgia's security policy are:

### **De-occupation of the occupied territories of Georgia**

The de-occupation of the occupied regions of Georgia, the civil reintegration of the population living there, and the restoration of sovereignty over the entire territory of the country are the most important priorities of the national security policy. The goal of the Georgian state should be to take timely and effective steps aimed at the de-occupation of the country's territories by peaceful methods based on the principles of international law. Georgia should remain committed to the non-use of force obligations assumed under the August 12, 2008, ceasefire agreement between Russia and Georgia. In addition, Georgia should unilaterally undertake a commitment to non-renewal of hostilities and continue to offer peace proposals that imply broad autonomy for the occupied regions based on European experience.

Georgia welcomes all peace proposals and initiatives that will facilitate the de-occupation of its territories. For the successful implementation of de-occupation, including in the context of the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, greater activity of the international community is required, in particular, further tightening of the sanctions already imposed on the Russian Federation, so that in the long term Russia will be forced to fulfill all obligations assumed under the ceasefire agreement between Russia and Georgia of August 12, 2008, concluded with the mediation of the European Union, first of all, to withdraw its armed forces from the occupied territories.

Today, against the backdrop of increased economic and diplomatic pressure on Russia from the international democratic community, one of the ways for Georgia to defuse the situation should be the creation of a peacekeeping mechanism that would ensure the withdrawal of the Russian Federation's armed forces from the occupied territories and the deployment of international peacekeeping/police forces there. The activities of the EU Monitoring Mission are still important for Georgia, and in the future, this mission should also cover the occupied territories, as defined by its mandate. This will contribute to the launch of a comprehensive peace process and the establishment of long-term peace.

<sup>6</sup> Parliament of Georgia, *Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia. On the Approval of the "National Security Concept of Georgia" 2011*, <<https://faolex.fao.org/docs/geo212922GEO.pdf>> (12.02.2025).

## **Development of State Institutions and Strengthening Democracy**

One of Georgia's main priorities should be the development of a free and democratic society in order to strengthen the rule of law and a transparent, accountable system of governance based on the equality of every citizen before the law, which will guarantee human rights and freedoms for all citizens, including freedom of speech, thought, conscience, religion and belief, and the right to form and participate in associations. Such a political system should be the main prerequisite for the development of the country; however, in the current situation, a clear regression of democracy is observed in Georgia, which poses a threat not only to Georgia's European integration but also to Georgian statehood as a whole. Accordingly, Georgia needs a strong consolidation of democratic forces within the country, and strong support from international democratic forces outside the country, including the imposition of specific sanctions against the political elite and those close to them who violate fundamental human rights and threaten the strengthening of Georgian statehood and Georgia's integration into the international democratic community.

## **Development of the Georgian Defense and Security System**

To protect national security, Georgia must implement reforms aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the security system. The cornerstone of state security sector reforms is the National Security Review process, which will ensure closer coordination between security institutions, improve the quality of interaction between military and civilian components, and enable the development of appropriate departmental strategies for institutions involved in the state security sector. The priority of Georgia's security policy is the existence of a unified, flexible, permanent, and effective crisis management system, which, through the coordinated work of the agencies defined by Georgian legislation, ensures the prediction and prevention of an expected crisis, and in the event of a crisis – its elimination or minimization of its negative consequences in the shortest possible time. Taking into account the changed security environment of Georgia, the most important direction of the national security policy is to increase defense capabilities. The Armed Forces must adapt to new challenges, operational environment, and tasks. Special importance is attached to measures aimed at strengthening the readiness and defense capabilities of the Armed Forces to defend the country's territory in the event of external aggression, the aim of which is to ensure full compliance of the education and training system with modern standards, develop the personnel management system, improve command and control, increase compatibility with NATO and promote Euro-Atlantic integration.

## **NATO Membership and EU Integration**

One of the main priorities of Georgia's foreign and national security policy is its membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union. Georgia, as a state in the Black Sea region and South-Eastern Europe, is a geographical, political, and cultural part of Europe, which was cut off from its natural environment of development due to historical cataclysms. Georgia's sovereign choice is to integrate into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union, which strengthens the country's security and ensures its stable development.

## **Cooperation in the South Caucasus**

Georgia attaches special importance to cooperation with neighboring countries and, through its political and economic steps, contributes to the transformation of the South Caucasus into an economically attractive, peaceful, and secure region. Georgia has traditionally enjoyed good-neighborly relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia. It believes that it is of great importance to develop joint approaches to the future development of the South Caucasus. Given the warming relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, it is necessary to deepen trilateral cooperation, create a single economic space, and develop a common market, which will significantly contribute to the stability and prosperity of the region. The potential of Georgia, as a Black Sea state, is a favorable circumstance for multilateral cooperation. Despite the existing contradictions, there is potential for cooperation between the three countries of the South Caucasus on issues such as joint efforts to combat international terrorism, organized crime, and drug trafficking, and the development of joint measures to improve the ecological situation. These relations will contribute to trilateral economic cooperation and deepen political dialogue in the long term.

