REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA

Background Brief: CENEX 2013

RECENT HISTORY

Georgia gained its independence at the end of 1991 with the dissolution of the former Soviet Union. Since then, it has had a turbulent relationship with its neighbour, Russia. Most recently, they went to war over Georgia’s breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August 2008. Despite efforts to stabilise this relationship, tensions have persisted between the two countries, forcing a number of states with strategic interests in the region to choose sides. For instance, the U.S. has been one of the main international guarantors of Georgia’s sovereignty and Georgia has been the recipient of high levels of German Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). The Georgian government and all Georgian parties support a pro-western foreign policy. While diplomatic and trade ties between Georgia and Russia have recently improved, this improvement has been the product of economic necessity as opposed to a pro-Russian orientation. Georgia continues to successfully negotiate its Association Agreement with the EU and its recent defence and security sector reforms are in line with NATO recommendations.

The October 2012 Parliamentary elections marked Georgia’s first peaceful transition of power since independence. Eight years after the ‘Rose Revolution,’ the opposition Georgian Dream (GD) coalition, led by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, defeated President Mikheil Saakashvili’s ruling United National Movement (UNM). The GD coalition gained a majority in parliament and formed a new government. Saakashvili believed that his party’s record of economic modernisation would bring victory in the 2012 elections, however, his drift to a more authoritarian style of governance eventually lead to his party’s demise. The October 2013 Presidential elections were won by leader of the Our Georgia-Free Democrats (OGFD) party and former Defense Minister, Irakli Alasania. OGFD is one of the six parties constituting the GD coalition. Both Ivanishvili and Alasania are committed to maintaining Georgia’s Western ties and are keen to see Georgia accede into NATO and the European Union.

PERTINENT ISSUES

Military

1. Reform & Restructuring

A primary objective of Georgian foreign and security policy is Georgia’s progressive integration into European and Euro-Atlantic political, economic, and security structures. This integration process has placed a number of demands upon the Georgian armed forces (GAF). NATO requires that national defence expenditures must not place an excessive burden upon the Georgian economy. As a result, Georgian military planners have embarked upon a dramatic transition to a smaller active-
duty force built around a core commissioned and non-commissioned officers and contract soldiers, supplemented by reservists. Georgia now has a much smaller mobile infantry with more developed surveillance, communication, and transport assets.

The authorised strength of the Georgian Armed Forces (GAF) has been reduced – Land Forces with 12,876, Air Force with 600, and Navy with 1,380. Administrative Staffs and Central Structures with 4,899. This is a marked reduction from the 2012 numbers, when the strength of the GAF was 37,000 active personnel. The tank battalion has been eliminated all together; the Georgian Navy and Coast Guard assets have merged to create a singular Maritime Defence Force; and the National Guard is marked for closure to be replaced by a trained reserve force of 140,000.

2. Peacekeeping Missions
The Georgian Forces have been involved in a number of peacekeeping missions. In 2007, Georgian forces were the third largest serving military contingent in Iraq after the United States and the United Kingdom. In 2013, Georgia remained the largest non-NATO member present in Afghanistan, with 1,568 soldiers on the ground. It is hoped that Georgia’s involvement in multilateral military commitments will deepen its ties to NATO and strengthen its diplomatic bonds with the United States.

3. Direct Military Confrontations
Beginning on August 7, 2008, Russia and Georgia went to war over Georgia’s breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The war concluded with Russia tightening their de facto control over the areas before a ceasefire was concluded on August 15, 2008. The Russia-Georgia conflict has had a significant impact on the security dynamics of the region. Against the wishes of Georgia, Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008. However, the United States and nearly all other nations have refused to follow suit.

In April 2009, Russia bolstered its position in South Ossetia by signing a five-year agreement to take formal control of its frontiers with Georgia, as well as those of Abkhazia. Furthermore, Russia has established military bases in the two regions. The Russian 4th Military Base has two main compounds in South Ossetia – one on the North Western outskirts of Tshinvali and another in Java. There are also a large number of troops stations in the Leningor District. In December 2013, the European Union Monitoring Mission observed a build-up of Russian Federation armed personnel along the South Ossetian Administrative Boundary Line. The Mission has raised concerns about this activity with the relevant Russian command structures. Russia has stated that this is simply a routine military deployment.

