

UN-Enchanted

Georgian Version of Neo-Isolationism

The body of modern international affairs encompasses key events that are vital to the global diplomatic landscape, and active participation in such events enables smaller players within the international system to advance their agendas. The annual United Nations General Assembly high-level session, held in September, is undoubtedly one of these events. Every UN member state considers the platform a means to forge new or strengthen existing partnerships, interact on multilateral or bilateral levels with both like-minded and challenging partners, and present the country's vision from the highest podium of the international stage.

Since its inception in 1945, the UNGA has served as the main venue for foreign policy leaders and practitioners as a significant tool in global diplomacy. Accordingly, high-level delegations arrive with pre-planned agendas, polished messages, and readiness for ad hoc meetings. Every member of the UN - whether welcomed or unwelcome by the

U.S. administration (Cuba, Iran, Venezuela, etc.) - leverages this event for its own benefit and finds it useful for advancing foreign policy objectives.

The key prerequisite for doing so is to actually have a foreign policy objective. The absence of such objectives renders any trip to the UNGA little more than a masquerade of statehood, a mockery of diplomacy, and a stroll through Central Park or the traffic-heavy avenues of the Big Apple. The recently concluded 80th jubilee session of the UN General Assembly had one such participant — and unfortunately, it was Georgia.

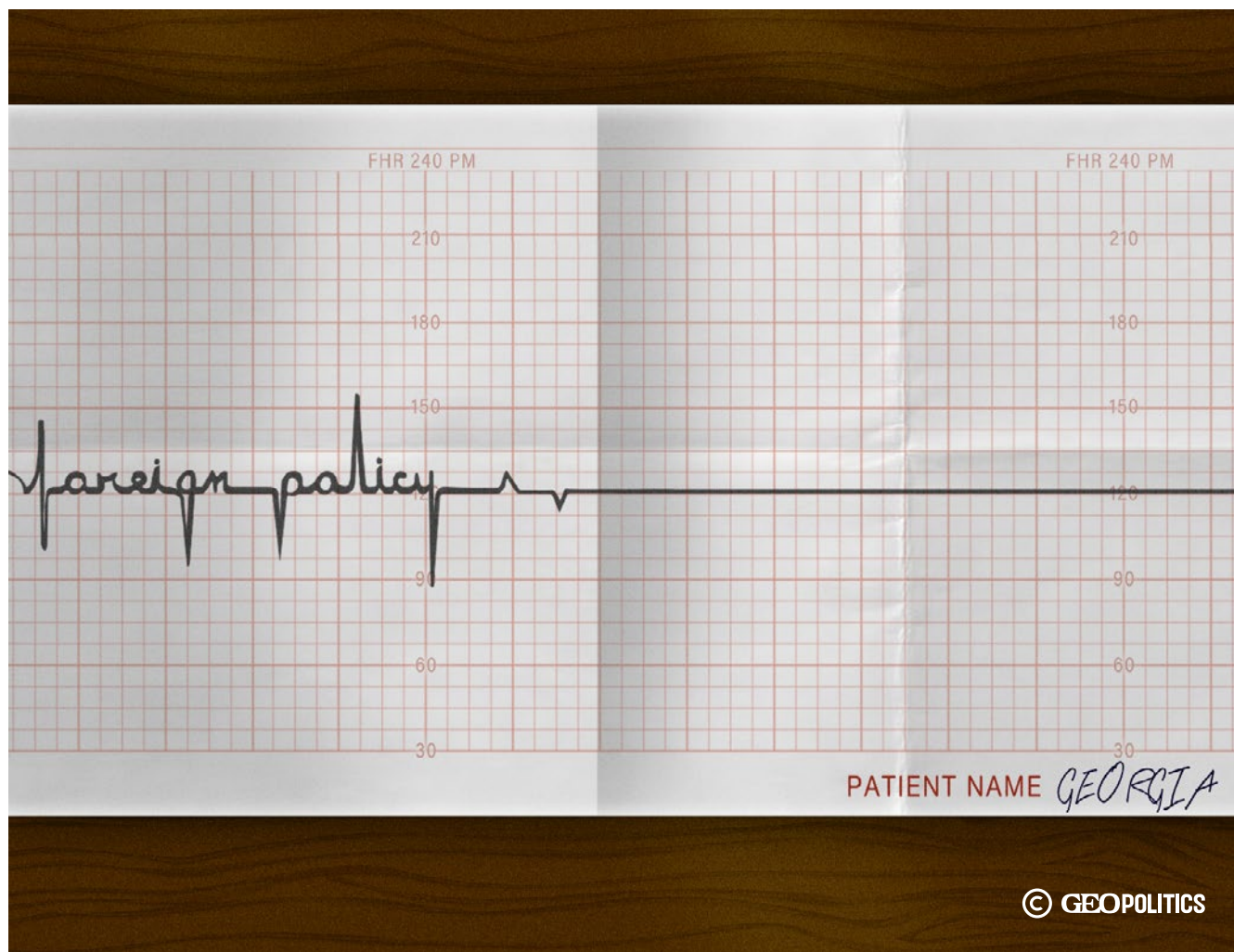
Who Runs the Foreign Policy of Georgia

It was odd from the outset that the Georgian delegation to the UNGA was headed by former footballer Mr. Mikheil Kavelashvili—a “President” whose legitimacy is contested by most of the opposition



