
The Challenging Path of Georgia towards NATO Membership

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61446/ds.2.2023.7409>

Article History:

Received 18 September 2023
Accepted 20 October 2023
Published 25 December 2023

Abstract

Georgia is a small nation situated in a region characterised by instability, where the occurrence of conflict escalation has become a frequent occurrence within the realm of regional politics. Ensuring stability in the South Caucasus region is a paramount concern for Georgia in terms of its security agenda. This commitment is clearly articulated in Georgia's National Security Concept (NSC), which was officially approved in 2011. Additionally, Georgia's Foreign Policy Strategy for the period 2019-2022 also underscores the importance of maintaining peace in the South Caucasus region. The level of public support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) affiliation in Georgia has been considerable, mirroring the widespread agreement among major political parties over the objective of attaining NATO membership. In 2018, a revision was made to the Georgian Constitution, including a paragraph that specifies the need for all governmental institutions to actively strive towards the objective of Georgia's prospective participation in NATO. The admission to NATO has been widely regarded as the most reliable means to achieve a state of stability and prosperity, enabling the nation to fully capitalise on its capabilities and opportunities. This article is characterised by its descriptive approach and aims to examine the dynamics of the evolution of NATO-Georgia ties throughout the history.

Keywords:

NATO, NATO Strategic Concept, Georgia, war, enlargement.

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Introduction

The integration of Georgia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is among the foremost objectives in Georgia's foreign and security policy agenda.² Georgia places significant emphasis on the role of NATO in enhancing the stability and security of the nation. Georgia has made concerted efforts to eliminate corruption within its political institutions, adopting new legal framework and pursue modernization initiatives in its armed forces. Simultaneously, the governmental changes implemented in Georgia adhere entirely to the proposals put forward by the Alliance, so making a substantial contribution to the advancement of democratic processes inside the nation. Furthermore, Georgia aspires to not just assume the position of a security consumer, but rather to actively contribute to the enhancement of shared Euro-Atlantic security.³

As stated in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949, in the event that a NATO Ally experiences an armed assault, the other member states of the Alliance shall interpret this act of aggression as an armed attack on the collective and shall undertake the measures they feel appropriate to provide assistance to the Ally that has been targeted.⁴ Georgia views NATO as the only collective defence organisation with the necessary political, military, and other resources to protect the security of its members and uphold peace within the Euro-Atlantic region.⁵

In the year 1991, after the attainment of independence, Georgia made a significant decision by opting for a pro-Western trajectory, marking a pivotal moment in its history. Georgia has faced persistent challenges to its sovereignty, territorial integrity, security, and democratic progress as a result of its geopolitical position. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia embarked on a quest to secure assurances for its national security within the Euro-Atlantic region.

The historical trajectory of developing NATO-Georgia relations

The progression of NATO-Georgian relations can be categorised into five distinct phases: (1) the initial establishment of relations following Georgia's independence up until the Rose Revolution; (2) the period spanning from the Rose Revolution to the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia; (3) the timeframe encompassing the Russian-Georgian war and the subsequent annexation of Crimea; (4) the period following the annexation of Crimea up until the Russo-Ukrainian War; and (5) Georgia and its priorities under the new NATO Strategic Concept.

Given the significance and fleeting nature of time, it is crucial to discuss the aforementioned five phases. This relationship is separated into five phases based on its significance and the causes that cause it to change. The categorization of NATO-Georgia relations into these five phases is associated with the transitional phases of NATO-Georgia relations, when one phase concludes and the subsequent, fresh phase begins. Eduard Shevardnadze's first public declaration expressing Georgia's desire to join NATO is widely seen as a pivotal moment in the first phase. The Russia-Georgia conflict marked a significant milestone in NATO-Georgia ties and second phase. The third phase culminates with Russia's annexation of Crimea, accompanied by heightened NATO support and collaboration with PFP nations, such as Ukraine and Georgia. The fourth phase concludes with the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, while the fifth phase begins with the introduction of NATO's new Strategic Concept.

The initial establishment of relations following Georgia's independence up until the Rose Revolution

In 1991, with the attainment of independence, Georgia made a significant decision that marked a crucial moment in its history, opting to pursue a trajectory aligned with Western values and interests. The geographical location of Georgia in close proximity to expansionist Russia has always posed challenges to its sovereignty, territorial integrity, security, and democratic progress. Consequently, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia began a search for assurances on the security of the nation inside the Euro-Atlantic organisation.

