

# How Should Georgia Treat America's "Retreat?"

In the annals of American diplomacy, few slogans have provoked as much debate as "America First." Coined during Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and revived with intensity in his second term beginning in January 2025, the phrase is often misinterpreted as a call for isolationism and a retreat from the world's complexities to Fortress America. Yet, the evidence of the past year points in the opposite direction. Rather than withdrawing, the United States has expanded its footprint through tariffs, airstrikes, diplomatic bargaining, and selective multilateralism—all calibrated to advance U.S. interests with greater efficiency and fewer ideological constraints.

America First, in its 2025 incarnation, is a form of strategic interventionism. It is not a plea for quietism but a doctrine of muscular engagement performed on America's terms. Trump's approach reflects a belief that the world is best shaped

through concentrated, transactional relationships that deliver measurable benefits. Stephen Wertheim's [observation](#) that Trump does not "leave the room" but rather "turns the tables" captures this shift well.

Trump's first term hinted at this pattern through selective exits from frameworks like the Paris [Agreement](#) or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action ([JCPOA](#)), the moves often misread as broader disengagement. In reality, the United States remained deeply entangled in global affairs, expanding defense spending, confronting China's economic dominance, and brokering the [Abraham Accords](#). By 2025, the posture hardened. An USD 848 billion defense budget, modernization of air and naval assets, and a comprehensive reorientation toward critical supply chains all signaled a renewed push for geopolitical dominance.

Trump's revival of aggressive tariff policy in 2025



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extends America First into economic coercion. The administration's use of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act ([IEEPA](#)) enabled it to deploy tariffs as technical instruments and political tools to extract concessions. A universal [10% tariff](#) on imports, supplemented by targeted levies on Canadian, Mexican, Indian, and Brazilian goods, created negotiating leverage across multiple theaters. China [faced](#) peak tariffs of 145% before settling at 30%. Rare earths, TikTok's operational structure, and Chinese port investments all became bargaining chips.

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This aggressive economic posture links trade to national security in ways unseen since the early Cold War. It reflects the administration's view that markets and geopolitics are inseparable. A view of trade has replaced traditional liberal assumptions about the autonomy of commerce as a pressure mechanism. In this world, the question is not whether trade is free or fair, but whether it advances U.S. strategic advantage.

"Peace through strength," long a Republican mantra, has become the operational logic of Trump's second term. Military interventions have intensified, not diminished. Over 500 airstrikes were [carried out](#) by mid-2025, nearly matching the pace of the entire previous administration. From Yemen to Fordow, from Al-Shabaab to Latin American narco-terror networks, the United States has demonstrated a willingness to act independently of multilateral institutions when its interests demand it.

This unilateral assertiveness is not a sign of American insecurity but of renewed confidence. The administration views military force, economic leverage, and cyber capabilities as integrated tools of statecraft. War is deterred not by treaties but by capacity and resolve. In this worldview, hesitation invites escalation; action imposes order.

## New Security Strategy and What Should Georgia Make of It?

The November 2025 National Security Strategy (NSS) formalizes the America First concept. It identifies economic security, reindustrialization, and energy dominance as core objectives. It reframes multilateral institutions as instruments to be used only when they advance U.S. power. It insists that allies and partners perform a larger share of regional security (“burden-shifting” and “burden-sharing” are central pillars). And it underscores sovereignty as a guiding principle, elevating the autonomy of nation-states over transnational structures. The result is a foreign policy that is neither isolationist nor idealistic, but sharply pragmatic.

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One of the most striking features of the new NSS is its implicit hierarchy of U.S. adversaries. China is never explicitly labeled “the enemy,” yet the entire strategy is organized around the need to compete with and constrain Beijing. Control of rare earths, access to strategic minerals, dominance in critical technologies, and the defense of supply-chain

sovereignty are all framed through this lens. Georgia’s recent habit of proclaiming value proximity and strategic partnership with China looks strategically tone-deaf in this context: aligning with the very power that Washington now treats as its central competitor is a self-inflicted wound and a very lousy geopolitical strategy.

