



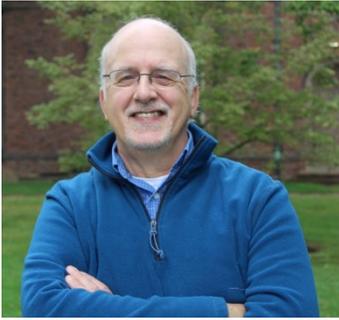
Can Georgia Afford Transactional Foreign Policy?

As the one-year anniversary of Russian invasion of Ukraine has passed, it's clear that Putin's plans to "Denazify" and "Demilitarize" Kyiv are failing. Instead, the war has significantly altered the world order and triggered the collective West's unprecedented mobilization against Russian aggression not seen since the Cold War. This shift in the global security architecture left small countries like Georgia vulnerable to the increasing hybrid threat the Kremlin poses.

Despite supporting Ukraine on various international platforms, the Georgian government's ambiguous stance towards Russia and, at times, antagonistic relations with Kyiv drew public and international criticism, with some pundits arguing that the Georgian Dream ruling party had abandoned its value-based foreign policy, resulting in the country losing strategic partners.

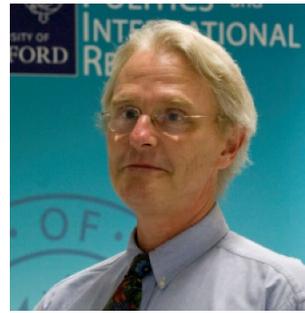
At the invitation of the Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP), a selection of foreign and Georgian experts are giving their responses to the following questions:

1. *What kind of foreign policy should a small country like Georgia apply in a rapidly changing geopolitical and security environment?*
2. *Can Georgia afford a value-based foreign policy or should it continue a more transactional approach?*
3. *What are the risks and benefits of both approaches?*



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The war against Ukraine, even if we do not know the outcome, will change the Eurasian landscape forever. Its impact in Europe will last for a century or more. Russia is the most powerful regional power in northern Eurasia and will always be present on Georgia's borders. But it has already lost this war - its military capacity has been damaged for decades to come, its soft power - if it ever had any - has been demolished. By 2050 the country may have no more than 120 million people within its borders unless it accepts massive numbers of immigrants. It has lost its most profitable markets in the West and its political influence, whether exercised through oil and gas pipelines, economic power, or partnerships like the Eurasian Economic Union, is already being challenged by the EU, China, Turkey, and the US.

In this new environment, there are both dangers and opportunities for Georgia. The dangers are connected to the collapse of Russia (what will happen in the North Caucasus?) or the rise of a post-Putin revanchism. South Ossetia and Abkhazia remain dangerous levers in Russia's hands. The opportunities, however, come with a better balance of power in the South Caucasus as rivals to Russia begin to move in. The expansion of the EU and NATO in the Black Sea region will be particularly welcome for Georgia and provide conditions for a more flexible multi-vector foreign policy, advantageous for small powers like Georgia. Georgia must realign with Ukraine and Moldova as part of a pro-European "package of three" to ensure that when the final peace settlement is made, Georgia is on the right side of the line and in the Western sphere.

Georgia's geopolitical and security environment is indeed changing rapidly, largely but not only because of Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine and the Western response to Russia's invasion. Deciding what Georgia should do is difficult; Russia is right next door and is an imminent threat to Georgian security. The United States and its allies are ever more deeply committed to defeating Russia in Ukraine and they expect that their friends such as Georgia should help. The problem is that if Georgia tilts too close to Russia in order to prevent serious regional disruption, it risks alienating the West. If it tilts too close to the West, it risks alienation of Russia and consequent economic and security disruption. There is no easy answer. Probably the best you can do is to walk the very narrow path between the two.

The US can afford a values-based foreign policy. Georgia cannot, because of its geographical position and its small size. Of course, the dichotomy is not one or the other. Most states (including the US) are both values based and transactional. Following the previous answer, I guess that on balance Georgia's foreign policy should lean towards the transactional without forgetting the values.

