

Georgian Dream's New Security Paradigm

In recent years, the Georgian Dream government has, in effect, crafted a new national security doctrine, one that redefines threats to state institutions and national security. Instead of recognizing Russia as the principal source of danger to Georgia's sovereignty, the regime has shifted its focus toward imaginary enemies, the so-called "Deep State," the "Global War Party," and alleged "foreign agents." This reorientation has turned the state's entire security apparatus, the State Security Service, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, intelligence, counterintelligence, and anti-corruption agencies, into instruments for policing the "internal front" rather than safeguarding the country from external aggression. Civil society organizations, media, universities, and even students are now routinely labeled "terrorists," "extremists," or "instigators of unrest," as the state machinery concentrates on their "neutralization."

By systematically blurring the boundary between

the state and the ruling party, the Georgian Dream strengthened its grip on power and simultaneously widened the rift between the regime's interests - political survival through alignment with Moscow - and the nation's interests - surviving Russian aggression and remaining anchored in Western institutions. The resulting contradiction corrodes Georgia's democratic fabric, counters declared national interests, and significantly strengthens authoritarian standing in the regional and broader European context.

Russia: A Choice or a Necessity?

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Many in and outside Georgia continue to debate Bidzina Ivanishvili's true intentions, asking whether or not he was a Russian project from the beginning or if he later chose to change course.



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This question itself demonstrates the lack of understanding of the fundamental nature of Ivanishvili's regime because it assumes the existence of alternatives for the oligarch. In reality, Ivanishvili never needed to "turn" toward Russia; it was always his natural habitat.

His entire political and economic formation took place within the Russian sphere of influence, where wealth and power are built through proximity to the state, informal loyalty networks, and the absence of accountability. When he entered Georgian politics, he brought with him that same mindset, one that views politics not as public service but as an extension of private enterprise. Over time, the Georgian Dream's behavior has only confirmed that Russia is not an accidental partner but the structural pillar of its survival. The Kremlin's model of governance – centralized control, co-opted elites, silenced opposition, and a permanent narrative of external threat – provides exactly what the current regime needs to stay in power.

The deeper connection between the Georgian Dream and Moscow lies in shared values and the survival instinct. Most of the current regime's key enablers were shaped by Soviet or post-Soviet Georgia, where democracy, the rule of law, and civic accountability were distant and abstract concepts. They learned to operate in systems where personal loyalty outweighed competence and where institutions existed to protect power rather than to regulate it. In this environment, corruption is a method of governance and clientelism is a measure of success. These are the conditions under which Ivanishvili's wealth multiplied and through which his closest circle rose to influence. It is no coincidence, therefore, that most of his closest allies come from his business empire – Cartu Group, JSC Cartu Bank, and affiliated entities. Ivanishvili's power networks thrive in opacity and dependence instead of competition and transparency. The West, with its emphasis on rules, disclosure, and equal opportunity, represents a terrain where

Ivanishvili and his associates cannot compete or maintain a grip on power, something which is also a reason why the opportunity for European integration and the push for reforms was viewed as a danger by Ivanishvili.

Moscow, in contrast, offers familiarity, leverage, and impunity. It is a place where wealth secures protection and influence without moral scrutiny, where loyalty is valued above legality, and where politics serves as an instrument of private enrichment. The recent corruption scandals [surrounding](#) Ivanishvili's former personal assistant and twice Prime Minister, Irakli Gharibashvili, and his cabinet members demonstrate exactly that – tapping into the state budget, receiving millions in cashbacks, and simply stealing money from state contracts was (and probably still is) the rule of the game. In this sense, Russia is both a deliberate choice and a fundamental necessity for the Georgian Dream.

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The strategic [logic](#) of the Georgian Dream is that the West's insistence on democratic norms threatens the regime's survival while closer affinity with Moscow secures patronage, impunity, and a geopolitical shelter. It also provides money. Moscow understands its position is fragile because Georgian public opinion remains pro-Western and because Western-educated youth form the backbone of domestic resistance. That is why Russia's priority is to make the country's reorientation permanent, to embed structures and narratives so deeply that even a change of leadership would not restore the Euro-Atlantic course. Obviously, this threat is totally ignored by the Georgian Dream.

It is, therefore, no surprise that Russian high offi-

cials often praise the Georgian Dream for resisting Western pressure and “acting sovereign.” Just recently, Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu [praised](#) the Georgian authorities’ ability to withstand destructive external pressure. Before that, Russian propagandists and politicians [expressed](#) content with how Georgia was “changing behavior” and standing up to the West.