NATO-Georgia relations officially began in 1992, when Georgia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), which was later renamed the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) in 1997.

2 სსიპ „საქართველოს საკანონმდებლო მაცნე“. „CONSTITUTION OF GEORGIA - Article 78“ <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/30346?publication=36>. The information was accessed on Nov 27, 2023.

3 Ministry of Defence of Georgia. „თანამშრომლობა ნატოსთან - MOD.GOV.GE,“ <https://mod.gov.ge/ge/page/38/tanamshromloba-natostan>. The information was accessed on November 18, 2023.

4 NATO. „The North Atlantic Treaty.“ NATO, 1949. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm. The information was accessed on Nov 18, 2023.

5 Ministry of Defence of Georgia. „თანამშრომლობა ნატოსთან - MOD.GOV.GE,“ <https://mod.gov.ge/ge/page/38/tanamshromloba-natostan>. The information was accessed on November 18, 2023.

The primary motivation for the shift was to establish a security forum that would be more suitable for fostering an improved and more effective relationship. In the present day, Georgia actively engages in this framework, offering partners and member states a platform to deliberate upon significant matters across many domains.⁶

Georgia has been actively involved in the Partnership for Peace programme (PfP) since 1994. The Partnership for Peace (PfP) serves as the primary framework for engaging in political conversation and facilitating the development of various programmes and initiatives. The first NATO-Georgia Individual Partnership Programme (IPP) was developed in 1995, including a range of collaborative initiatives across many domains. Georgia regularly engages in regular joint military exercises and command staff trainings, in addition to participating in international seminars and conferences on contemporary security problems organised by the Alliance and partner nations under the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme.⁷

In 1996, the first Georgian Unit took part in the PfP Field Training. Since then, Georgia has actively engaged in several military trainings and exercises. Both military and civilian personnel from various branches of the security sector have been receiving education at various Partnership for Peace (PfP) Training centres. Last decades Georgia served as the host country for many NATO/PfP exercises.

In the context of the historical trajectory of NATO-Georgia relations, a significant event to highlight is the NATO summit that took place in Prague in 2002. During this summit, Eduard Shevardnadze, the second president of Georgia, expressed Georgia's aspiration to become a member of NATO for the first time.⁸ This declaration clearly indicated the country's desire to identify itself with Western nations. This period has been seen as the start of security cooperation between Georgia and the United States via the Georgia Train and Equip Programme. The Georgia Train and Equip Programme began in 2002 and included the collaboration between the United States and Georgian Armed Forces.⁹ The program's objective was to provide Georgian battalions with specialised training and resources in small unit tactics, specifically to combat terrorism.

Eduard Shevardnadze's official declaration expressing Georgia's desire to join NATO aimed to bolster the country's ability capacity to address domestic security issues and effectively manage the challenging Pankisi Gorge region, which had proven difficult to control and had become a haven for terrorists and criminal organisations. Georgia got assistance from the United States as a component of its global counter-terrorism strategies, specifically to combat the menace of domestic terrorism in Pankisi Gorge.

The period spanning from the Rose Revolution to the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia

After the Rose Revolution, the newly established Georgian government significantly enhanced its diplomatic ties with NATO and actively pursued membership in the Alliance as a prominent objective of its foreign policy agenda. In 2004, Georgia became the first country to establish an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO and to participate in the aforementioned programme. This programme outlines the necessary steps for implementing reforms across various domains, emphasizing the need for Georgia's government to work together in a coordinated manner.¹⁰ The NATO International Service is responsible for the yearly evaluation of IPAP performance, highlighting the importance of collaboration with the alliance for the efficacy of ongoing reforms within Georgia.

Between the years 2004 and 2008, a cumulative sum of five assessments was obtained, consisting of four official evaluations and one unofficial evaluation. All of the observed outcomes had a favourable nature.¹¹ On September 21, 2006, the Alliance initiated collaboration with Georgia under the auspices of the Intensified Dialogue on Membership Issues (ID - Intensified Dialogue on Membership Issues) with the aim of aligning Georgia with NATO's standards.¹²

6 Ministry of Defence of Georgia. “თანამშრომლობა ნატოსთან - MOD.GOV.GE,” <https://mod.gov.ge/ge/page/38/tanamshromloba-natostan>. The information was accessed on November 18, 2023.

