

Georgia's Geopolitical Importance to the United States: Strategic Perspectives

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Abstract: *The research provides a thorough examination of Georgia's geopolitical importance, taking into account its contribution to regional and international security, economic and energy roles and democratic reform initiatives. The study emphasizes the critical role of the country in influencing regional dynamics and promoting international stability by placing it within the broader geopolitical context. Against the backdrop of these, the study examines the reasons behind Georgia's importance to the USA, emphasizing its role as a key transit hub for trade and energy between Europe and Central Asia. In the face of Russian aggression, the United State defends Georgia's territorial integrity as it sees the nation as a meaningful ally in maintaining regional peace and international standards.*

Keywords: Georgia, geopolitical strategy, energy security, NATO integration, regional stability

1. Introduction

The paper examines Georgia's contributions to energy transit, regional stability, security alliances and democratic growth. This paper investigates Georgia's geopolitical relevance. It explores the complex relationship between Georgia's political affiliations and geographic advantages, examining how this country plays a significant role in the global geopolitics and why the USA focuses on it.

Georgia is a key participant in regional international geopolitics due to its favorable geographic location at the intersection of Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Located in the South Caucasus, this small, but strategically meaningful country serves as a critical transit hub, connecting energy-demanding Europe with energy-rich Central Asia and acting as a vital corridor for infrastructure, connectivity and trade projects. In addition to increasing Georgia's economic significance, these geographic advantages have solidified Georgia's place in the geographical plants of the world's leading nations.

Beyond its economic and energy contributions, Georgia's geopolitical importance extends to its role in regional stability and security. The pro-Western stance of the nation and its aspiration to NATO membership strengthened its affiliation with Western powers and its geopolitical location places it as a buffer state between Russia, Turkey and Iran. These elements have positioned Georgia at the forefront of larger initiatives to uphold international security frameworks, foster regional peace and curtail Russian influence in the Caucasus.

Geopolitical significance

Georgia's location at the center of the South Caucasus, linking Europe, Asia, and the Middle East offers significant advantage. Because of its location, the country serves as a major conduit for trade, infrastructure, and pipelines that link energy-rich Central Asia with energy-demanding Europe. Georgia's function as a crucial corridor has several geopolitical significance aspects, including energy security, economic stability, and regional power dynamics. In recent decades, Georgia's strategic significance has been enhanced

by its role of the transit route in the "New Silk Road" initiatives aimed at strengthening connectivity and trade, such as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The significant geopolitical location supports Georgia to be a vital transit route between the Caspian Sea and Europe and a buffer state between major countries like Russia, Turkey, and Iran likewise. The South Caucasus gas pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline demonstrate Georgia's contribution to ensure European energy independence from Russian energy supplies; below are listed three main projects, with the major role of Georgia:

- **Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Oil Pipeline**

The BTC pipeline is one of the primary oil transit routes, extending from Azerbaijan through Georgia to Turkey, and onward to Europe. This pipeline is of a particular importance for the country with regards to the economics and politics as well. This pipeline allows Caspian oil to reach European markets while bypassing Russia and the Bosphorus Strait, which is a major chokepoint. BTC is not only an economic asset for Georgia but a strategic symbol of Western influence in the region, strengthening Georgia's ties with the U.S., the EU, and regional partners. The pipeline connects Baku with the Turkish Mediterranean seaport of Ceyhan. The total length of the pipeline amounts to 1760 km out of which 248 km section runs through Georgia and its capital, Tbilisi. As the corporate policy of BTC company states: the economic benefits and opportunities will be generated by the company, which will enhance the quality of life for those whom the business impacted. The investment programs in Georgia aims at:

- Improving live standards by means of strengthened social infrastructure;
- Better financial prospects and higher earnings;
- Enhanced capacity of communities to plan, coordinate and oversee social developments on their own (Papava, 2005);

The total budget, invested by the US to this project amounts to USD 25 million out of which USD 8 million will be invested in Georgia.

Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey formed a single “team,” that has received significant support from the US almost promptly from the USA, after the idea of transporting Caspian oil to the West and building the BTC pipeline (by avoiding the domains of Russia and Iran) emerged. This turned out to be entirely consistent with the main political goals of the United States in the area, which aimed at isolation of Iran and preventing Russia to regain its monopoly, in the meantime assisting the USA to invest there and supporting Turkey in its endeavor to expand its influence in the area (Papava, 2005).

- **South Caucasus Gas Pipeline (SCP)**

- The SCP, running in the meantime of the BTC, transports natural gas from Azerbaijan’s Shah Deniz field through Georgia into Turkey and further into Europe via the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP). As part of the Southern Gas Corridor, this network is critical to EU efforts to reduce its dependency on Russian gas. By facilitating this alternative energy route, Georgia plays a strategic role in European energy security.

