

Explaining the Self-Harming Policies of the Georgian Dream through the Russian Prism

Georgia is facing the most dangerous political moment since regaining independence. Russia appears to have set a strategic objective that goes far beyond influencing Georgian policies. Russia has moved from trying to meddle in Georgian politics to trying to control the long-term direction of the Georgian state in a way that cannot be reversed.

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Pro-Russian policies remain largely [unpopular](#) among Georgians. Even those who support the

Georgian Dream (GD) have little interest in an openly pro-Russian course. Years of Russian [pro-paganda](#) have created doubts about Western partners, but they have not produced genuine sympathy toward Russia. The memory of Soviet rule, the conflicts of the 1990s, and the 2008 August war continue to act as a psychological barrier that prevents Georgians from trusting the Kremlin.

This is why the Georgian Dream does not publicly declare a pro-Russian agenda. Instead, it relies on mixed and contradictory messaging. It attacks Western institutions, particularly European ones, and civic and political actors, while simultaneously claiming that European integration remains a national priority. Despite tightening its authoritarian grip and applying pressure on pro-Western critics, the ruling party has not been able to create a



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Georgian Dream Hotline

If you want Russian laws
rebranded, history rewritten, and
Europe taken off your future
- call us.

1-800-KREMLIN

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Russia-oriented majority. One year of [sustained](#) protest shows that Georgian society rejects a Russia-centered political future.

Russia must be interpreting this resistance as a structural weakness. If the Georgian Dream loses power, Georgia will likely return to its Western trajectory very quickly. Preventing this scenario ought to be a central strategic goal for the Kremlin.

As a result, pressure on the Georgian Dream has intensified, suggesting a deeper level of external influence. A key indicator of this shift is the pattern of decisions made by the Georgian Dream that offer no political benefit to the ruling party and, in many cases, even damage its reputation. These choices are hard to explain through domestic political logic. They alienate much of the population, mobilize the opposition, harm the party's international legitimacy, and reduce its room for maneuver. Yet, the government continues to take them. The only way these decisions make sense is to view them as actions that serve Russia's strategic interests rather than Georgia's or even the regime's own.

The full scope of this process is difficult to document through direct evidence because it most probably [unfolds](#) through informal channels, [co-ordinated messaging](#), tightly timed policy shifts, and the alignment of domestic decisions with Russia's objectives. The most revealing way to understand this process is to examine the timeline of the self-harming choices made by the Georgian Dream. When viewed together, these steps form a coherent sequence that strengthens Russia's leverage while steadily damaging Georgia's relationship with the European Union and the United States. Each such move by the ruling party, from the revival of the foreign agents law to the [announcement](#) by Irakli Kobakhidze that Georgia was halting its European path, has pushed Georgia further away from its Western partners and deeper into political isolation.

Regional Context

Russia's influence across the South Caucasus is weakening rapidly. Armenia is distancing itself from Moscow after the failure of Russian security guarantees, seeking stronger ties with Western partners and openly questioning its reliance on the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Azerbaijan continues to deepen its strategic partnership with Türkiye while also signaling independence from Moscow through public support for Ukraine's territorial integrity. Türkiye's growing role in the region and President Donald Trump's new initiative to [mediate](#) lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, while promoting long-term regional economic prospects under the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity ([TRIPP](#)), create an increasingly multipolar environment that limits Russia's ability to [shape](#) outcomes.

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Within this shifting landscape, maintaining control over Georgia is Russia's last opportunity to retain a meaningful presence in the Caucasus. If Georgia reaffirms its Euro-Atlantic direction, Russia risks losing strategic influence across the entire region. Recent [research](#) from the Royal United Services Institute and regional security analysts notes that Russia views developments in Georgia as central to its remaining position in the South Caucasus. Understanding this broader environment is essen-

tial for interpreting the otherwise irrational and self-damaging decisions taken by the Georgian Dream, which serve to preserve Russian strategic influence at a time when it is eroding everywhere else in the region.

Self-Harming Moscow Serving Decisions

The Russian factor has produced a long sequence of decisions that make little sense within Georgia's domestic political environment but align closely with Moscow's strategic aims. These steps consistently damage the ruling party's popularity, the country's economy, social cohesion, and the integrity of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Yet, each move serves a clear purpose for the Kremlin by eroding trust in Western partners, normalizing Russian narratives, and gradually pushing Georgia toward irreversible isolation from the West.