4. Terrorism
Alongside direct military confrontations with Russia, Georgia has also encountered a series of terrorist attacks and foiled a number of plots. In late 2012, over two-dozen alleged terrorists
affiliated with the group Caucasus Emirate entered Georgian territory from Russia’s Dagestan or Chechnya republics and took a number of hostages. Georgian police forces killed or apprehended the majority of these terrorists. In 2013, Georgia announced that it had captured Russian terrorist infiltrators, associated with Russian security agencies that were planning attacks in Georgia. Russia termed these allegations “artificially fabricated arrays of data.” The Washington Times alleged that the U.S. intelligence community had backed up an earlier Georgian claim that Russian intelligence operatives had orchestrated a bombing in September 2010 near the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi.

In a separate incident, Russia’s Antiterrorism Committee issued a statement in May 2012 claiming that the Federal Security Service (FSB) in cooperation with its Abhkaz counterpart, had discovered antitank rocket launchers shoulder-fired ground-to-air missiles, and rocket-propelled grenade launchers in Abkhazia to be used in Russia. It was alleged that the Caucasus Emirate leader Doku Umarov intended to use the weapons to attack targets in Russia. Furthermore, the Russians stated that the weapons had been transported to Abkhazia through Georgia with the cooperation of the Georgian security services and illegal armed formations based in Turkey. The Georgian authorities rejected these allegations and declared that under no circumstances would it permit instability from Russia to spill over into Georgian territory.

**Economic**

There are still residual concerns regarding the South Caucasus’s stability as a transit area for oil and gas. Georgia is a vital corridor for oil and gas from Central Asia and the Caspian to Western markets. Following the 2008 conflict, gas transit from Russia to South Ossetia via other Georgian territory was disrupted, with each side blaming the other, until service was restored in late January 2009. In late August 2009, Russia completed construction of a 110-mile gas pipeline from North Ossetia to South Ossetia to avoid transiting Georgia.

**DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS**

**Georgia-U.S.**

The United States has provided substantial political, military, financial and humanitarian assistance to Georgia. There is also a limited degree of intelligence sharing between the two countries. The U.S. has become one of the main international guarantors of Georgia’s sovereignty. Following Russian aggression in 2008, $1 billion dollars of assistance was pledged to Georgia for their economic recovery. The United States has expressed strong support for Georgia, which is reflected in the U.S-Georgia Charter on Strategic partnership signed in January 2009, which states that “our two countries share a vital interest in a strong, independent, sovereign, unified, and democratic Georgia.” In October 2013, the U.S. government initiated the first round of weapon sales to Georgia. At a visit to Georgia in January 2014, the U.S. Secretary of State reaffirmed U.S. support for Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. While the Georgia Deployment Program - International Security Assistance Force (GDP-ISAF) ended in 2012,
marines and sailors from US Marine Corps Forces Reserve have continued to train Georgian forces through a number of different ad hoc initiatives. There are, however, pockets of disapproval in the U.S. that have warned that U.S. acceptance of Georgian troops for coalition operations must not lead to U.S. defence commitments to Georgia.

**Georgia-Russia**

In response to Russia’s recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, the Georgian government announced that it would cease all diplomatic relations with Russia. It also left the Commonwealth of Independent States. Recently, Georgian Prime Minister Ivanishvili has attempted to stabilise and rebuild relations with Russia. In 2013, Russian and Georgian special envoys held a series of special meetings in Prague that were aimed at normalizing bilateral ties in areas of trade, transport and culture. However, they avoided the issue of Georgia’s breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and thus tensions continue to persist between the two countries.