Equally important is the NSS’s treatment of Russia. Moscow is no longer described as an existential threat but as a threat to Europe, which should be strengthened with U.S. support. The primary U.S. interest vis-à-vis Russia is the termination of the war in Ukraine and “strategic stability.” This does not signal deference to the Kremlin; rather, it reflects a strategic assessment that Russia lacks the economic, military, and technological base to serve as a peer to a great power.

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It is a fact that Russia’s war economy is weakening under U.S. pressure and can be weakened further if the U.S. continues its efforts in this direction. The October 2025 sanctions [aimed](#) at the energy sector struck at the financial core of Moscow’s war machine. Rosneft, Lukoil, and their networks have seen declining revenues and Russia’s National Wealth Fund has contracted dramatically. Putin’s fiscal space is narrowing. Washington’s goal is clear: undermine Russia’s long-term capacity for regional disruption while intensifying the search for an acceptable end to the Ukraine war.

The broader implication of Trump’s Russia policy for Georgia is evident. Cozying up to a state the United States now treats as a declining power, rather than as a strategic adversary, is a miscalculation of historic proportions.

For Georgia, the lesson should be not that the U.S. has given in to Russia's claim to reestablish its zones of influence, but that it should align more closely with Europe in its quest for stability and strength. Aligning with Russia at a time when Washington openly deprioritizes it is not only unwise but also counterproductive. In American eyes, Georgia begins to resemble a country voluntarily subordinating itself to a declining regional actor at the expense of its Western trajectory.

The NSS also questions another long-held Georgian expectation - NATO enlargement is no longer a policy priority for Washington. For Georgia, this requires a fundamental recalibration. The path to security cannot lie in bandwagoning with Russia nor in illusions of neutrality. It lies instead in deeper cooperation with the United States and Europe on defense reform, intelligence collaboration, and Black Sea security - tangible guarantees that do not depend on the enlargement paradigm of the 2000s. It is also more important than ever to couple Georgia's security and stability with the ongoing peace negotiations over Ukraine, since the outcome of the talks and the new security order will determine the rules of the game on the European continent. America, neither in its statements nor its security strategy, plans to allow Russia and China to take over European interests. After all, the Security strategy states that Washington "will deny non-Hemispheric competitors the ability to position forces or other threatening capabilities, or to own or control strategically vital assets, in our [Western] Hemisphere."

This is the strategic environment in which Georgia must operate, whether its leaders acknowledge it or not.

## Diplomatic Maneuvers and Global Bargaining in the Neighborhood

Diplomatically, 2025 has been a year of intense engagement. The United States has shaped NATO procurement, revitalized the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, negotiated Gaza cease-fire channels, and scrutinized Chinese-linked infrastructure from the Pacific to the Caribbean. Even territorial ambitions—such as renewed interest in Greenland—reflect the administration's readiness to rethink traditional boundaries.

Critics warn that shuttering USAID programs or scaling back the Voice of America undermines soft power, yet the overall pattern of U.S. foreign policy contradicts claims of retreat. America is not withdrawing, but rather reprioritizing.

Trump's diplomacy has affected the South Caucasus as well. In August 2025, Trump hosted Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev for the signing of a landmark peace framework. The Trump-brokered TRIPP Corridor through Syunik/Zangezur has become a flagship of American strategic engineering: a U.S.-led consortium, a bypass of Russian and Iranian routes, a direct reduction of Moscow's leverage, and an integration of the region into Western logistics networks. TRIPP is now an infrastructure project with a geopolitical goal to reorder Eurasian transit. Recent visits of U.S. high officials to Yerevan and Tbilisi confirm that the U.S. interests in TRIPP are real. In addition, TRIPP, if linked with the Central Asian transit, can indeed become an alternative to Russian transit capability, especially in time of war or after it ends.