7 Ministry of Defence of Georgia. “თანამშრომლობა ნატოსთან - MOD.GOV.GE,” <https://mod.gov.ge/ge/page/38/tanamshromloba-natostan>. The information was accessed on November 18, 2023.

8 “NATO Speech by President of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze at the EAPC Summit -Atlantic Partnership Council - Prague Summit - 22 November 2002,” <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s021122h.htm>. The information was accessed on November 19, 2023.

9 Ministry of Defence of Georgia. “თანამშრომლობა ნატოსთან.” MOD.GOV.GE. <https://mod.gov.ge/ge/page/38/tanamshromloba-natostan>. The information was accessed on Nov 18, 2023.

10 NATO. “Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAPs).” https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49290.htm. The information was accessed on Nov 19, 2023.

11 Ministry of Defence of Georgia. “თანამშრომლობა ნატოსთან.” MOD.GOV.GE. <https://mod.gov.ge/ge/page/38/tanamshromloba-natostan>. The information was accessed on Nov 18, 2023.

12 NATO. “NATO Update: NATO Offers Intensified Dialogue to Georgia.” <https://www.nato.int/docu/update/2006/09-september/e0921c.htm>. The information was accessed on Nov 19, 2023.

In 2006, Georgia initiated a dialogue with NATO¹³, aligning with Western involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. Georgia has made significant contributions to NATO's international security operations, receiving practical assistance in training and equipping its forces. Georgia played a significant role in NATO's efforts in Afghanistan, contributing significantly to the operations.

Between 2004 until the conclusion of the mission, a total of over 30,000 Georgian military soldiers actively engaged in international operations in Afghanistan.¹⁴ These deployments were organised into more than 100 rotations, each operating at various levels such as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the Resolute Support Mission (RSM).

Based on a comprehensive analysis of many NATO reports and assessments, it can be deduced that the Georgian military soldiers shown a commendable level of competence, professionalism, and seamless execution in carrying out their designated missions across various hierarchical levels throughout the rotations.

The Bucharest NATO Summit in 2008 was a pivotal occasion in the advancement of this cooperation. Subsequently, at the Bucharest summit held from April 2nd to 4th, 2008, Germany, France, and Italy made the collective decision to withhold NATO Membership Action Plan for Georgia and Ukraine, but they promised an eventual membership to the Alliance.¹⁵ The political decision made at the Bucharest Summit regarding Georgia may be seen as a pivotal intersection.

The decisions taken in Bucharest were complex and need examination from several viewpoints. The United States government actively advocated for a Membership Action Plan for both, Georgia and Ukraine in a comprehensive manner. Nevertheless, this assertion did not hold true for everyone, especially those who were preoccupied with the worsening of diplomatic ties with Russia. The decision had adverse consequences, shown in the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict. According to several scholars and experts,¹⁶ this served as the foundation and motivation for Russia to annex additional Georgian lands.

The timeframe encompassing the Russian-Georgian war and the subsequent annexation of Crimea

The aforementioned decision at the Bucharest summit, served as a catalyst for Russia's initiation of armed assault against Georgia in 2008. During that period, Russia engaged in hybrid operations, including acts of sabotage, explosives, and the targeted killing of Georgian officers. On August 7, 2008, the regular Russian military forces breached the internationally acknowledged border between Russia and Georgia. The military operation transgressed the basic tenets of international law and signified a new phase in the realm of international politics and armed conflict.

The Russian-Georgian War, was a significant turning point in the relationship between the United States and Russia, as well as in modern European security reality. Despite being little comprehended at the time, this conflict marked a significant shift in global politics too. This war foreshadowed the resurgence of major power politics and marked the conclusion of the post-Cold War era. In 2008, Russia exhibited a strong determination and capability to actively oppose the U.S. perspective on European security, reject NATO enlargement in its neighbourhood, and confront a standard international system where smaller nations can independently determine their own affairs without interference from major powers.¹⁷ Russia had no intention of allowing Georgia to regain control of the areas. However, after NATO's announcement at the Bucharest Summit, Russia decided to demonstrate its might to prevent any further expansion of NATO in his neighbourhood and teach the Western countries a lesson.

