

Anaklia's Strategic Gamble: Will Washington's New Maritime Strategy Matter?

President Trump's [establishment](#) of the White House shipbuilding office and the U.S. senators' recent introduction of the [Strategic Ports Reporting Act](#) herald a major shift in the United States' maritime strategy, where control over naval power, shipbuilding, and strategic ports becomes a central pillar of U.S. national security. While the shipbuilding office aims to deter China's maritime buildup and reshape global shipping, the Strategic Ports Reporting Act intends to counter China's expanding control over strategic ports worldwide. The bill explicitly targets China's efforts to build, acquire, or control strategic maritime infrastructure worldwide, while securing trade routes, protecting critical chokepoints, and gaining access to lucrative markets.

In these circumstances, the Anaklia deep-sea port on Georgia's Black Sea coast, caught in China's

grip, is a significant but often overlooked strategic asset that aligns with U.S. economic, security, and geopolitical interests. As the U.S. formulates its global maritime strategy and defines its approach towards greater Eurasia, Georgia's deep-sea port in Anaklia offers an opportunity to deter strategic adversaries - Russia, China, and Iran - reshape regional trade networks, and embrace attractive business opportunities while enhancing connectivity with resource-rich Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

A Geopolitical and Economic Opportunity

Strategically located, Anaklia is poised to become the only deep-sea port in Georgia, capable of handling large cargo vessels that currently bypass



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the country for ports in Türkiye or Russia. More importantly, the deep-sea port will enhance the goods handling capacity of the Trans-Caspian International Transportation Route (TITR), a strategic land trade route linking Europe with Central Asia and China via Georgia, known as the Middle Corridor.

It is worth noting that cargo shipments along the Middle Corridor have increased dramatically in recent years. It is widely anticipated that shipments will [rise](#) to 10 million tons annually by 2030, creating significant trade and investment opportunities for the United States and its European allies. Once operational, the Anaklia port will [provide](#) the nearest access to the South Caucasus (17 million people) and serve as a crucial maritime hub for landlocked nations such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Moreover, it will enhance connectivity for the North and South Caucasus, as well as Anatolia, collectively home to 180 million people.

Sino-Georgian cooperation on the Anaklia port project is still in its early stages of development, leaving room for maneuvering and potential course corrections.

As the United States and the EU intend to reduce their dependence on supply chains dominated by China and trade infrastructure controlled by Russia, the Georgian deep-sea port presents a secure, reliable, and Western-aligned alternative, facilitating faster and more predictable cargo transit between the Middle East, the EU, Central Asia and China bypassing Russian trade routes and infrastructure. It is worth noting that Sino-Georgian cooperation on the Anaklia port project is still in its early stages of development, leaving room for maneuvering and potential course corrections.

A Counterweight to Adversaries

In recent years, Beijing, through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has invested heavily in physical and

digital infrastructure projects across Eurasia, increasing its geopolitical footprint and tightening its grip on strategic infrastructure, including Anaklia. Although Trump's first administration [raised](#) concerns about China's involvement in the Anaklia deep-sea port project in 2019, Georgia's ruling party proceeded with the deal, allowing Chinese state-backed companies to invest in the project. [The China Harbor Engineering Company](#), a subsidiary of China Communications Construction Co., [blacklisted](#) by the U.S. Department of Commerce and [sanctioned](#) by Bangladesh in 2018, was awarded the contract to develop the project in Anaklia in collaboration with a Chinese-Singaporean consortium. Despite a well-documented history of illicit practices and fraudulent activities, the Georgian government has not hesitated in partnering with these highly controversial Chinese business enterprises, raising serious concerns about transparency, corruption, and the country's strategic orientation.

While China's control of the Anaklia port leaves Georgia increasingly vulnerable and dependent on Beijing's economic might and authoritarian decision-making, it also poses a threat to the U.S. and the EU's security in the wider Black Sea region. China's growing network of seaports is an integral part of the BRI, serving a broad range of strategic purposes beyond commercial trade. These multi-purpose facilities, can serve as key military outposts, enabling the rapid deployment of military assets while allowing for enhanced global reach and force projection.

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In addition to their military utility, Chinese-con-

trolled ports play a significant role in intelligence gathering and surveillance activities. China's communications and monitoring infrastructure, often installed under the guise of port security or logistics management, can facilitate electronic intelligence collection. Consequently, the Chinese-operated Anaklia port offers Beijing a valuable vantage point for observing NATO's naval movements and maritime activities in the Black Sea region, posing threats to Euro-Atlantic security.

Washington's growing efforts, manifested in the Strategic Ports Reporting Act, to successfully safeguard critical ports, secure supply chains, protect transatlantic security, and stand up to China's growing global influence, will require the U.S. to get involved in the development of the Anaklia deep-sea port.

U.S. strategic interests and possibly even investments in Anaklia can counter China's growing influence in the region. With American and European political backing, Anaklia has excellent potential to develop into a central regional trade hub, curbing China's geopolitical clout and its economic dominance in the region. U.S. involvement can also offer a viable alternative to China's maritime and developmental architecture, reshaping trading routes and strategic infrastructures that crisscross greater Eurasia.