## **Combating international terrorism and transnational organized crime**

The goal of Georgia's counter-terrorism policy should be to ensure the security of the country's citizens, the state and other institutions. Georgia is a party to the UN anti-terrorism conventions and protocols and actively cooperates in the field of combating terrorism in bilateral and multilateral formats. Georgia's cooperation with the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee and the development of means to combat terrorism, including special forces of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies, serve to achieve this goal. To prevent the threat of terrorists using Georgia's territory for transit purposes, Georgia should strengthen border protection, customs control, and actively cooperate with neighboring states – Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan – in the fight against terrorism and transnational organized crime. A significant terrorist threat to Georgia comes from the territories occupied by the Russian Federation. The terrorist

acts that have occurred in Georgia in recent years were carried out by representatives of the Russian occupation forces from the occupied territories, who continue to abduct Georgian citizens in the territories adjacent to the occupied regions.

## **Economic Security Policy**

Georgia's economic policy should be based on the principle of economic freedom. Georgia's economic security policy aims to create the necessary conditions that will promote the development of the country, the well-being of the population, as well as the growth of the economy and the competitiveness of its citizens. An important priority of Georgia's economic security policy is to strengthen macroeconomic stability by improving and simplifying tax administration, consistently reducing the budget deficit to maintain fiscal sustainability, pursuing a conservative fiscal and sound monetary policy, achieving and maintaining a minimum level of inflation, reducing public spending, and minimizing public debt. One of the important directions of Georgia's foreign economic and security policy is the development of sound economic relations with the European Union, the United States, and countries in the region, including through free trade regimes. Economic and cross-border relations will contribute to reducing tensions in the region and de-escalating conflict situations. To this end, Georgia cooperates in various economic spheres with countries of the wider region: Azerbaijan, Turkey, Armenia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, as well as with other countries of the Black Sea region, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

Today, in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is important to develop Georgia's transport infrastructure, maximize the realization of its transport, transit, and communication potential, and maximize the country's integration into international transport systems in order to strengthen Georgia's function as a regional logistics center. Georgia's economic policy should ensure non-interference of the state in the activities of individuals and businesses, protection of economic freedom and property, improvement of tax administration, and implementation of a conservative fiscal policy.

## **Georgia's Geostrategic Position in the Context of South Caucasus Security**

Georgia plays an important role in establishing a connection between Central Asia and Europe. 1,467 kilometers of international transit routes pass through this South Caucasus country. Cargo transportation through Georgia is carried out by sea, rail, and road. Land transport accounts for approximately 59% of Georgia's total freight turnover, which averages 17.2 million tons per year. In the period from January to June 2024, 249,400 trucks passed through Georgia, which means an income of 87.2 million GEL (approximately 32.3 million USD) to the state budget<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> E. Elibekyan, M. Hovsepyan, *Regional transportation routes: How Georgia's transit role is changing in light of new realities*, JAM News 2024.

More than 40 percent of this amount (approximately 13 million USD) came from Armenian trucks. About 40% of the total volume is related to transit through Armenia. The only land route between Armenia and Russia, the Mtskheta-Stepantsminda-Larsi section, passes through the territory of Georgia. Transit transportation is an economically significant benefit for Georgia. Each truck pays 350 GEL (about 130 USD) for movement through the country's territory – this figure was 200 GEL (about 75 USD) until 2022.

In recent years, the number of trucks crossing the Georgian border has been steadily increasing: in 2020 – 315,300, in 2021 – 322,100, in 2022 – 496,300, and in 2023 – 520,000. In the first eight months of 2024, 336,402 trucks crossed the Georgian border<sup>8</sup>.

Following the 44-day war of 2020 and the events of 2022-2023, which are related to the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, both countries signed an agreement on the opening of all economic and transport routes in the region. Under this agreement, Armenia undertakes to ensure a safe transport connection between Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan, which aims to ensure freedom of movement for people, cargo and vehicles.

In this regard, Georgian experts are of the opinion that the possible opening of regional infrastructure could reduce the volume of cargo transported through Georgia. In particular, if relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan stabilize and the road to Nakhichevan and Turkey is opened through Armenia, this will somewhat reduce Georgia's transit function. In particular, the restoration of the functioning of the railway through the territory of Armenia may activate transport routes that were previously unused. This opinion is based on the changes that have been developing in the region since the Karabakh conflict. However, overall, the warming of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan provides an opportunity to deepen ties between the three states of the region.