One of the earliest examples is the 2019 Gavrillov [incident](#). A Russian State Duma's communist member who had participated in the armed conflict in Abkhazia in the 1990s was allowed to preside over a session of the Interparliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy from the Georgian parliamentary speaker's chair. This [triggered](#) mass protests that left more than 200 [injured](#) and forced the then-Speaker of the Parliament, Irakli Kobakhidze, to [resign](#). For the Georgian Dream, this episode was politically disastrous. It inflamed anti-government and anti-Russian sentiment, eroded public trust, and destabilized the pre-election environment, forcing Bidzina Ivanishvili to acquiesce to proportional elections (which he later [renege](#)d on). For Russia, however, the incident served to test public tolerance for pro-Russian policies and gauge the limits of Georgian society's active resistance. [International](#) and [domestic](#) reports from the period show that this event established a pattern of measuring societal resistance that Moscow would exploit in the years ahead.

The cancellation of the [Anaklia deep-sea port](#) project in 2019–2020 followed the same logic. The project, backed by American partners, had the potential to increase Georgia's GDP, create new connectivity and economic opportunities, and reduce Russian dominance in the Black Sea transit corridor. The Georgian Dream terminated the consortium, [accused](#) it of financial misconduct, and left the project dormant until a Chinese company secured involvement in 2024. This decision undermined Georgian Dream's credibility domestically and internationally, making it harder to mask its pro-Russian stance. As a result, the Kremlin preserved its maritime advantage, blocked a competing port, and steered the region's logistics environment from Washington toward Beijing – Russia's situational partner in the region.

For Moscow, the gain is significant, as it recasts Georgia as responsible for the conflict, reduces the legitimacy of Georgia's claims over occupied territories, weakens international support for de-occupation, and paves the way for the restoration of formal relations between Moscow and Tbilisi, giving the Kremlin more direct levers of pressure.

Rewriting the history of the 2008 war is another politically costly step for the Georgian Dream. Mr. Kobakhidze and other high-ranking ruling party officials publicly [blamed](#) the 3rd President Mikheil Saakashvili and echoed narratives that Western powers had orchestrated the conflict. This reopened national trauma, deepened political polarization, and put the Georgian Dream further at odds with a public that consistently shows around 70–80% [support](#) for EU and NATO integration, giving the opposition a nationalist and pro-Western rallying point. For Moscow, the gain is significant, as it recasts Georgia as responsible for the conflict, reduces the legitimacy of Georgia's claims

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The adoption of the “foreign agents law” in 2024 further demonstrated the pattern of self-harming alignment with Russian strategies. The [law](#), modeled on legislation used by the Kremlin to suppress civil society, forced organizations receiving foreign support to register as agents serving foreign interests. It was pushed through despite [protests](#) involving more than 100,000 participants and despite warnings from the European Union and the United States that it would halt integration processes. Approval ratings for the government dropped sharply, and political unrest intensified right before the milestone parliamentary elections. Russia, however, benefited from the replication of its preferred legal tool that has also appeared in Kyrgyzstan and Slovakia. The law targeted precisely those sectors that anchor Georgia’s Western identity, weakening the civic infrastructure that opposes Russian influence.

Prime Minister Kobakhidze’s announcement in late 2024 that Georgia would pause its European Union integration until 2028 also fits in this pattern. The policy shift alienated the population, unified opposition parties, triggered mass demonstrations, and risked the wrath of hundreds of thousands of Georgian citizens who consistently expressed strong support for the European Union membership. The only obvious winner was Moscow, which secured a visible rupture between Georgia and its Western partners and put Georgia on a path of international isolation.

The [abolition](#) of the South Ossetia Provisional Administration in 2025 is the latest episode in this series of pro-Russian moves. The administration was established in 2007 to create a legitimate, state-mandated governance structure represent-

ing Ossetian communities willing to engage with the Georgian government, after the parallel “alternative elections” demonstrated that part of the local population rejected the Russia-backed *de facto* authorities. The existence of this structure was an institutional proof that the conflict was not with the Ossetians, but with the Kremlin. It also served practical goals - coordinating humanitarian and rehabilitation projects, building confidence between communities, and ensuring access to Georgian state services for residents of the region. Russia and the Tskhinvali regime loathed the temporary administration and often requested that they be dropped from the Geneva talks. Ending the administration risked angering nationalist voters, deepened the perception of Georgian Dream’s lack of policy on the occupied regions, and removed an important symbol of territorial integrity. Russia, however, benefited from advancing *de facto* recognition of the division, erasing institutional structures that resisted its control, and paving the way to the next steps toward legitimizing the current status quo regarding occupied territories.

