



December 2023

Georgian Institute of Politics

EXPERT COMMENT

Issue #25

Navigating Tensions: Geopolitical Implications of Russia's Permanent Naval Base in Ochamchire

The full-scale war initiated by Russia in Ukraine has reshaped the international order, notably impacting security dynamics in the Black Sea region. Despite its initial attempts to maintain balanced relations with Russia, the war's effects have spilled over into Georgia, introducing new security challenges, including Russia's plans for a permanent naval base in Ochamchire. This move poses a significant threat not only to Georgia but to the security of the entire region. If realized, this move could turn the region into an additional battleground or a flexible strategic asset for Russia's operations against Ukraine, potentially extending the conflict's reach into Georgia.

At the request of the **Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP)**, a selection of experts from different countries responded to the following questions:

- 1. What are the specific risks and potential consequences of Russia establishing a naval base in Ochamchire for Georgia and the wider Black Sea region?*
- 2. How can establishing a naval base in Ochamchire impact conflict resolution efforts in Georgia and the wider region?*
- 3. What actions can the Georgian government and key international actors (NATO, EU, and OSCE) take to address the security challenges posed by the potential naval base and mitigate its potential risks?*



Dr. Tracey German,

Ph.D., Professor of Conflict and Security at the Defence Studies Department, King's College London

Russia's plans to open a permanent naval base at the Black Sea port of Ochamchire poses some significant risks both for Georgia and the wider Black Sea region. Firstly, it would represent further consolidation of Russia's occupation of Georgian territory, which already 'hosts' two permanent Russian military bases, the 7th Base of the Russian Armed Forces at Gudauta in Abkhazia and the 4th Base in South Ossetia. These military installations provide Moscow with a tool of coercion over Tbilisi and underpin Russian dominance in the occupied territories, undermining efforts to resolve the conflicts. Discussions about Ochamchire are not new: in the wake of the 2008 war, there was some discussion about the construction of a new base for the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Ochamchire. However, Russia's war in Ukraine has given renewed impetus to these plans as Moscow seeks to disperse its Black Sea Fleet from Sevastopol, which is vulnerable to Ukrainian strikes (as is the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossisk). Relocating some of the fleet to Ochamchire risks dragging Georgia into the war: Kyiv has already said that the planned naval base would be a legitimate target. Finally, the proposed base will increase Russia's maritime footprint and influence in the Black Sea, and ensure it

remains able to project its military power outside of the region, posing a risk of continuing instability beyond the wider Black Sea, in both military and economic terms. The ongoing war has accentuated the importance of the wider Black Sea region to international security and stability; Georgia needs to ensure that the implications of the Russian plans are fully appreciated by actors such as NATO and the OSCE.



**Major-General
Vakhtang
Kapanadze,**

Former Chief of General Staff of the Georgian Armed Forces (GAF)

From a purely military-operational point of view, the construction of Ochamchire base does not add any vital threat to the already existing challenging military-political environment of Georgia: Russia can use the waters and ports of Abkhazia for its ships at any time, as well as affect the territory of Georgia from its warships even from raids or open sea. What is important here is the potential political and economic impact of the presence of the Russian base on the coast of Georgia, which will significantly hinder the economic development of Georgia and the visits of allied ships. The fact that the Russians generally do not talk about the opening of the base, and the Abkhazian side does, might be a sign that the Russians are using this fact as a

political trade towards Georgia at this stage. Moreover, discussions over establishing a naval base in Ochamchire will only prevent the solution to the problem when it comes to the conflict resolution efforts in Georgia and the wider region and significantly increase the tension in the region as a whole. Finally, Russia only recognizes power. Therefore, I consider the application of creating a military base of the allies or partners in response as the only deterrent measure. At the same time, the Defense Forces of Georgia should review their existing operational plans and make pivotal changes considering the new reality.



Dr. Andrey Makarychev,

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The resumed plans to build a Russian naval base in the occupied Abkhazia means two things for Georgia. First, it puts an end to naive expectations that the neutral position on the war against Ukraine taken by the Georgian government would bring some palpable fruits. It becomes clear that Moscow has no intentions to reward Tbilisi for abstaining from joining international sanctions against Russia and for agreeing to resume air transportation links between the two countries. As seen from the Kremlin, these gestures have little geopolitical and

security value as compared to the interests of the Russian military machine. Second, the base in Ochamchire means that war moves much closer to Georgia, and there will be much fewer chances for any Black Sea country to dissociate itself from its consequences. Russia brings significant elements of its naval fleet into the occupied Georgian territory that might be targeted by the Ukrainian armed forces, possibly with the consent of Ukraine's Western allies. None of these two points makes Georgia more secure. Moreover, both create new preconditions for a direct annexation of Abkhazia by Russia in the future, along the lines of Luhansk and Donetsk.



**Dr. Tornike
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After the start of the Russia-Ukraine war and Kyiv's recent successful military campaign to oust the Russian Black Sea Fleet from Crimea, Russia has decided to relocate some of its military vessels from Sevastopol to Ochamchire, potentially bringing military hostilities to Georgia. This move would allow Russia to use Georgian territory in its military campaign against Ukraine, making the Black

Sea Fleet stationed in Ochamchire a legitimate target for Ukrainian Defense Forces. The potential exchange of fire between Russian and Ukrainian forces on Georgian territory and along its Black Sea coast could endanger the lives and safety of residents of Abkhazia, including Georgian citizens in the occupied Gali district. The warzone could also spread to the nearby Samegrelo region, jeopardizing international trade through Georgia's Poti Port and hindering the building of the Anaklia deep sea port. Thus, Russia's upgraded military presence in Abkhazia aggravates military and economic threats to Georgian national security and contributes to the destabilization of the wider Black Sea region. Any additional Russian military build-up on Georgia's occupied territories, and using these territories to wage war against a third

country, violates the 2008 Six-Point Ceasefire Agreement and could hinder progress in Russia-Georgia negotiations at the Geneva International Discussions as well as the restoration of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meetings in Gali. In response to those recent developments, the Georgian government should address the risks associated with the deployment of the Russian Black Sea Fleet on its territory and seek additional security assistance from strategic partners. Tbilisi could ask Brussels to bolster the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) by introducing maritime patrols across the Black Sea Coast of the Samegrelo region to prevent Russian military provocations.



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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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HOW TO QUOTE THIS DOCUMENT:

"Navigating Tensions: Geopolitical Implications of Russia's Permanent Naval Base in Ochamchire", Expert Comment #25, Georgian Institute of Politics, December 2023.

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