The November 2025 C5+1 (Central Asia plus U.S.) Summit in Washington marked a watershed moment for entrenching U.S. interests in the wider region. Uzbekistan is [committed](#) to investing and purchasing over USD 100 billion in the United States over the next decade. Kazakhstan [added](#) USD 17 billion in deals. The region's leaders arrived with uranium, rare earths, gold, and connectivity proposals. The United States arrived with capital, technology, and the promise of a "direct line to the White House." Both sides left with a shared understanding: Central Asia is no longer an afterthought of U.S. policy but a core element of the strategy to diversify away from China and Russia.

This shift is entirely consistent with the NSS. Control of critical minerals, supply chains, and overland corridors defines the new map of American engagement. But in this concert of diplomatic and strategic interactions, Georgia is remarkably absent.

## Georgia – “Uncatchable Joe”

As Armenia integrates into American diplomacy and Azerbaijan becomes a logistical pivot, as Türkiye maintains its irreplaceable strategic role, as Central Asia's leaders secure access and attention, Georgia stands alone – absent, isolated, misaligned, and self-indulged in incomprehensible propaganda-driven assaults on the “deep state,” the “global war party,” and anyone who criticizes Tbilisi's drive towards one-party dictatorship.

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American retreat that never came, in a European collapse that never occurred, and in a Russian lightning victory that never materialized. They imagined partnerships with China at the very moment Washington identified Beijing as its principal competitor; they pursued warmer ties with Russia as U.S. strategy downgraded Moscow from primary threat to manageable disruptor; they chose the pragmatic isolationism at the moment when the opportunity opened for the strategic U.S. transit interests in the wider region.

By passing Russia-inspired “foreign agents” laws, attacking Western institutions in domestic propaganda, and flirting with alternative geopolitical patrons, the Georgian government turned the country from a strategic partner into a reputational risk. Meanwhile, every other state in the region found its place. Armenia delivers peace, realigns with the EU, and strives for the opening of trade routes with all neighbors. Azerbaijan delivers energy resources and connectivity while building alliances across the region and the world, including Europe and Washington. Central Asia delivers minerals and transit, including through the TRIPP corridor. Türkiye delivers strategic balancing, military strength, and transit from East to West. Georgia delivers only uncertainty.

The implications for Georgian foreign policy are profound. A country that should be central to Black Sea security, the Middle Corridor, and Western deterrence architecture is now perceived as drifting toward dictatorship and strategic ambiguity. In the emerging Eurasian order defined by TRIPP, critical minerals, burden-shifting, and supply-chain sovereignty, Georgia is the only actor not adapting.

Yet, Washington still possesses significant leverage and should use it deliberately. American financial scrutiny can limit oligarchic influence, targeted visa and property measures can introduce costs for anti-Western behavior, stricter conditionality

on defense cooperation can reestablish red lines, and closer coordination with Brussels can prevent Tbilisi from playing partners against each other. At the same time, Washington should deepen direct engagement with Georgian society, municipalities, civil actors, and the private sector, ensuring that the country's pro-Western majority remains anchored even if its government drifts. The alternative would be Georgia under Russian and Chinese influences, neither of which is there to defend American interests in the region.

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The Wild West anecdote remains painfully relevant. A man storms into a saloon, shouts, and fires into the air, then rushes out. When asked who he

is, the answer comes: "Uncatchable Joe." When asked why he is uncatchable, the reply is simple: because nobody wants him. Today, this moniker applies not to Georgia's people, who remain steadfastly pro-Western, but to their leadership, whose erratic course has made Georgia the region's lone outlier.

In the musical-chairs game that best illustrates the new Eurasian diplomacy, everyone else has found their seat. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan sits firmly. Aliyev and Pashinyan sit after reshaping their region. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and the other Central Asian leaders sit after bringing billions to the table. They all understood the music and sat before it stopped. Only Georgia is left circling. Unless it changes direction—and unless the United States uses its leverage with clarity and purpose—the music may stop with Georgia still standing, without a chair, and without a place in the room where decisions about its neighborhood are now being made ■