Taken together, these episodes reveal a pattern in which the Georgian Dream repeatedly undermines its own legitimacy and strategic interests, in ways that align precisely with Russia’s objectives. Each decision imposes domestic political costs, yet collectively they advance a methodical process of entrenching Russian influence.

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Interestingly, even the recent internal shakeup within Georgian Dream can be explained not by the alleged anti-corruption campaign but rather by Moscow-style consolidation of a dependent proxy. The [sidelining](#) of former security chief Grigol Lilu-

ashvili, the [ostracizing](#) of the former Prime Minister Gharibashvili, the [pressure](#) on former business allies, and the consolidation around a smaller political core fit this logic. Georgian Dream is being reshaped into a compact, obedient structure capable of executing Russia's strategic agenda without internal friction or competing loyalties.

Beyond the No Return Point

The political [developments](#) in today's Georgia (arrests of opposition leaders, bans on parties, introduction of restrictive laws, attacks on civil society and the media, fierce anti-Western propaganda) often precede constitutional or referendum-based attempts to formalize a geopolitical realignment and full capture of the state institutions. Georgia fits this pattern with alarming precision. The emerging strategy appears to involve holding a referendum (with recently [announced amendments](#) to the national law on referendum) on adopting a neutral status, removing the constitutional clause defining Georgia's Euro-Atlantic orientation, and formally withdrawing the EU membership application submitted to the EU. These measures would lock in a geopolitical shift that future governments would struggle to reverse. A deeper analysis of Georgia's internal discourse suggests several indicators and red flags that indicate this strategy is well underway.

One of the most revealing indicators of the effort to recalibrate the country's geopolitical orientation is the sweeping education reforms targeting [schools](#) and [universities](#). These reforms introduce a centralized and politically controlled governance structure that places curriculum, administration, and content under direct state supervision. This architecture mirrors the Russian and post-Soviet educational model, which relies on ideological conformity, centralized control, and the suppression of critical thought. Such a system is fundamentally incompatible with European standards.

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The significance of this shift cannot be overstated. Policies can be reversed, governments can change, but transforming the identity-forming institutions of a nation creates long-term structural effects. Steering schools and universities toward a Russian-style system that cannot interoperate with the Western educational space is intended to ensure that the country's cultural and intellectual fabric aligns with Moscow, making any future return to European integration far more difficult. This move illustrates how deeply the project of pushing Georgia past the point of no return extends into the state's social foundations.

However, if the plan of gradual subjugation fails, a coercive alternative remains available for the Kremlin, as always. According to the [model](#) described by Yuri Bezmenov, the destabilization phase is already well advanced in Georgia. Institutions that once ensured national resilience have been weakened from within as laws are rewritten, freedoms restricted, and corruption and economic entanglements expand in ways that favor those aligned with the subverting force, steadily preparing the ground for an engineered crisis. In an environment defined by rising temperatures, deepening polarization, and unprecedented societal tension, a premeditated precipitating event would be sufficient to ignite unrest. Should such a crisis occur, Georgia may be forced to confront the true purpose of the large number of physically fit Russian nationals who [settled in](#) Georgia in 2022 as part of the migration influx.

Combat Power Assessment

According to the established [pattern](#) of influence operations, malign foreign interference targets

two principal dimensions: policy and administrative structures, and public sentiment within broader society. In Georgia, the Georgian Dream has already fallen into what analysts define as an exclusive sphere of influence. It has relinquished the ability to make domestic or foreign policy decisions that contradict Kremlin interests and shows limited capacity to safeguard Georgia's long-term strategic goals. One entire dimension of national resilience is, therefore, under complete Russian control.

Despite a full-scale authoritarian crackdown, it remains active and mobilized after a full year of continuous protest. This resilience limits Russia's ability to consolidate political control as it did in Belarus, under earlier administrations in Armenia, or in Central Asian partner states.

The second dimension presents a serious challenge for Moscow. Georgia's civil society has proven remarkably resilient. Despite a full-scale authoritarian crackdown, it remains active and mobilized after a full year of continuous protest. This resilience limits Russia's ability to consolidate political control as it did in Belarus, under earlier administrations in Armenia, or in Central Asian partner states. In addition, broader support for the European future remains very high among Georgia's citizens.

