

41 vs. 47

Until 20 January 2025, Donald Trump is considered an “incoming president.” It might be more accurate to call him a “returning president.” Interestingly, the word “incoming” is used not only in politics. In military jargon, it refers to a warning that enemy artillery fire or RPGs are approaching, requiring extraordinary measures to withstand the impact. The results of such an impact will undoubtedly alter the surroundings, may cause casualties, and will influence the future actions of the “impacted.”

The anticipatory mood inside and outside the US increasingly resembles the military meaning of the word. Trump’s declared and previously demonstrated determination to revise and reshape domestic and international affairs fundamentally is expected to create not just waves of change but a sweeping tsunami.

A brief glance at the president-elect’s known preferences for senior governmental positions indicates the seriousness of these changes. The most

common adjectives for the new nominees are “outsiders,” “disrupters,” and “loyalists.” This reflects the serious intent and preparation for engaging in fundamental change.

The 47th version of President Trump is far more powerful than the 45th.

Is Trump capable of doing it? To paraphrase the slogan of one of his predecessors—yes, he can! The 47th version of President Trump is far more powerful than the 45th. Trump and the Republican Party, led by him, control the White House, the Senate, and (highly likely) the House of Representatives while dominating the Supreme Court. Most importantly, most Americans embrace his ideas and plans. Unlike during his first term, many elected and appointed Republican representatives owe their current positions to Donald Trump. All this makes him a superman with superpowers, at least for the next two years until the mid-term congressional elections. Whatever domestic changes Trump’s presidency entails will undoubtedly affect the international system.



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Many pundits attempt to decipher and interpret Trump's main slogan, MAGA (Make America Great Again). Meanwhile, for President Trump, it is clear that this means restoring America's economic, political, and military might and using that power to advance American interests globally.

The contours of his foreign policy agenda are encapsulated in a short, Reaganesque phrase: 'peace through strength,' leaving ample room for interpretation. Trump's tumultuous rhetoric and actions left temporary wounds on the fabric of America's democracy, much like the ear wound he sustained during a rally in Pennsylvania. Yet, following his assertive victory, the United States—wounded but still resilient—will seek to reassert its might both at home and abroad. To understand what Trump's new foreign policy might entail, we must look back to his first presidential term and the methods he employed to achieve his goals. While Trump never received a Nobel Peace Prize, he fashioned himself as a peacemaker with several notable achievements: the Abraham Accords between Israel and key Arab states, direct and high-level dialogue with North Korea, and a peace deal with the Taliban.

He never shied away from using American strength—pulling out of the Iran Deal and imposing new sanctions, killing its celebrated military leader Qasem Soleimani, eliminating Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS, effectively ending its status as a significant military and political force; killing hundreds of Russian “Wagner” operatives in Syria; supplying lethal weapons to Ukraine, unlike his predecessor; and increasing tariffs on Chinese products, sparking an economic war with China.

International institutions and treaties also faced scrutiny, from renegotiating NAFTA to pressuring NATO member countries to increase their contributions and withdrawing from the UN Human Rights Council, the World Health Organization, and the Paris Climate Accord.

Even though democracy promotion was not prominent in his foreign policy agenda, Trump decisively supported Venezuela's opposition and rolled back ties with the Cuban regime.

From all of this, it is likely that an emboldened Trump will vigorously pursue his foreign policy agenda, matching “talks” with “walks” and reshaping the global political, economic, and security landscape.

Implications for Georgia

What does this mean for contemporary Georgia and where will it fit into Trump's vision of a “New World Order?”

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Trump will inherit two major conflicts—Ukraine and the Middle East—highlighting the weaknesses and inefficacy of the current world order and its institutions. This legacy clearly defines roles: the Russia-China-Iran-North Korea axis challenges American interests. Unfortunately, current Georgia appears to orbit around that anti-American and generally anti-Western axis.

This alignment is manifested not only in fraudulent elections which place Georgia among a long list of authoritarian and poorly governed countries worldwide. Unlike these other nations, however, Georgia claims to be “Western” and aspires to integrate into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. Yet for the past 200 years and even today, the imperial power that has threatened Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity is Russia. It seems Georgia is suffering from severe amnesia or some form of the “Stockholm Syndrome.”

The shift towards this specific axis is evident in

concrete actions, not just rhetoric. For small or medium-sized countries, these actions often align with the policies and priorities of major players in the axis, encompassing all functions of the state—economy, security, ideology, etc.

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According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, even preliminary indicators for the first quarter of 2024 [show](#) that Georgia's primary trading partner is neither the EU nor the US for exports or imports. Russia is increasingly becoming a significant destination for both—openly or covertly. The top trading partner by export is Kyrgyzstan, a country in Central Asia, widely considered one of the poorest in Eurasia! It is no secret that Kyrgyzstan is often used to smuggle goods into Russia, exploiting loopholes to evade sanctions. Next in line are Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Russia, Armenia, Türkiye, and China! So much for preferential trade agreements with the EU and special trade regimes with the US. It is unsurprising, considering the current Georgian government's open refusal to join Western nations in proactively supporting Ukraine and imposing sanctions against Russia.