In September 2008, following Russia's aggression against Georgia, the Allies established the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) to assist in recovery and reconstruction. The NGC implements resolutions adopted at the Bucharest Summit and oversees the aid process.¹⁸ The North Atlantic Council visited Georgia in September 2008, signing a framework document for the NGC. In December, NATO foreign ministers endorsed the advancement of the Annual National Programme (ANP) for Georgia, specifically

13 NATO. "NATO Update - 2006: Georgia Begins Intensified Dialogue with NATO," <https://www.nato.int/docu/update/2006/12-december/e1214b.htm>. The information was accessed on November 19, 2023.

14 NATO Infocenter. "მობილ ავღანეთში". Infocenter.gov.ge, <https://infocenter.gov.ge/nato/international-missions/misia-avghanethshi/>. The information was accessed on November 19, 2023.

15 NATO. "Bucharest Summit Declaration Issued by NATO Heads of State and Government (2008)." https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm. The information was accessed on November 19, 2023.

16 Evans, Ryan. "The August War, Ten Years On: A Retrospective on the Russo-Georgian War - War on the Rocks." War on the Rocks, August 17, 2018. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/08/the-august-war-ten-years-on-a-retrospective-on-the-russo-georgian-war/>. The information was accessed on November 20, 2023.

17 Evans, Ryan. "The August War, Ten Years On: A Retrospective on the Russo-Georgian War - War on the Rocks." War on the Rocks, August 17, 2018. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/08/the-august-war-ten-years-on-a-retrospective-on-the-russo-georgian-war/>. The information was accessed on November 20, 2023.

18 NATO. "NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC)." https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52131.htm. The information was accessed on Nov 20, 2023.

within the NATO Georgian Commission.¹⁹ The yearly national programme is limited to nations participating in the Membership Action Plan, making Georgia an exceptional example. The program aligns the country with NATO criteria and the content of ANP is classified as confidential. NATO's annual reviews of every ANP have shown positive results, demonstrating the importance of the NGC in promoting cooperation and aid.

It is worth mentioning that subsequent to the first visit in September 2008, the North Atlantic Council conducted four further trips to Georgia, occurring in the years 2011, 2013, 2016, and 2019.²⁰ These visits serve as a significant affirmation of the unshakable political support provided by the Alliance to Georgia.

Subsequently, on December 7, 2011, a ministerial meeting of the member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) took place at the organization's headquarters. During this meeting, Georgia was designated as an aspiring country, alongside Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and North Macedonia.²¹ An important advancement in the context of Georgia's integration into NATO was the active involvement of the Georgian delegation in all sessions held at the Chicago Summit in 2012, with the exception of the meeting exclusive to NATO member states.²² Following the conclusion of the Chicago summit, a notable development occurred in the NATO-Georgia relationship, wherein Georgia was categorised among the aspirant nations. Specifically, this grouping pertains to the Balkan countries that possess discernible possibilities for attaining membership inside NATO.

The period following the annexation of Crimea up until the Russo-Ukrainian War

During the Wales summit in 2014, the participating Allies made the decision to establish an important framework in collaboration with Georgia.²³ The primary objective of this framework is to enhance alignment with NATO, bolster defence capabilities, and facilitate Georgia's preparedness for potential membership. The execution of the fundamental package included the participation of all NATO members, as well as two partner nations, namely Sweden and Finland. The Substantial NATO-Georgia Package (SNGP) serves as the primary mechanism for operational collaboration between the nation of Georgia and the NATO. The package is designed to enhance Georgia's defence capabilities in accordance with NATO standards and facilitate Georgia's progress in its preparations for prospective NATO membership. It is noteworthy that in December 2020, a comprehensive assessment was undertaken by NATO and the reviewed SNGP program was adopted by NATO Foreign Ministers.²⁴ This package has significant components aimed at enhancing Georgia's defence capabilities. SNGP encompasses comprehensive assistance provided at the strategic, tactical, and operational levels across 16 key domains, fostering collaboration between Georgia and NATO.

The 2018 Brussels Summit of NATO marked a significant milestone as it convened the heads of state from member nations at the highest echelon to engage in focused deliberations pertaining to matters concerning Georgia. The significant contribution of the NATO-Georgia Commission and the Annual National Programme (ANP) in fostering political discussion and collaboration between NATO and Georgia has been widely acknowledged throughout the course of the last ten years. NATO has provided a good evaluation of the continuing security reforms and legislative improvements in Georgia. It is noteworthy to emphasise that, as per official declarations, the notable advancements in reforms undertaken by Georgia are duly acknowledged and must be sustained.²⁵ These reforms have been crucial in propelling Georgia, an aspiring nation, towards its membership preparations and enhancing its defence and interoperability capabilities with the Alliance. The adoption of the NATO-Georgia commission declaration is a notable occurrence, as it marks the first instance in the history of NATO-Georgia relations when a declaration has been issued at the level of heads of state. Previously, joint declarations had been made only at the level of foreign ministers.