Two other stakeholders shape the balance of forces. The first is an all-but-decimated pro-Western political opposition that has been largely neutralized through legal pressure, fragmentation, and repression. It is currently unable to provide a credible political alternative or translate public sentiment into institutional change. The second is the democratic international community and Western institutions, which have attempted to

support democratic processes in Georgia but have largely failed to develop an actionable or unified strategy. In addition, some long-time pro-Russian satellites are riding the momentum and [consolidating](#) into political parties to help push Georgian Dream's agenda, notably by supporting the idea of neutrality.

Western partners express normative commitment to Georgian democracy but lack a coherent strategy to reinforce it.

Like any political confrontation, the struggle ultimately revolves around legitimacy. On one side stands a deeply entrenched yet vulnerable Georgian Dream regime aligned with Moscow and lacking internal or external legitimacy. Opposing it is a strong and determined civil society that continues to defend policy alternatives, legitimate national interests, and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The political opposition remains structurally weak and unable to channel public demands into a viable political process. Meanwhile, Western partners express normative commitment to Georgian democracy but lack a coherent strategy to reinforce it.

From Friction to Strategic Opportunity

The outcome of this legitimacy contest will determine whether or not Georgia reclaims its democratic trajectory or remains anchored within Russia's sphere of influence. There should be no illusions about changing Ivanishvili's behavior without decisive and clear pressure on his financial security. His political survival depends on maintaining a system rooted in dependency, informal control, and alignment with Moscow's strategic goals. If symbolic sanctions continue, while he may offer cosmetic concessions, his Russian management style will never allow genuine political com-

petition. As in the [earlier cases](#), he will promise what is needed to appease, yet stop short of allowing free and fair elections that he might lose. If not challenged by severe sanctions, there might only be a space for cosmetic reforms and staged gestures at best. Still, the core architecture of shadow governance will remain intact unless external pressure shifts the cost structure it faces.

The Kremlin seeks to push Georgia beyond the point of no return, even when this involves inflicting severe political costs on the regime.

Yet this picture contains a critical, underappreciated vulnerability. There is now a growing friction between Moscow's objectives and the interests of the Georgian Dream leadership. The Kremlin seeks to push Georgia beyond the point of no return, even when this involves inflicting severe political costs on the regime. Ivanishvili, however, is focused on the long-term survival of his system, which he sees as the sole guarantee of his personal safety and financial security. This divergence is a strategic opening. It creates an opportunity to pressure the regime at the exact point where its interests no longer fully align with Moscow's and where internal loyalty strains are already visible.

A viable strategy, therefore, requires two parallel tracks. The first track is sustained engagement with Georgia's civil society and other pro-democracy forces as the legitimate frontline defenders of the nation's Euro-Atlantic future. Western partners must move beyond standard bureaucratic responses that have failed to yield tangible results and find ways to work directly with genuine pro-democracy forces in Georgia without allowing anticipated criticism or attacks from Georgian Dream to deter engagement, since such attacks are inevitable and now serve primarily as a self-imposed barrier to Western action.

The second component of a viable strategy is direct engagement with Ivanishvili himself, built on the recognition that the friction between Moscow's goals and his own long-term interests creates a narrow but real strategic opportunity. For Ivanishvili to factor Western interests into his calculations, he must first feel the genuine cost of ignoring them. This requires sanctions, asset freezes, and financial disruption, applied with sufficient force to alter his risk assessment. Only under such pressure will he consider recalibrating his position. Yet, pressure alone is insufficient. It must be paired with a credible, clearly articulated off-ramp that guarantees his personal security and financial protection in exchange for his withdrawal from Georgian politics. The experience of Moldova under Vladimir Plahotniuc shows that decisive sanctions combined with a structured exit plan can unlock change even in entrenched systems. But the regional context today is different, and Georgia's political environment is far more volatile. The approach must, therefore, be adapted with nuance and sustained engagement from key Western actors.

This is the most challenging part of the strategy, as there is limited diplomatic stamina to prioritize Georgia amid global crises. Yet, the alternative is far worse for the entire region. Failure to act would allow Russia to complete its subjugation of Georgia.

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The friction between Moscow's strategic ambitions and Ivanishvili's instinct for self-preservation creates an exploitable weakness. If the West acts with clarity, coordination, and resolve, it can transform

this strategic vulnerability into an opportunity to restore Georgia's democratic path. The window of opportunity is getting narrower by the day, and the authoritarian crackdown eliminates the pockets of freedom in Georgia's fabric very quickly. The

coming months will determine whether this window is seized or lost, and whether Georgia crosses the point of no return or starts reclaiming its place within the Euro-Atlantic community ■