Broken Radar

The clearest way to trace the transformation of Georgia’s defense and security policy under the Georgian Dream is through the measurable indicators that define a democratic security system: strategic documents, alliances, training and deployment patterns, procurement, and institutional behavior. These indicators reveal a deliberate realignment with Russia’s model of governance and security logic. In democracies, national security strategies and threat assessments are regularly renewed to reassess risks and guide defense planning. In Georgia, the National Security Concept has not been [updated](#) since 2011 and the last publicly [available](#) National Threat Assessment was adopted in 2010. This long silence is political. The Georgian Dream avoids revisiting these documents because any honest revision would again identify Russia as the principal threat to Georgia’s sovereignty and reaffirm that closer integration with NATO and the EU is the only viable path to mitigate that threat.

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More importantly, it is impossible to organize an effective national defense and security without those cornerstone documents, meaning that Georgia’s defenses are currently effectively dis-

abled. The institutions responsible for protecting the state are left without strategic guidance and have been redirected to fight democratic stakeholders who are portrayed as internal “threats” to the Georgian Dream regime. In doing so, the government has inverted the very logic of security: the machinery designed to defend the nation has been turned against its citizens, leaving the country exposed externally and repressed internally. The radar of threats is broken – showing enemies as friends and allies as enemies.

Institutional stagnation contrasts sharply with the country’s record of active and transparent cooperation. During the early 2000s, Georgia’s defense sector [underwent](#) systematic reform, aligning its planning cycles with NATO’s Planning and Review Process and the Annual National Program, and conducting regular Strategic Defense Reviews to improve interoperability and readiness. These processes have now slowed or lost substance, turning into bureaucratic rituals rather than strategic exercises. Exercises such as Noble Partner have been [postponed](#) or reduced in scope and bilateral defense programs with the United States and the United Kingdom are managed with visible caution. The same institutions that once opened Georgia’s defense establishment to Western scrutiny are now used to close it off from criticism, reproducing Moscow’s pattern of control through secrecy and selective loyalty.

Although formal cooperation frameworks between Georgia and NATO technically remain in place, the reality on the ground tells a very different story. Despite the fact that practical cooperation is effectively stalled and many of the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package (SNGP) projects are suspended or paused, the official NATO website continues to [portray](#) a delusional image of uninterrupted progress and successful partnership. The page describing NATO-Georgia relations still lists ongoing reforms, joint exercises, and defense capacity-building efforts as if the political and insti-

tutional relationship were functioning normally.

In reality, the partnership has been [reduced](#) to a hollow formality. The majority of cooperation mechanisms have lost operational significance due to the Georgian government's open hostility toward NATO members, its anti-Western [rhetoric](#), and the political sanctions now [imposed](#) on Georgia's leadership by several NATO states. This disconnect between NATO's public communications and the deteriorating political reality in Georgia confuses international audiences and plays directly into the Georgian Dream's narrative of false legitimacy, allowing the regime to claim that Euro-Atlantic integration remains an option. At the same time, in practice, it systematically dismantles every institutional link to it.

A striking sign of this reversal is found in the moral geography of Georgia's current security posture. The country that once [ranked](#) as the largest per capita contributor to the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan now [tolerates](#) Russia's open recruitment of Georgians to fight against Ukraine. Moscow's official platform for foreign enlistees includes a page specifically targeting Georgian citizens, inviting them to join the Russian armed forces. This grotesque reality is met with complete silence from Tbilisi. Moreover, Georgian Dream has been hostile to and has been [creating](#) a variety of problems for Georgians fighting on Ukraine's side. The Georgian government, which [accuses](#) the West of trying to drag Georgia into war, shows no reaction to a hostile power recruiting its citizens to fight in an aggressive war against a democratic neighbor.

Georgia's ruling party has successfully turned the disinformation narratives about the "Global War Party" and the "Deep State" into strategic reference points for a security policy that treats Western influence as an existential threat. The 2024 State Security Service report explicitly [links](#) civil society and independent media with alleged foreign malign influence. It claims that these actors

seek to drag Georgia into war or to overthrow the government. The report of the Parliamentary Investigative Commission, chaired by MP and former Justice Minister Thea Tsulukiani, [argues](#) the same.

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This securitized framing is matched by practice. The institutions that should be countering hostile foreign action and foreign information manipulation interference instead focus on monitoring and marginalizing domestic democratic actors. The State Security Service regularly spearheads investigations and legal cases against the opposition and NGOs.