Moreover, greater Western involvement in Anaklia will reduce Moscow's leverage and diminish its influence over regional commerce. In the past three decades, the Kremlin has effectively used its strategic influence over trade routes to exert pressure on neighboring states, reshaping the region's geopolitical landscape. The American-invested and developed strategic infrastructure and connectivity network can deter Russian aggression, strengthen Georgia's sovereignty, and reinforce democratic processes in the region while pushing East-West commerce and trade away from Russia

to alternative routes, reshaping trading networks, and advancing economic integration along the Middle Corridor.

A Gateway to Central Asia

By providing direct access to Black Sea shipping lanes, Anaklia can serve as a vital hub for Central Asian goods, exporting energy resources, uranium, rare earth minerals, industrial goods, and agricultural products to the EU, the Middle East, and beyond.

The Anaklia port represents a strategic gateway to landlocked countries in Central Asia. With abundant natural resources and a growing need for diversified trade routes, Central Asia will gain significantly from the development of the Anaklia port, which will be independent of Russia and China. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan have been investing heavily in exploring alternatives to Russian-dominated transport networks. By providing direct access to Black Sea shipping lanes, Anaklia can serve as a vital hub for Central Asian goods, exporting energy resources, uranium, rare earth minerals, industrial goods, and agricultural products to the EU, the Middle East, and beyond.

The Europeans have already taken steps to secure their interest in the region. The Anaklia deep-sea port also directly aligns with the European Union's [Global Gateway initiative](#), which aims to build sustainable, trusted infrastructure across the world while reducing dependency on China's Belt and Road Initiative. As part of its commitment to the region, the EU has [pledged](#) a EUR 12 billion assistance package to Central Asia, with EUR 3 billion specifically allocated to the transport sector. This significant investment package highlights Brussels' strategic intent to bolster the Middle Corri-

dor. Anaklia, can serve as the maritime anchor of this corridor, enhancing the EU's connectivity, resilience, and trade security.

The deeper engagement of the United States in Central Asia and the South Caucasus with European allies could reshape the regional power balance, enhance, and, to a certain extent, ensure the region's security, stability, and economic advancement while reducing their reliance on Russian and Chinese security and geo-economic structures. Furthermore, greater U.S. involvement in the region, in close cooperation with the EU, can strengthen the sovereignty of local actors while unlocking lucrative business opportunities for American and European business enterprises.

Securing U.S. Interests

The Anaklia deep-sea port [represents](#) a not-to-be-missed opportunity for the U.S. and its European allies to reshape connectivity, re-establish trade routes, and increase their footprint in the region. It is essential to consider that any ceasefire or peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine will likely be temporary, and Europe's relationship with Russia will remain strained in the long term. This will make trade with China through Russian routes risky and unviable, shifting focus to other trade routes along the Middle Corridor. Furthermore, amid a potential U.S.-China conflict in the Indo-Pacific, Beijing is expected to bolster its use of the Middle Corridor and potentially the Anaklia deep-sea port to preserve its access to the European market.

In a region where Russian naval activity has intensified and Chinese economic interests are expanding, Anaklia offers the U.S. a rare opportunity to anchor a long-term maritime and strategic presence on the Eastern edge of Europe.

By supporting the development of the Anaklia port, the United States can strengthen its strategic presence in the Black Sea—an increasingly contested zone between NATO, Russia, and China. The port could complement NATO's eastward posture, enabling the U.S. and its allies to project power more efficiently, support regional allies like Türkiye, Romania, and Bulgaria, and establish logistics hubs for defense and humanitarian operations. In a region where Russian naval activity has intensified and Chinese economic interests are expanding, Anaklia offers the U.S. a rare opportunity to anchor a long-term maritime and strategic presence on the Eastern edge of Europe.

The COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions have exposed the vulnerabilities in global supply chains, particularly those dependent on Chinese or Russian-controlled corridors. By investing in Anaklia, the U.S. can diversify and secure alternative supply chains through the Middle Corridor, linking Central Asia and Europe without crossing Russian territory. This shift will reduce the risks of coercive leverage over Western markets and industries, especially in critical sectors such as rare earth elements, energy, and agriculture, thereby enhancing the strategic resilience of the U.S. and allied economies.

The Anaklia project also presents a unique opportunity to encourage American private sector engagement in a high-potential, emerging market. With proper U.S. government backing and risk mitigation tools, American companies specializing in logistics, construction, digital infrastructure, and energy can gain a first-mover advantage in the region. This will not only generate jobs and economic returns but also promote U.S. business standards, innovation, and technological leadership in Eurasia. It aligns with the Trump administration's broader goal of promoting market-oriented development and countering state-led models advanced by China and Russia.

A major American-backed strategic infrastructure project like the Anaklia deep-sea port can also signal a strong commitment to democratic development in Georgia and the broader region. At a time when authoritarian regimes, such as China, are using their economic might, financial investments, and technological prowess to exert political influence, the U.S. can use the Anaklia project as a model for transparent, accountable, and sustainable development. The greater engagement of the United States in Georgia can empower reformist forces within the country, strengthen the rule of law, and counteract the creeping influence of authoritarian governance promoted by Beijing, Moscow, and Tehran. As a democratic partner on Europe's eastern frontier, Georgia's success will serve as a beacon for other aspiring democracies in the South Caucasus and greater Eurasia.