TEMURI YAKOBASHVILI
Contributor

Ambassador Temuri Yakobashvili distinguishes himself as an accomplished leader in government, crisis management, and diplomacy. As the founder of TY Strategies LLC, he extends advisory services globally. A pivotal figure in co-founding the Revival Foundation, aiding Ukraine, and leading the New International Leadership Institute, Yakobashvili held key roles, including Georgia's Ambassador to the U.S. and Deputy Prime Minister. With the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, he is a Yale World Fellow, trained at Oxford and Harvard. As a co-founder and chair of the Governing Board of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, he actively contributes to global media discussions on regional security. His significant contributions have merited the Presidential Medal of Excellence.



spectrum in Georgia and many Western powers. Legitimacy aside, in June 2022, the Government of Georgia filed a lawsuit in the Constitutional Court, claiming (and unsurprisingly winning) the supremacy of the Prime Minister over the President on matters of international affairs. If that is the case, then logically the delegation should have been led by the Prime Minister.

The Georgian government suffers not only from a profound legitimacy crisis but also from an acute problem of trustworthiness and growing isolation.

However, the reality is that the Georgian government suffers not only from a profound legitimacy crisis but also from an acute problem of trustworthiness and growing isolation. Its anti-Western rhetoric – amplified by loud and consistent state-

ments from senior officials about “the West’s attempts to drag Georgia into war” and “the deep state fighting Georgian identity” – has turned the government into a pariah in the eyes of any credible Western leader.

The proclaimed “[pivot to the East](#)” has also failed: China is uninterested, Iran is preoccupied with its own problems, Türkiye treats Georgia like a vassal, and even the Central Asian states, as well as neighboring Armenia and Azerbaijan, see little value in closer ties with the current Georgian regime. Meanwhile, during the regional visit of UAE President H.H. Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in September 2025, Bidzina Ivanishvili was visibly the central figure [greeting](#) the guest, overshadowing all government officials. This served as a clear signal to everyone regarding who truly calls the shots in today’s Georgia – including in matters of foreign affairs.

It is also notable that Ivanishvili has refused to extend the same courtesy to any senior U.S. or European visitors. Since Ivanishvili holds no official position, and his minions merely perform the roles of “Prime Minister,” “President,” or “Foreign Minister,” it is unsurprising that Georgia’s chances for significant high-level meetings at the UNGA were minimal. A voyage by the actual Prime Minister would have only exposed how isolated Georgia has become in international affairs and how far it has fallen from the radar of serious foreign policymakers.

Message in a Bottle

Sending Mr. Kavelashvili was merely an exercise in optics - a symbolic attempt to “show the flag” or signal that “we are not completely gone yet.” His [speech](#) was even more telling: it completely avoided mentioning Russia, contained aimless calls for peace and prosperity, and, most importantly, conveyed a message of “my way or the highway.” A short summary would be: “Accept us as we are, or we won’t play with you.” He was essentially parroting the paranoia of the isolated and sanctioned Ivanishvili, who perceives foreign affairs as a profound danger for him rather than an opportunity for the country.

Georgia was notably [uninvited](#) to the transatlantic dinner hosted by Secretary Marco Rubio—an event attended by European leaders, as well as representatives from Azerbaijan and Armenia. A protocol meeting with UN Secretary-General António Guterres, courtesy photo-ops with the Presidents of Slovakia and Serbia, and a dinner interaction with U.S. Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick - all underscored Georgia’s isolation, as there was no substantive common agenda with any of them.

Similarly, Foreign Minister Maka Botchorishvili’s [meetings](#) with her counterparts from Vietnam, Hungary, Serbia, and Croatia were further evidence of the absence of any real foreign policy

direction. In short, the Georgian delegation had no meaningful bilateral meetings, was not invited to any regional discussions, and Kavelashvili’s Georgian-language speech - featuring the mythical call to “start relations from a blank page” - was little more than a message in a bottle, cast into the ocean in hope that someone, someday, might find it and treat it as a call to action.

Home Alone

Isolation works in mysterious ways. For Russia, according to Vladimir Putin, it resembles a cornered rat that attacks out of desperation. The current Georgian regime often borrows from the Russian playbook but cannot afford even the rat’s desperation. It feels more comfortable in the posture of a frightened ostrich — burying its head in the sand and ignoring the world. Just as the ostrich position is a myth, so too is the dreamlike belief of the Georgian Dream that reality can be ignored.