The rest of the indicators follow the same direction. Military education and procurement have become increasingly opaque with less oversight and fewer Western-linked programs. Transparency International and defense observers have [noted](#) a regression in public accountability within the Ministry of Defence and a growing concentration of decision-making under political appointees rather than professional officers. Procurement processes are [handled](#) in secrecy, resembling the informal practices and corruption of Russia's own defense sector. The arrest of the former Minister of Defence for misappropriating large sums from the ministry's procurement is a testament to this problem. Parliamentary oversight of security agencies has weakened, especially since there is no opposition in the Parliament and the Parliamentary Trust Group to oversee the defense spending. The intelligence community operates with diminished independence, focused largely on domestic surveillance. The former head of the State Security

Service, who was appointed by the Parliament for six years, [resigned](#) in a few months, thanking the party and accepting a low-profile position of advisor to the Prime Minister. The annual reporting of security institutions has not included meaningful discussion of Russian hybrid threats for years, even as occupation lines in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia quietly advance.

Across all measurable indicators: strategic documents, alliances, training and deployment patterns, procurement, and institutional behavior, the pattern is consistent. Georgia's defense and security system no longer behaves as part of the Euro-Atlantic community. It retains the appearance of cooperation through symbolic participation in select exercises and declarations but its content has been hollowed out. The metrics that once defined progress now record decay.

Isolation Under the Russian Shadow

The gradual redirection of Georgia away from its Western orientation is not limited to the military or security domains; it is most illustrative in the sphere of education, where the Georgian Dream government seeks to reshape the worldview of the next generation. The recently [announced](#) higher education reform concept presents itself as a modernization initiative, yet its content reveals the agenda aimed at narrowing the country's educational and cultural connection with the West. Behind the bureaucratic language of "optimization," "deconcentration," and "alignment with national priorities," the reform blueprint redefines the mission of higher education in ways that mirror post-Soviet authoritarian governance. The document does not envision universities as spaces of critical inquiry or international cooperation but as instruments of state planning and control. It introduces a "one city – one faculty" principle, limits foreign student enrollment, and eliminates com-

petitive grant-based funding in favor of a state order model where resources are allocated according to "national needs." These changes collectively transfer the decision-making power from academic institutions to the central government, allowing political elites to determine what is taught, where, and by whom.

Perhaps the most revealing feature of the reform is its attempt to shorten the general education cycle from 12 to 11 years. This seemingly technical change has enormous implications for Georgia's place in the global education landscape. By breaking compatibility with the European Higher Education Area, it will make Georgian graduates ineligible for direct admission to Western bachelor's programs, effectively severing a key pathway that has enabled thousands of young Georgians to study abroad. The reform's defenders claim that this adjustment is designed to "adapt education to national realities" but its real purpose is to detach Georgian youth from international mobility and intellectual exchange. When asked about the issue, Irakli Kobakhidze mockingly [suggested](#) that those who wish to study in the West could simply complete an extra twelfth-grade year abroad. The practical outcome of the reform will be the closure of the most accessible bridge between Georgia and Western education.

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This shift cannot be understood apart from the regime's political logic. The most persistent opposition to the Georgian Dream's authoritarian consolidation comes from the Western-educated youth, individuals who have studied in Europe or North America, who think in terms of rights, transparency, and merit, and who recognize Rus-

sia as an existential threat. For both the Georgian Dream and the Kremlin, such a generation represents a strategic danger. In the Russian model of influence, control over education is a key mechanism of long-term domination. By limiting exposure to Western institutions and ideas, the regime can gradually reorient national identity toward a closed, state-dependent, and hierarchically structured worldview. The reform's emphasis on state-managed financing, reduced academic autonomy, and limiting compatibility with the Western education system further blurs the line between education, ideology, and political loyalty. These choices replicate the structure of Russia's educational system, where the Ministry of Education dictates both content and ideology, producing compliance rather than creativity.

From Observation to Action: A Strategic Roadmap for the West

Western response to Georgia's slide into one-party dictatorship has been muted or reactive rather than decisive. The EU has failed to establish a meaningful sanction mechanism other than suspending the visa-free regime for diplomatic and service passport holders. The United States and the United Kingdom have [imposed](#) limited targeted sanctions on several Georgian officials for human rights abuses and repression, signaling concern but [not yet](#) applying the complete set of levers needed to reverse a process that is already institutionalized. These measures have failed to prevent the Georgian Dream from changing its anti-democratic course.