As global enthusiasm for China's Belt and Road Initiative wanes—and with Panama's bold decision to [withdraw](#)—the United States should adopt a similar stance regarding Georgia's Anaklia port. This moment offers a strategic opportunity to support Georgia's disengagement from the BRI while simultaneously investing in Anaklia's development. By strengthening maritime security and modernizing port infrastructure, the U.S. can help position Anaklia as a key gateway for Western trade. To achieve this, Washington must coordinate with international financial institutions, the private sector, and European allies to firmly anchor Anaklia within a Western-led framework of connectivity.

The port's success will serve as a model for how transatlantic coordination can deliver tangible results, reinforcing shared goals such as democratic governance, open markets, and secure infrastructure.

Anaklia provides a unique opportunity for deeper U.S.-EU cooperation in Eurasia, combining Ameri-

can strategic investments with European financial and policy tools. Through coordinated support—from the U.S. maritime strategy to the EU's Global Gateway initiative—both sides can pool resources, expertise, and diplomatic influence to reshape regional connectivity and trade. The port's success will serve as a model for how transatlantic coordination can deliver tangible results, reinforcing shared goals such as democratic governance, open markets, and secure infrastructure. This collaboration will also demonstrate the West's ability to deliver alternatives to authoritarian development models, solidifying influence in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

China's growing involvement in Anaklia through state-backed companies threatens to bring the port under Beijing's geopolitical influence, potentially turning it into another node in its expanding global port network. A proactive U.S.-EU approach can prevent it from falling into China's orbit by offering joint investments, political support, and private-sector partnerships that align the project with Western standards. By doing so, the West will not only halt China's encroachment in Georgia but also block Beijing's attempts to dominate the Middle Corridor. This strategic alignment will safeguard critical infrastructure from authoritarian influence while anchoring Georgia more firmly in the transatlantic community.

Anchoring the West: Why the U.S. Must Lead on Anaklia

As Georgia moves forward with plans to develop the Anaklia deep-sea port, the United States should increase diplomatic pressure on Tbilisi to reconsider partnering with Chinese companies. To catalyze this shift, the U.S. Department of State should appoint a dedicated envoy or create a task force focused on Black Sea infrastructure and energy security with Anaklia as a central priority. U.S. officials must engage Georgian leadership, civ-

il society, and business stakeholders to highlight the long-term strategic risks of Chinese involvement while offering credible Western alternatives backed by sustained support.

A key step is organizing investment summits and public-private partnership forums that showcase Anaklia's potential as a secure, Western-aligned trade hub, attracting U.S. and European capital. Washington should also lead the formation of a Western-led investment consortium, comprising American and European port developers, logistics firms, and infrastructure investors, backed by financial institutions such as the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), the World Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). This consortium would offer Georgia transparent, competitive financing and serve as a compelling alternative to Chinese capital, ensuring the port's strategic alignment with the West.

To reinforce this message, the U.S. should condition future economic, financial, and infrastructure assistance on the exclusion of Chinese state-owned enterprises from the Anaklia project. This would echo recent U.S. legislative measures, such as the [CHIPS and Science Act](#) and the Strategic Ports Reporting Act, which aim to block authoritarian influence over critical infrastructure. By leveraging both diplomatic and financial tools, the U.S. can support Georgia in establishing safeguards to prevent foreign authoritarian control over strategic assets.

The United States should also reconfigure its military and security cooperation with Georgia around the port project. This could include naval

training exercises, maritime domain awareness programs, and cybersecurity assistance tailored to critical port infrastructure. These initiatives would bolster Georgia's sovereignty and resilience while signaling to Beijing and Moscow that Anaklia is part of a U.S.-backed security architecture. Linking Anaklia's development to regional security frameworks ensures the port becomes a linchpin in a broader Western defense and trade strategy.

Although Georgia is not yet a member of NATO or the EU, the U.S. can work closely with Brussels to position Anaklia's development as a stepping-stone toward Euro-Atlantic integration. NATO and EU officials—coordinating with Washington—should stress that transparency, rule-of-law reforms, and independence from authoritarian influence are essential prerequisites for deeper institutional ties. Framing Anaklia within a wider Euro-Atlantic context would encourage Western companies to invest while strengthening public support in Georgia for Western, rather than Chinese, participation.

In an era when maritime chokepoints and trade infrastructure shape global power, Anaklia is far more than a Georgian infrastructure project—it is a strategic asset. Investing in its development allows the United States to reinforce regional partnerships, expand its economic footprint in Eurasia, and push back against the growing influence of its strategic rivals across the Black Sea and beyond.

This is not just about Georgia. In the context of escalating competition with China, supporting the Anaklia deep-sea port will be a forward-looking move to secure U.S. strategic influence in one of the world's most geopolitically contested regions ■