During the Fifth NAC International Conference in Tbilisi in 2019, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the for-

19 NATO. "NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC)." https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52131.htm. The information was accessed on Nov 20, 2023.

20 NATO. "Visit to Georgia by the North Atlantic Council." https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_169016.htm. The information was accessed on Nov 20, 2023.

21 NATO. "Relations with Georgia." https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_38988.htm. The information was accessed on Nov 20, 2023.

22 NATO. "Chicago Summit Declaration Issued by NATO Heads of State and Government (2012)." https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_87593.htm. The information was accessed on Nov 21, 2023.

23 NATO. "Wales Summit Declaration Issued by NATO Heads of State and Government (2014)." https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm. The information was accessed on Nov 23, 2023.

24 NATO. "Relations with Georgia." https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_38988.htm. The information was accessed on Nov 24, 2023.

25 NATO. "Brussels Summit Declaration Issued by NATO Heads of State and Government (2018)." https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm. The information was accessed on Nov 24, 2023.

mer Secretary General of NATO, expressed the view that it is necessary for Georgia and NATO to engage in discussions regarding the development of mechanisms that would specifically safeguard the territories of Georgia under the control of its government. The objective of such mechanisms would be to ensure that Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which pertains to collective defence, exclusively applies to these territories in the event of Georgia's membership in NATO.²⁶

Georgian priorities under the new NATO Strategic Concept

In light of the existing strategic circumstances, NATO is compelled to establish its priorities and undertake the process of renewing its Strategic Concept. Based on the NATO 2030 plan and previous summits, NATO's objectives may be categorised as follows: Enhancing the security and unity of the Allied nations, addressing the challenges posed by Russia and China, managing emerging dangers, and promoting the Open Door Policy and collaboration with partner countries.²⁷

The 2022 Strategic Concept of NATO reasserted its commitment to further enhance its collaboration with Georgia and reiterated the decision made at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, affirming the future membership of Georgia in the Alliance. The concept underscored the interconnection between the security of nations seeking membership in the Alliance and NATO. Georgia exhibits a firm endorsement of their independence, sovereignty, and preservation of geographical boundaries.²⁸

According to the Foreign Policy Strategy of Georgia for the period 2019-2022, Georgia's primary strategic objective is to enhance the nation's sovereignty and peacefully reclaim its territorial integrity within the internationally recognised boundaries. The primary objective of Georgia's foreign policy is to achieve national unity via the peaceful resolution of the Russia-Georgia conflict, specifically addressing the areas of Georgia that are currently under occupation.

The Foreign Policy Strategy of Georgia places significant emphasis on the goal of integrating into NATO. This objective is identified as one of the foremost objectives within the realm of foreign policy. To effectively pursue this integration, the strategy outlines a series of sub-priorities that are seen crucial for advancing Georgia's alignment with NATO:

- The promotion and intensification of political discourse within the framework of the NATO-Georgia Commission;
- The use of Georgia's Annual National Programme (ANP) as a significant mechanism for integration serves to facilitate the progression of Georgia's accession to NATO;
- The use of Substantial NATO-Georgia Package as a means to enhance self-defence capabilities and accomplish interoperability with NATO;
- Enhance diplomatic ties with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in order to make a meaningful contribution to the maintenance of security in the Black Sea region;
- The involvement of Georgia in the promotion and maintenance of international security and stability;
- Georgia's actively engagement in NATO exercises and training, which include the staging of joint NATO-Georgia exercises inside Georgia's borders. These activities aim to enhance defence capabilities and foster compatibility with the alliance;
- Strengthen defence capabilities of Georgia, enhance interoperability with NATO member nations, and foster consensus on admission via the augmentation of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with NATO member and partner states.²⁹

The document of measures "tailored support to Georgia" was agreed at the summit of NATO member states held in Madrid on June 28-30, 2022. This document outlines specific strategies aimed at enhancing Georgia's defence capabilities and facilitating NATO's increased engagement in this endeavour. These steps serve to enhance both the political and practical support for Georgia. The political steps seek to facilitate the initiation of a discussion between Georgia and NATO. The practical actions used are designed to expedite the process of transitioning Georgia's equipment from Soviet-era to NATO-compliant standards, as well as enhance Georgia's situational awareness.³⁰

26 GHN - ახალი ამბების სააგენტო. "საქართველო და უკრაინა ნატოში უნდა მოვიწვიოთ რუსეთის მიერ ოკუპირებული და ანექსირებული ნაწილების გარეშე - რასმუსენი," <https://ghn.ge/news/277623-sakartvelo-da-ukraina-natoshi-undamovitsvot-rusetis-mier-okupirebuli-da-aneksirebuli-natsilebis-gareshe-rasmuseni>. The information was accessed on Nov 24, 2023.