The European Commission launched the Southern Gas Corridor in 2008. It aimed to transport gas from the Caspian Sea region all the way to Europe via the South Caucasus Pipeline, which passes through Georgia and Azerbaijan to Turkey, where the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline joins the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, running through Greece, Albania, and Italy. The Caspian Sea's Shah Deniz gas field, which now produces 20 billion cubic meters (bcm) annually, serves as the pipeline network's primary supply source. Given the gas crisis in Europe, the importance of the Southern Gas Corridor's for the continent's energy diversification is crucial and this makes energy security even more obvious. At the time of implementation, the United States also provided the project with significant support (Miniconi, 2022).

Considering its closeness to the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, and Central Asia, Georgia has an advantage of being a transit nation. Georgia has been considered as a transit route alternative to Russia, by the US and the European Union. Georgia seems to occupy a rather special position as a transit nation at the intersection of East-West flows via the SCP and North-South gas transports (mostly for gas travelling from Russia to Armenia). Georgia’s political independence from Russia and its pro-Western stance enable current and future initiatives. The new infrastructure improves relations with NATO and EU nations like Italy and Greece. This is a real asset for Georgian foreign policy and a strategic advantage.

In the Caucasus, energy appears to be the most significant area for collaboration and policymaking. It is true that the South Caucasus region faces numerous difficulties that could impede such global energy-related initiatives. Peace and stability in the area are threatened by the fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno Karabagh. Since Armenia buys gas from Russia via Georgia and imports a little amount from Iran as part of a gas-for-electricity exchange agreement, it is not anticipated that Armenia will need any Azerbaijani gas anytime soon. Besides, Georgia is weakened and faces certain security challenges as a result of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war.

Ultimately, through shared interests and closeness to Europe, energy cooperation may fortify the area, supporting Azerbaijan's independence and economic stability (Miniconi, 2022).

- **Potential for New Projects**

While current pipelines enhance Georgia’s role, there are ongoing discussions about additional infrastructure like the Trans-Caspian Pipeline (TCP), which could transport Turkmenistan’s gas through Azerbaijan and Georgia to Europe. Such projects, although speculative, underscore the potential for Georgia’s importance to grow even further if regional security and cooperation align favorably. Turkmenistan, as one of the world’s largest natural gas producers have vast reserves of natural gas, the largest amount of which is currently exported to China and remains largely untapped for European markets could open new export opportunities. Russia and the other four littoral countries executed the agreement regarding legal status of the Caspian Sea, which opened a new way to the realization of the TCP. With regards of the intertwined various interests of Europe, the US and Russia, improvement of the EU-Russian relation is of particular importance and building the good relations with Turkey likewise, which is the main transit country for the Southern Gas corridor, while Georgia, as the transit country would benefit from the transit fee. The USA, as the others played a major role in the Caspian Sea region and Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union and sought to contribute significantly to realization of the oil pipelines (Khokrishvili & Lebanidze, 2022).

- **Regional Stability**

The US has deep interest in the regional stability of Georgia for geopolitical and strategic reasons. Bordering Russia to the north, Azerbaijan to the southeast, Armenia to the south and Turkey to the southwest makes Georgia one of the key players in regional stability. The US has been viewed Georgia as a counterbalance to Russian influence in the South Caucasus. In particular, the USA has been supporting territorial integrity of Georgia since the collapse of the USSR in the face of Russian encroachment.

Besides, the U.S. views Georgia’s stability as crucial for limiting Russian influence in the Caucasus and Eurasia as a whole. Russia always sought to expend its influence through military presence to control the region and make political alliances with breakaway regions (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and other post-soviet states, while the strategy of Georgia to de-occupy and peacefully reunite its territories of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali has been consistently supported by the United States. The USA has variety of geopolitical, security, economic and ideological reasons for having interest in regional stability of Georgia. They are aligned with the US goals to resist Russian influence, promote trade security and support a stable, secure and democratic global order. First of all, the USA seeks to prevent Russia from asserting dominance over Georgia. The US views the Russia’s effort to destroy Georgia’s sovereignty as a clear threat to global stability and norms. The 2008 August war was a clear example, which led to annexation of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions. The United States tried to keep these regions from becoming more unstable as this could lead

Russia to increase its influence over the other post-Soviet nations. Besides, security of Caucasus and the neighboring areas depends on a stable Georgia. Considering its location, regional conflicts will easily spread to nearby nations like Armenia, Azerbaijan and even Turkey. Regional instability of the country may have extensive consequences given the unstable security situation in the area, which includes the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Security and military cooperation

Georgia has shown the interest in joining NATO as a full member and has been a partner since early 1990s. This relationship has played a key role in the foreign policy of Georgia and its security strategy. Georgia viewed NATO as a crucial ally and sought international assistance to establish its sovereignty and security following its independence. Despite early setbacks, such as Russia's opposition to NATO's post-Soviet expansion, Georgia began working with NATO in early 1990s. While full membership in the alliance was not initially on the table, Georgia joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1994, which allows joint military exercises, discussions and trainings.

The process was supported by the third President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili, who took office after the Rose Revolution in 2003. In 2004, Georgia joined the Annual National Program (ANP), number of stages towards aligning Georgia's defense and political systems with NATO standards.