Cooperation in the security sphere between Georgia and Western countries or institutions (like NATO) has been put on hold, delayed indefinitely, or canceled. The Georgian leadership continues to promote a narrative about a mythical Global (read – Western) War Party, trying to “drag Georgia into the Russo-Ukrainian war.” The military is eroded and unrecognizable, with members of special forces who participated in the 2008 Russo-Georgian war dying under suspicious circumstances, likely due to leaked security personnel databases. More

than that, the Voice of America recently reported that Russia compromises the entire electronic communication of the Georgian foreign service. The country's security apparatus, from the police to state security services, primarily targets political opposition, their supporters, and independent non-governmental institutions.

Georgian legislation increasingly mirrors “new trends” among authoritarian countries, labeling pro-Western NGOs and activists as “foreign agents.” A law widely known as the “Russian law”—oppressive legislation introduced and actively implemented by Russia—was forcefully imposed on the Georgian population despite widespread protests and numerous warnings, pledges, and objections from Georgia's Western allies and friends. The hard-earned EU candidacy status is on hold; the US has openly announced a comprehensive review of cooperation with Georgia and, like the EU, has suspended assistance to the Georgian government. It should be noted that this stance from the US is not simply the policy of one particular administration but a bipartisan consensus shared by members of Congress and prominent think tanks.

Specific actions complement anti-Western policies. Georgia has moved closer to countries from the aforementioned axis, introducing a visa-free regime for China. Georgian senior officials have frequently visited Iran, expanding areas of cooperation. Friendly and complimentary statements from Russia towards the current Georgian regime have become a “new normal.”

Georgian Dream of Business as Usual

Given this situation, what are the chances of normalizing relations between the new American leadership and the current Georgian government? The primary question is whether or not the administration of the 47th president of the US will

even care about Party #41's administrative capacities in Georgia.

Optimists may claim that the Georgian Dream and its leadership have a sort of “direct access” to President Trump through Viktor Orbán of Hungary whom the new American president has praised as a “strong man” and “tough guy.” Beyond personal relationships, Orbán's conservative agenda resonates with the forces in America that are now in power. While the Hungarian leader might be a messenger of Trump, several factors must be considered. Orbán's ambitions are far greater than merely fixing US-Georgian relations. He likely sees himself as a conduit between Trump and Putin, not Trump and Ivanishvili. The reward for facilitating an end to the bloodshed in Ukraine is much greater than whitewashing one obscure billionaire.

Let us imagine that, against the odds, Orbán does find the time to discuss Georgia with Trump. What would his message be? In the most optimistic scenario (for the Georgian Dream), he might present them as a “conservative force” or label Ivanishvili as “just like you—a businessman who entered politics to save his country.” The problem with such a scenario is obvious—it might resonate (with a huge stretch of the imagination) for major players but not for a marginal figure ostracized by the West. At the end of the day, Orbán himself is not playing an “anti-Western” game, just a “conservative” one, and Hungary is already firmly embedded in the European and Euro-Atlantic orbit. Orbán may deviate temporarily from the mainstream, but he sees himself as a Western politician at his core. In the case of Ivanishvili (who avoids official positions and prefers to “lead from behind”) or his party, calling them “conservative” is an overreach—a label that has been [debunked](#) by many, including my colleagues in previous volumes of this journal.

Whatever message Orbán may deliver (or not) to Trump, the relationship will ultimately be managed

by the State Department, influenced by the foreign affairs committees of the House and Senate, and must resonate positively among the US foreign policy community. Given current statements and bipartisan initiatives, it is hard to imagine a dramatic shift in attitude toward the Georgian Dream and its leadership. The trust has not just been broken—it is shattered. Ivanishvili's leadership is widely recognized as untrustworthy, a reputation he consistently reinforces with the American establishment.

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The same sentiments are widely shared in Europe. Given Trump's belief that the EU should bear primary responsibility for its neighborhood, the Georgian case will likely be seen as a “primarily European headache.” Without proper consultation with European leaders (beyond just Orbán), nothing will happen. In that scenario, the prospects for normalization with Ivanishvili and his team look even bleaker. Georgia's ruling elite has repeatedly violated numerous EU-brokered agreements. Such a Euro-Atlantic consensus will not be overturned overnight, especially if it requires trusting someone widely seen as a “certified cheater.” A planned EU-inspired commission to investigate electoral violations is pending and the current US president has publicly called for an investigation into electoral fraud—an extremely rare occurrence. It is unlikely that the US will take any active steps towards legitimizing the “victory” of the Georgian Dream or engage in meaningful dialogue.

Ironically, Georgia's case is one of the few in which pundits, politicians, journalists, businessmen, and foreign policy experts agree broadly. The current

leadership is driving a pro-Western population away from the West and into the influence of Russia and China. This shared attitude results from a series of disappointments over more than a decade of the Georgian Dream's rule.

The only remedy for such an outcome might not be a change in the government's attitude but a change in the government itself. An "awakened" America definitely cannot tolerate any more "Dreamers."

Finally, what will happen if, for the next six months, due to the formation of a new cabinet,

staffing, and congressional approvals, we see no visible US policy toward Georgia (which, in my opinion, is the most likely scenario)? Much will depend on the situation on the ground, the opposition's resilience, the special commission's findings on electoral fraud, and the ruling party's ability to govern without proper legitimacy. It is a very slippery slope that could firmly place Georgia into the wrong axis and among the category of what the 45th US president once referred to as "s***hole countries." The only remedy for such an outcome might not be a change in the government's attitude but a change in the government itself. An "awakened" America definitely cannot tolerate any more "Dreamers" ■