27 NATO. "NATO 2022 - Strategic Concept," <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>. The information was accessed on November 25, 2023.

28 NATO. "NATO 2022 - Strategic Concept," <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>. The information was accessed on November 25, 2023.

29 MFA - Ministry of International Affairs. "საგარეო პოლიტიკის სტრატეგია," <https://mfa.gov.ge/Foreign-Policy-Strategy>. The information was accessed on Nov 25, 2023.

30 NATO. "Relations with Georgia." https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_38988.htm. The information was accessed on Nov 24, 2023.

Considering the existing diplomatic ties between the Georgia and NATO, Georgia has not been officially issued a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP). NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia, Javier Colomina, contend that the issue of corruption in Georgia and Ukraine remains unresolved, hence necessitating its resolution prior to the Alliance considering their prospective participation.³¹ As per the statement made by the Special Representative of the Secretary General, it is imperative for Georgia to re-establish its trajectory of changes in order to reclaim its previous status as a leading proponent of reform, a distinction it had until around three years ago.³²

However, with regards to the aforementioned matter, it is important to acknowledge that at the official level, based on the comments issued by NATO, it is evident that Georgia is actively pursuing reforms and striving to enhance its alignment and compatibility with the NATO alliance. An illustrative instance of this phenomenon is the NATO Military Committee, which convened in Tbilisi in November 2023. NATO Military Committee conducted a series of high-level engagements visit in Georgia. The NATO Military Representatives convened a specialised meeting of the Military Committee with their Georgian military counterparts. The primary agenda of the conference included deliberations on the prevailing security conditions internal and across Georgia, the progress made in implementing Georgia's defence reforms, and the status of military cooperation between NATO and Georgia.³³ NATO has provided a good evaluation of the continuing security reforms and legislative improvements in Georgia. It is noteworthy to emphasise that, as per official declarations, the recent visit of NATO's foremost military entity serves as a reiteration of the Alliance's unwavering dedication to Georgia's independence, sovereignty, territorial unity, and its desire to become part of the Euro-Atlantic community.

The government of Georgia has been adopting significant anticorruption measures in order to enhance its governance. In its endeavour to secure NATO membership, Georgia is parallel pursuing accession to the European Union. Georgia has started the implementation of a framework given by the European Union (EU). After Georgia submitted its application for membership in the European Union in March 2022, the European Commission released an opinion that delineated 12 key areas for the nation to focus on throughout its journey towards admission.³⁴ The aforementioned recommendations include several domains, such limited to democracy, the rule of law, judicial reform, and basic rights.

In November 2023, European Commission presented a proposal to the European Council, advising them to confer upon Georgia the status of a candidate for membership in the European Union. According to the Commission's remarks, Georgia has undertaken measures to enhance its interaction with the European Union and has expedited the implementation of reforms in order to achieve the twelve objectives outlined in its application for membership.³⁵ The aforementioned accomplishment and the affirmation by the European Commission validate the Georgian government's inclination towards the West, its aim for European integration, and its unwavering dedication to democratic principles and process in Georgia.³⁶ However, the implementation of these changes will serve as a catalyst in steering Georgia towards genuine independence and democracy.

Georgia in NATO-led Peacekeeping International Missions

Georgia plays a prominent role in bolstering Euro-Atlantic security via its active participation in missions led by NATO. From 1999 until 2008, the armed troops of Georgia were stationed in the region of Kosovo.³⁷ The participation of Georgia to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan has considerable significance. Among the non-NATO nations, Georgia had the distinction of being the second greatest provider of troops to Afghanistan.