## **Challenges to Georgia's Security Policy**

The conflicts in Georgia, the occupation of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, or Russia's attempts to dominate security, directly and indirectly reflect on Georgia's security.

The geopolitical configuration of the South Caucasus directly affects Georgia's defense capabilities. The continued militarization of the occupied territories by Russia and the operation of a Russian military base in Armenia mean that Russia's security architecture in the region remains accountable and can escalate the situation at any time. In addition, due to the recent policies pursued by the Georgian authorities, the process of integration with Western security structures has been suspended, which makes the country's foreign policy even more vulnerable in times of crisis.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

At the same time, Georgia has certain strategic advantages that allow it to strengthen its position in the region. First of all, this is its geostrategic location, which allows the country to be involved in the energy and transport networks of Europe-Asia.

For Georgia, as an important state in the South Caucasus, positioning itself in this environment is difficult and at the same time strategically important.

It can be said that the geopolitical environment of the South Caucasus represents a combination of both opportunities and threats for Georgia. The country's stability, security, and development prospects closely depend on how it manages to reassess its role in the geopolitical balance of the region, diversify its relations with its neighbors and Western partners, and effectively balance internal stability and the protection of national interests.

The conflicts in Abkhazia and Samachablo have had many serious consequences for Georgia in terms of strategic, political, and security. These conflicts began after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when ethnic confrontation, separatism, and Russian intervention combined to create a constant threat to Georgia's statehood.

As a result of the conflict, state sovereignty was partially violated and territorial integrity was violated, which led to structural destabilization in the country and significantly increased the number of internally displaced persons.

These conflicts were not only a legacy of the past, but also a precondition and a determining factor for the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. These processes demonstrated that any change of power in the region was unacceptable to the Kremlin, which eventually evolved into an open military confrontation.

The August 2008 war posed a number of strategic, political, and economic challenges for Georgia. Although the fighting was short-lived, the long-term consequences of the conflict seriously affected the country's security architecture and international positioning.

One of the main consequences of the war is the worsening state of territorial integrity. The recognition of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia) as independent states by the Russian Federation not only deepened the existing conflict but also hindered the possibility of a settlement based on international legal mechanisms. Russian military bases are still located in these territories, which threatens Georgia's sovereignty and disrupts the balance of power in the region.

In terms of security, Georgia's strategic situation has become even more complicated. The constant change of occupation lines – the so-called borderization – creates a tense environment among the local population and disrupts the free movement of citizens. At the same time, this process often takes place without a response from the international community, which allows Russia more maneuverability.

The war has led to fundamental changes in Georgia's defense policy. The country has strengthened military cooperation with the West, especially with NATO, although the process of full integration is still fraught with challenges. After the war, the number of exercises has increased, the communication system has improved,

and strategic plans have been revised, although the country's military potential is still limited compared to Russia.

The war has clearly shown that security is not determined solely by military capabilities. Strong institutions, democratic governance, and a sustainable system of international support are needed. Georgia will only be able to address these challenges with a long-term strategic vision and a unified national consensus.

## **Conclusion**

The restoration of independence for Georgia became possible because the world order in which Georgia was not represented as a state ended. The recent history of modern Georgia and the entire political agenda in the context of international relations and security can be explained as an attempt to integrate into the international order, where the fate of Georgia, based on its scale and capabilities, depends entirely on the rules of the common world game. Therefore, the state of Georgia will always be proportional to how successfully or unsuccessfully Georgia plays by these rules.

Against the backdrop of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the process of forming the world order in the modern world is characterized by the confrontation between the democratic world of the West and Russia and its allies (for example, the BRICS member states), which includes sub-directions of the confrontation of various regional players.

In the new world order, the strategic goal of the Georgian state is to maintain and develop its own statehood. In the process of forming the order itself, Georgia's task is to establish a place for itself in the most optimal space. From the overview analysis of the national security environment, it is clear that there is no political entity in the world whose interests will be constantly in line with Georgia's, because the variability of their interests depends on the change in the balance of power in the process of forming a new world order. In this most difficult process, based on political tendencies, Georgia's foreign policy should be directed so that in no case does Georgia become a subject or an instrument of political bargaining. In order to achieve its own goal, Georgia must establish itself as a subject at the international level, not an object, which will be enabled by the increased interest in it in the process of forming a world order. Moreover, based on the analysis of international politics, new opportunities emerge for Georgia, the use of which requires a flexible foreign policy, which is of vital importance for Georgia, because in whatever form Georgia's integration into the future world order takes place, it will remain there until the next world order.

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