Continuing to treat democratic backsliding as Georgia's domestic problem or responding only with rhetorical condemnation will cede strategic ground to Moscow in the wider region, undermining the security interests of the West.

The policy consequence of the ruling party's new security paradigm will be stark for the collective West which views Georgia and the South Caucasus as an important transit corridor, especially now once the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been solved and Western interests increase toward the middle corridor. Continuing to treat democratic backsliding as Georgia's domestic problem or responding only with rhetorical condemnation will cede strategic ground to Moscow in the wider region, undermining the security interests of the West. While the West waits, Russia is moving to institutionalize leverage over Georgian society through multiple avenues from expanded recruitment policies that [allow](#) foreigners to serve in the Russian armed forces to pragmatic steps such as [extended](#) visa regimes and economic ties that deepen dependence. Russian black money and the influx of Russian citizens and businesses have been [instrumental](#) in Georgia's recent economic growth. These levers will be very hard to undo as time passes.

Now is the time for the West [to act](#) with calibrated, consequential measures that raise the costs of authoritarian consolidation for the Georgian Dream. The window to prevent irreversible capture of Georgia's institutions is closing. If the West chooses to stand aside while Ivanishvili secures a pro-Russian legacy, it will have chosen the side that advances Moscow's strategic goal of cutting Georgia out of the European and Euro-Atlantic space.

The collective West must move from declarative concern to a coordinated strategy of pressure, deterrence, and protection. This strategy should rest on three mutually reinforcing pillars: political, economic, and informational leverage.

First, Western institutions should treat Georgia's democratic backsliding not as a domestic issue but as a direct geopolitical challenge orchestrated to serve Moscow's interests. The United States, the European Union, and NATO should coordinate a unified message that future cooperation, assistance,

and accession processes are suspended until verifiable progress on democratic reforms is made. The Georgian Dream regime must be clearly warned at the highest level what sticks the West can use and what carrots could be offered if Ivanishvili chooses to reverse the anti-democratic path. Meanwhile, high-level political dialogue must be redirected from government channels to direct engagement with civil society and the independent media as these organizations still represent the democratic majority. This “dual-track” diplomacy of engaging society while isolating the regime would ensure that Western support strengthens Georgia’s democracy rather than legitimizing its capture.

Second, targeted sanctions are the most immediate and effective tool. They should focus on Bidzina Ivanishvili and his close circle of political, business, and media enablers. Asset freezes, travel bans, and restrictions on financial transactions should apply not only to individuals but to affiliated companies, shell entities, propaganda media, and foundations that facilitate state capture. These sanctions could also cover the Georgian ministries and state institutions responsible for human rights violations – the Ministry of the Interior, the Prosecutor’s Office, the Anti-Corruption Bureau, and the State Security Service. Western governments and financial institutions should initiate forensic audits to trace flows of Russian-linked capital within Georgia’s banking and real estate sectors. These steps would signal that state capture in Georgia carries a personal and institutional cost for those who sustain it. At the same time, EU and U.S. development funding should not be suspended, but redirected from government-administered projects to independent institutions and educational programs that promote civic resilience, protect human rights, and counter disinformation. With the clear political will, these are still possible even with the Georgian Dream’s draconian legislation imposed on the inflow of foreign funding.

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Third, Western governments should openly expose hybrid activities that violate Georgia’s sovereignty and the Georgian Dream regime’s authoritarian consolidation, ensuring that silence does not become complicity. A coordinated public information campaign supported by EU StratCom and the independent Georgian media should document how disinformation about the “Global War Party” and the “Deep State” serves Moscow’s interests and undermines Georgia’s national security.

These measures must be applied simultaneously rather than sequentially. The Georgian Dream government has proven skilled at exploiting gradualism and rhetorical ambiguity. The West must, therefore, act on a compressed timeline: a joint announcement of targeted sanctions coupled with conditional suspension of institutional cooperation and an immediate increase in direct civil-society funding, reinforced with a strong strategic communication campaign explaining to Georgians and the world why all this is happening.

At stake is not only Georgia’s sovereignty but also the credibility of Western commitment to its own declared values and interests in the Black Sea region. Allowing Ivanishvili to consolidate power under Russian patronage would embolden similar hybrid models across Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. Acting decisively now would send the opposite signal: that democratic regression and strategic capture have tangible consequences ■