At the same time, with no “adult supervision,” Georgian Dream is waging war against any “foreign influence” by cracking down on pro-Western opposition parties, civil society organizations, independent media, and journalists, and now even the universities.

Annoyed by persistent and growing challenges from various organized and unorganized domestic forces opposing Ivanishvili’s isolationism, the regime tries to convince the population that the world outside Georgia’s borders is a dangerous place filled with hostile intruders — much like in the movie *Home Alone*. At the same time, with no “adult supervision,” Georgian Dream is waging war against any “foreign influence” by cracking down on pro-Western opposition parties, civil society organizations, independent media, and journalists, and now even the universities. Many of them have already been imprisoned on bogus charges. Intim-

idation, physical assaults, and violent crackdowns on any form of dissent have become routine.

This hostility extends even to accredited diplomats, especially those from Western countries, who face verbal attacks almost daily from senior figures of the Georgian Dream regime. Deportations or entry denials for foreign journalists and experts have become the new normal. Pro-regime media channels amplify xenophobic narratives, portraying the West as a malicious force “trying to erode Georgian identity.”

Such behavior is hardly surprising: in one of his interviews, Bidzina Ivanishvili openly [stated](#) that traveling abroad is dangerous for Georgians because “they will see a good life, and it will enhance their sorrow.” While Ivanishvili portrays himself as a “hero” defending the nation against foreign “intruders” - like Kevin McCallister in *Home Alone* - Ivanishvili’s message of “starting from a blank page” appears to be a hope that one day he might, like in the movie, meet President Donald Trump and ask him for directions. Just like in a movie, they met briefly for a protocol photo, but there was no time for questions or meaningful interaction.

Neo-Isolationism or National Asceticism

Classically defined, neo-isolationism is a foreign policy approach that advocates for reducing a nation’s political and military commitments abroad without complete withdrawal from the global community. It is a modern variation of traditional isolationism, favoring a less interventionist and more restrained international role. While major powers like the United States can, at least theoretically, afford such a policy, for smaller states it inevitably leads to models like those of North Korea, Turkmenistan, or, until recently, Uzbekistan. The latter two possess substantial hydrocarbon and natural resources, providing them with enough income to sustain a sense of affluence among their

populations. North Korea’s constant famine and misery are well-documented, and even with a “father figure” like China, it cannot achieve proper sustenance or development.

Georgia’s form of neo-isolationism looks different. Its ruling elite wants free access to the Western world — but without being questioned. It is as if saying: “We want to join the non-smokers club because you have clean air, but please take us with our cigars.”

Dragging Georgia into international isolation is either a deliberate choice or the consequence of Ivanishvili’s worldview; in either case, it is lethal not only for Georgia’s foreign policy but also for its statehood.

It is difficult to pinpoint precisely where this attitude originates. Still, it likely stems from Ivanishvili’s early years of enrichment, when large sums of money were welcomed almost everywhere without much inquiry into their origin. Since then, the world — including the financial world — has undergone significant changes, but Ivanishvili’s mindset remains unchanged. Dragging Georgia into international isolation is either a deliberate choice or the consequence of Ivanishvili’s worldview; in either case, it is lethal not only for Georgia’s foreign policy but also for its statehood.

Businessmen entering politics is not new, but Ivanishvili’s total control is unprecedented outside fully autocratic regimes — and even there, autocrats at least hold official titles (e.g., President, King, Chairman) and bear responsibility for their actions. In Georgia’s case, Ivanishvili hides behind his subordinates, and this masquerade of statehood serves only his personal interests and phobias. These phobias appear profound: despite his immense wealth, he has not left Georgian territory for nearly a decade.

This declared and practiced “national asceticism” has become the defining feature of Georgia’s foreign policy — and from this angle, Kavelashvili’s voyage and messaging at the UNGA appear logical. Of course, this asceticism does not extend to his subordinates, who continue to enjoy trips to Europe and America — even if only for luxury shopping or fashionable haircuts.

This hypocrisy presents an opportunity for those who still see value in a democratic and prosperous Georgia. The soon-to-be adopted EU Visa Suspension Mechanism could become an effective instrument if properly applied. Ivanishvili’s regime relies not only on loyalty among his top lieutenants but also among mid- and lower-level judges, policemen, propagandists, and other executors of his anti-freedom agenda.

Revoking visa privileges for the entire Georgian population would amount to collective punishment — a form of “carpet bombing.” Instead, selective but extensive targeting of violators (and making their names public) could create a critical mass of “wrong-order enforcement deniers.”

Revoking visa privileges for the entire Georgian population would amount to collective punishment — a form of “carpet bombing.” Instead, selective but extensive targeting of violators (and making their names public) could create a critical mass of “wrong-order enforcement deniers.” Eventually, this could empower freedom-loving, anti-isolationist Georgians to rid themselves of the oppressive regime and bring Georgia back into the family of democratic nations. But before that, Georgia’s foreign policy rests in peace ■