Since I object to the dichotomy presented in the second question, and I don't see a reason to have to choose between them. On risks and benefits if you choose one or the other: if you adopt a heavily values-based approach, you might accelerate your long road into the EU and NATO, but Russia might repeat 2008; If you tilt too much the other way, you can kiss goodbye to EU and candidacy and a NATO membership action ... for a long time. It's a tough position for Georgia. Happily you don't need to choose, as I suggested in my answer to question 1. You walk the line.



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Whether Georgia should pursue a value-based or transactional foreign policy is not a question of what can be “afforded” as much as what kind of country Georgians want. The ambition to transform Georgia into a European-style liberal democracy inevitably requires the country to retain liberal values as an intrinsic part of its foreign and domestic policies (which cannot be easily separated) and to stay oriented towards the Euro-Atlantic security community. It is sometimes suggested that Georgia should seek a “neutral” position in foreign affairs, in order to build positive relations with the West as well as Russia and focus on its own domestic development. This, however, would increase Georgia’s vulnerability to Russian influence and weaken the external incentives for Georgia to abide by the standards required for EU and NATO integration. The perception of Georgia as a reforming and democratizing country, which Georgia has invested so much in over the years, remains one of its most important assets in relations with the West, and giving up on this would reduce the interest among Georgia’s external partners in the country’s political future.

Georgia certainly faces significant security risks in the future, however, these depend less on the choices made in Georgia’s foreign policy than on what the eventual outcome of the war in Ukraine will imply in terms of Russian capability for intervention in other states. Regardless of how the war ends, Georgian foreign policy will have to deal with an aggressive and revisionist Russia, which will seek to increase its influence in

Georgia. While this is not a principally new situation for Georgia, the threat posed to the Russian regime by an eventual loss in Ukraine could conceivably incentivize increasingly desperate measures to retain or regain influence and control elsewhere (the averted coup attempt in Moldova is an example). On the other hand, Russia’s capacity to project influence in neighboring states is also in question given the trajectory of the war in Ukraine and the importance of the South Caucasus to the U.S. and EU is increasing due to geopolitical needs induced by the war.



Dr. David Aprasidze,

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Let's start with the definitions. A small state cannot transform its environment and has to react and adjust to external impulses. Transactional foreign policy means ad hoc, case-by-case foreign behavior, the main goal of which is short-term gains. Traditionally, we can call such policies "balancing," "multi-vector," or "non-alignment." In contrast, value-based foreign policy involves pursuing more stable and long-term goals and having allies.

Georgia cannot afford to pursue a transactional foreign policy. Although such a policy may appear practical in a swiftly shifting environment, for a small nation, lacking a dependable ally can rapidly turn into a trap that eventually infringes on its sovereignty. A big, aggressive state will either turn such a country into its satellite (at best) or directly subordinate it. We do not need to turn to history for examples since the cases of Armenia (relatively soft subjugation), and Belarus (relatively hard) are notable enough

However, international relations are not only a domain of power. Norms (assumptions about "good" and "bad") have always been important, and today their weight has increased significantly. The mobilization of the democratic world to support Ukraine shows that values and not only geopolitics determine the behavior of countries. Russia's aggression triggered geopolitical processes that opened up space for the materialization of values. The manifestation of this is the invitation of Ukraine, Moldova (and hopefully Georgia) to join the European Union.

What should Georgia do? Georgia should not balance between countries but strive for a good combination of long-term strategic goals and short-term tactical objectives. The strategic goal, as

it is enshrined in the country's constitution, should be integration in the Euro-Atlantic space, and the objectives should base on four principles: 1. Loyalty to values in domestic politics (we are a democratic country, i.e., we naturally belong to the Euro-Atlantic space); 2. Support Ukraine by word and deed (and eliminate any ambiguity in this regard); 3. Balance between short-term (quick return) and long-term (linking to stable markets) policies in trade and economic relations; 4. Emphasize peaceful conflict resolution (and link it to the perspective of European integration). With such a foreign policy, Georgia will have greater chances to achieve its strategic goals in a rapidly changing environment.



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Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) is a Tbilisi-based non-profit, non-partisan, research and analysis organization. GIP works to strengthen the organizational backbone of democratic institutions and promote good governance and development through policy research and advocacy in Georgia.

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