**Georgia-Germany**

Georgia-Germany relations have been strong since 1991. Germany was the first country to send an Ambassador to Georgia and to open an embassy in the country after it gained independence. Georgian industries are home to German Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Georgia is keen to highlight the growing economic bonds between Germany and Georgia. During the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, the U.S. called for Georgia to join the Membership Action Plan. However, NATO decided against this due to opposition from several countries, including Germany and France – who were concerned that Georgia’s assent into NATO might anger Russia. In a private communiqué, Germany and a number of other countries reassured Georgia that it would gain entry into NATO once it fulfilled its membership requirements. Most recently, Germany has expressed interest in playing the role of mediator between Russia and Georgia. In a series of meetings between Georgian and German officials in November 2013, the two sides discussed a number of issues, including the future of Georgia-Germany relations and Georgia’s relations with the EU and NATO. A special emphasis was placed on improving Georgia’s relations with Russia. A high level delegation from Germany also travelled to Moscow in November 2013 to hold consultations with the Russian government.

**Georgia-Turkey**

Georgia and Turkey have a relatively stable and amicable relationship. With approximately 1 million Georgian residing in Turkey, Georgia has an abiding interest in maintaining close ties with its citizens abroad. According to the Turkish consulate, the number of Turkish citizens entering into Georgia also tripled during the first sixth months of 2012 (658,000) compared with the same period in 2011 (252,000). Turkey is Georgia’s fifth largest investor. Turkish investment stood at $60 million for the first two quarters of 2013 - $10 million more than the equivalent period in 2012.
The existing and planned east-west oil and gas pipelines also demonstrate cooperation between Georgia and Turkey. Turkey has openly declared its support for Georgia’s territorial integrity and it has not recognised the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Despite Turkey’s commitment to Georgia’s territorial integrity, Turkish officials have also been meeting with the de facto prime minister and foreign minister of the unrecognized republic of Abkhazia. There are approximately 500,000 Abkhazian people in Turkey. Turkey expressed its willingness to expand political ties with Abkhazia, however, Abkhazian officials suspect Turkey of spying on behalf of Georgia.

**Georgia-Syria**

During former President Bashar al-Assad’s regime, Georgia’s relationship with Syria was extremely tense. Syria accused Georgia, the United States and the West of ignoring the rights of the people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It also accused Georgia of starting the war against Russia in 2008 and stated that Russia’s response to Georgian aggression was correct and necessary. In 2012, Georgia joined the European Union in placing sanctions on Syria. While Georgia has not openly declared its stance on the new Islamist government of Syria, it has expressed concern regarding the authoritarian nature of the regime and the government’s disregard for human rights.

**IGO/NGO**

Under the new “Rules for the Conduct of Activities in the Occupied Territories of Georgia”, NGO and other projects must be agreed by the Georgian authorities before they are launched. In other words, all IGOs or NGOs operating within Abkhazia and South Ossetia must gain permission from the Georgian government prior to starting their project. According to Georgian regulations, the only organisation that does not need to register with the State Ministry for Reintegration is the International Committee of the Red Cross, which is allowed to operate freely. A further requirement is that all IGO/NGOs use the language deemed acceptable by Georgia. South Ossetia, for example, is officially referred to as “the occupied Tskhinvali region” in Georgia. Abkhazia must be referred to as the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. If the IGO or NGO fails to gain permission from the Georgian government, they will be expelled from the region.

**Public statements regarding region, significant events, etc**

*Prime Minister Ivanishvili speaking on Georgia’s foreign policy orientation in 2013:* “In the near future it’s hardly [possible], but in general countries develop, people develop, society develops and they change priorities, but I do not think that in the near future we will be changing our priorities.”....“But in parallel to it a question arises: is it possible to combine restoration of friendly relations with Russia and at the same time to have good relations with NATO and to aspire towards NATO and to have good relations with the United States and NATO-member states? I think that here Armenia is a good example; Armenia gives a good example for Georgia and it can be a source of envy in positive sense,”
President Alasania on Russia: “It is pretty clear for Russia and for the west that we do not have a goal to attack Russia's borders. It is very clear and in addition, there are no talks about rearming, which would create a threat to Russia from this region.”