From 2003 until 2008, the Defence Forces of Georgia participated in the "Multi-National Force - Iraq" with other international military forces deployed in Iraq. The coalition, under the leadership of the United States, was assigned the responsibility of providing assistance and assuring the establishment of a

31 Zaza Suladze, "ხავეერ კოლომინა: „ბოლო ერთ წელში, საქართველოში რეფორმების პროცესები გაჩერდა.“ Voice of America, May 26, 2023. <https://www.amerikiskhma.com/a/7109510.html>. The information was accessed on Nov 24, 2023.

32 Ge.Civil, "NATO Concerned Over Georgia; Reforms." Civil Georgia, May 8, 2022. <https://civil.ge/archives/489415>. The information was accessed on Nov 24, 2023.

33 NATO "NATO Military Committee Visits Georgia." https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_219979.htm?selectedLocale=en. The information was accessed on Nov 27, 2023.

34 EEAS. "The Twelve Priorities | EEAS". https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/twelve-priorities_en?s=221. The information was accessed on Nov 28, 2023.

35 DG NEAR. "Georgia," https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/georgia_en. The information was accessed on Nov 28, 2023.

36 DG NEAR. "Opinion on Georgia's Application for Membership of the European Union," https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/opinion-georgias-application-membership-european-union_en. The information was accessed on Nov 28, 2023.

37 Infocenter. "მისია კოსოვოში". Infocenter.gov.ge. <https://infocenter.gov.ge/nato/international-missions/misia-kosovoshi/>. The information was accessed on Nov 27, 2023.

proficient defence force, as well as facilitating the enhancement of defence capabilities for the Iraqi government.³⁸

A total of 8,495 military soldiers from Georgia actively engaged in an international operation in Iraq, spanning over 19 rotations conducted at various hierarchical levels, resulting in Georgia attaining the position of the third highest contributor in terms of the quantity of military soldiers involved in the operation.³⁹ In the context of the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, it is noteworthy that Georgian military forces were redeployed to their home country, thereby terminating the engagement of the Georgian Defence Forces in Iraq.

Between 2004 until the conclusion of the mission, a total of over 30,000 Georgian military soldiers actively engaged in international operations in Afghanistan. These deployments were organised into more than 100 rotations, each operating at various levels such as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the Resolute Support Mission (RSM).⁴⁰ The primary responsibilities undertaken by the Georgian forces included a wide range of operational activities, including comprehensive operations, safeguarding critical infrastructure, conducting patrols and searches, managing checkpoints, executing engineering security operations, providing assistance to military hospitals, and facilitating escort missions.⁴¹

The ongoing relevance of Georgia as a dependable partner is a consistent international concern, fostering sustained support from NATO. Georgia's engagement in peacekeeping operations is a significant determinant for its membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Based on a comprehensive analysis of many NATO reports and assessments, it can be deduced that the Georgian military soldiers shown a commendable level of competence, professionalism, and seamless execution in carrying out their designated missions across various hierarchical levels throughout the rotations.

Conclusion

Georgia has endeavoured to eradicate corruption within its governmental structures and implement modernization measures in its forces. Georgian armed forces have actively engaged in a diverse range of NATO exercises, and a contingent of their military personnel was sent to Afghanistan in support of NATO's mission. Georgia is actively involved in ongoing international peacekeeping operations and trainings, contributing to Euro-Atlantic security and countering international terrorism. This collaboration is crucial as the threat of terrorism transcends national boundaries, necessitating global efforts. Georgia's military personnel receive unique military experience, enhancing its capabilities. Past 15-20 years, over 18,000 troops have received comprehensive training, resulting in a highly skilled force that adheres to NATO criteria.⁴² This resource is crucial for Georgia's development trajectory. Georgia's troops demonstrate commendable performance, upholding its reputation as a reliable partner to NATO member countries and partner nations.

Generally, it is evident that Georgia has not yet met the requisite criteria set by NATO to receive a formal invitation for NATO membership or MAP. To adhere to NATO standards, it is crucial for Georgia to continue his efforts in democratisation and concurrently undertake further defence reforms. However, when examining the depth of the relationship between Georgia and NATO, it becomes evident that Georgia has not shown any inclination to make concessions or withdraw from their respective stances. The notion of "NATO fatigue," sometimes referred to as a shared weariness towards NATO, is a tactic used by certain individuals to manipulate public opinion. In contrast, the citizens of Georgia and Government demonstrate a notable commitment to their pursuits. The effective resolution of these problems will serve as evidence of Georgia's shared commitment to actively engage in the goals of NATO, therefore promoting a safer and more democratic global environment.

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