On the path to NATO the Bucharest Summit 2008 was a turning point for Georgia. The opportunity of Georgia and Ukraine to join the alliance was one of the main topics of discussion. Georgia received Membership Action Plan (MAP) (as part of the goal of joining the Alliance. The country actively participated in NATO led missions and annual exercises, delivered within the frame of NATO compatibility. Georgia was an active contributor to the missions, such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq and made significant progress in its defense reforms. According to its per capita, Georgia is considered as one of the significant contributors to international security efforts, when sending the troops to US-led peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Since 2015 Georgia has been receiving annual training through **Noble Partner** and **Agile Spirit** within the NATO compatibility framework, which were delivered every other year. During these exercises, Georgian Armed Forces got closer with NATO approved military personnel (Vanishvili, 2021).

Democratic Development and Human Rights

The United States has long backed Georgia's shift to a market-based, democratic society. Washington has supported Georgia's political and economic reforms since the country gained independence in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As Georgian politicians note, US humanitarian aid was crucial for the country's recovery from the civil war and coping with the post-independence economic challenges (Burkadze, 2015).

The intent of the relationship was well expressed by the United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership,

according to which the cooperation of these two countries aims at increasing judicial independence, political pluralism and transparency and accountability of Georgia's executive branch and legislative processes, while creating a more competitive electoral environment. Overall, the achievement of democratic processes is the main goal, the charter sought. Therefore, enhancing democratic institutions was essential to support this process. In the process of institutional reforms, it was also crucial to consider the legal aspects of bilateral cooperation. For promoting bilateral cooperation, the Strategic Partnership Commission was established, which held its meeting on June 22, 2009 in Washington D.C. Democracy, defense and security, economic, trade and energy issues, and people-to-people and cultural exchanges were the priority areas. In 2009-2015, the working groups, assigned to the priority areas held the meeting by involving American and Georgian policymakers to review commitments, update activity and set future goals (Burkadze, 2015).

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funds more than 35 programs in Georgia since 1992 and strengthening democratic institutions is one of its priorities, which is crucial to Georgia on its path to Euro - Atlantic institutions. It helps to build the capacity of political parties, citizen groups and Georgian election management bodies to support and involve in the political processes focused on citizens. Besides, it gives and enhances the foundation for democratic governance and politics in Georgia.

- **Civic Society Engagement Program** operating under the USAID aims at empowering and mobilizing the communities to fight for their rights, increase the capacity of both existing and new civic actors to act as reliable, legitimate and effective representatives of citizens and strengthen the civil society of Georgia. In order to provide and promote citizen-vetted solutions to main issues and priorities of the population, the program will support civic movements, civic activists and civic society organizations (CSO) nationwide (USAID, n.d.). It was funded by 17 million USD by the USA.
- By funding **Elections and Political Processes Support**, USAID attempts to build the capacity of political parties and election authorities to engage in citizen-centered political processes and pursue democratic politics in Georgia as a result.
- The goal of **Human and Institutional Capacity Development** program is to enhance the institutional and human capacity of important strategic partner institutions in Georgia. Governmental, non-governmental and private sector organizations, that are essential for democratic growth of Georgia constitute main participant institutions. USAID technical assistance will increase the organizational integrity, boost operational effectiveness and ensure viability of these main partner institutions in a long run.

2. Conclusion

Given energy project solidify the status of Georgia as a transit location for moving the essential energy sources between Europe and Central Asia. Apart for the financial gains in the form of investment for Georgia, the country has strengthened its position in diminishing Europe's dependency on Russian

energy. Georgia will probably continue to play a crucial role in facilitating energy diversification and promoting stability in energy flows as long as Europe and its allies continue to prioritize energy security.

Beyond economy, Georgia preserves its importance for regional and international stability. It is vital to the security architecture of the South Caucasus due to its role as a buffer between strong countries like Iran, Russia and Turkey. Acknowledging this, the United States and its Western allies actively backed integrity and sovereignty of Georgia, in the wake of Russian occupation and aggression in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia, in particular. By keeping conflicts from spreading from nearby regions, like Nagorno-Karabakh and maintaining security in a very unstable area, Georgia's stability serves as a pillar for regional peace.

By participating in NATO-led missions and its aspiration to NATO membership, Georgia demonstrated its alignment to the Western security frameworks. The country shows its commitment to Euro-Atlantic security by actively participating in peacekeeping operations and modernizing its defense realm. Georgia's attempt to join Western security organizations have strengthened its defense capabilities and enhanced its status as a regional ally, despite the obstacles like Russian resistance to NATO expansion.

Georgia's advancement towards democracy and market reforms are equally significant. Georgia has benefited greatly from the robust US assistance by means of initiatives, like USAID in establishing institutions, that encourage openness, responsibility and public involvement. In addition to improving Georgia's internal governance, the emphasis on bolstering civil society, political pluralism and electoral system has brought Georgia's ideas closer to those of Western democracies.

In summary, Georgia plays an indispensable role in U.S. foreign policy due to its strategic location, energy transit capabilities, and commitment to democratic values. By supporting Georgia's sovereignty and fostering collaboration in energy and security, the U.S. reinforces stability in the South Caucasus. Continued investment in Georgia's development will further align its interests with those of Western institutions.

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