

GEORGIA'S STABILITY AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE CONTEXT OF REGIONAL CONFLICTS

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Abstract

The article reviews the ongoing conflicts and crisis events in the Caucasus region, which cannot be considered as isolated events. They are a reflection of regional and global geopolitical interests, which directly create challenges in the security, economic and political spheres. Special attention is paid to the Russian Federation as a major regional actor, which systematically uses ethnic confrontations and frozen conflicts to shape the domestic and foreign policies of neighboring states. The study shows how these conflicts create security instability in the South Caucasus, especially for Georgia, which is considered a central figure in regional processes. The country, acting as a strategic bridge between Europe and Asia, carries a significant geopolitical burden, which affects both the country's economic development and its international transit function. Georgia's geostrategic location determines the country's role in the energy, logistics and security systems. The article also discusses Georgia's state policy, focused on peaceful conflict resolution, strengthening security, and deepening cooperation with international partners. The study shows that achieving stability in the Caucasus is a complex, multi-layered process that requires the consistent involvement of both local and global actors. In addition, the review highlights the economic, transit, and social aspects of regional conflicts, which are directly related to Georgia's political decisions and regional strategic visions. The study aims to better understand the security system in the Caucasus and identify the factors that determine regional stability processes.

Keywords: conflicts, Caucasus region, international partners, Georgia, security, stability.

Introduction

The South Caucasus is located in an important geopolitical area, which represents a kind of crossroads, both for a free and prosperous future, as well as for difficulties and challenges. The security and development prospects of the countries in the region depend on the de-escalation of existing conflicts. Accordingly, the conflicts in the region are not only internal problems of the borders of the states, but also have an impact on the daily life of the state of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. In particular:

- Disruptions to energy transport routes cause gas and electricity shortages;
- Instability of trade corridors limits economic growth;
- Refugee flows and the situation of ethnic minorities pose new socio-economic challenges.

Given the current reality, Georgia faces a major choice on how to resolve its foreign policy in the region, while maintaining a certain degree of stability and neutrality. Strengthening and developing the country's economic position is one of the country's important strategic steps, which is directly related to the development of a security policy in the region.

The purpose of the article is Studying and analyzing the impact of ongoing conflicts in the region on the state policy and economy of Georgia in order to address the challenges of regional security and development. Accordingly, tasks were also outlined on the basis of which the problem should be identified. Attention should be focused on the direct and external consequences of the conflicts, which will affect the foreign and domestic political stability of Georgia; The situation of the regional economy should be analyzed, in particular the role of energy transit and the dynamics of investments; We should provide practical recommendations that will help Georgia effectively manage existing geopolitical challenges in the process of forming a new world order.

In the process of developing the article, we formulated several research questions:

1. What role does the Russian Federation play in shaping security politics across the Caucasus region today?
2. How do regional conflicts in the Caucasus influence the flexibility of Georgia's foreign policy and the overall quality of its national security environment?
3. What are the key economic consequences of regional instability for Georgia, particularly within the energy and transit sectors?
4. Through which mechanisms and policy instruments can Georgia respond more effectively to regional challenges and enhance long-term economic stability?

In examining the research question, the study primarily employs qualitative research methods, complemented by quantitative approaches. Statistical data are used to strengthen the argumentation and to identify key trends. Within the qualitative framework, the analysis relies on both primary and secondary sources, including content analysis. The theoretical foundation of the study is based on the perspectives of political realism and constructivism.

Hans Morgenthau, one of the principal thinkers of classical realism, argued that international relations are fundamentally driven by the pursuit of power rooted in national interests. According to his perspective, global politics cannot be fully explained through moral or ideological frameworks; rather, it is shaped by the distribution and competition of power among states. Morgenthau maintained that states consistently act to ensure their own security and strength, a dynamic that frequently generates tensions and conflict. For him, political realism entails perceiving the international system as it is, rather than through aspirational ideals.¹ Consequently, the balance of power serves as a central mechanism for sustaining stability. In contrast, Alexander Wendt's constructivist theory posits that state behaviour cannot be understood solely through material interests; ideas, beliefs, and socio-cultural contexts play a decisive role. His seminal claim - "Anarchy is what states make of it" emphasizes that the structure of the international system is not predetermined but is instead socially constructed through interaction.² For Wendt, identity shapes interests, and interests shape behaviour. Thus, hostility or cooperation among states depends not only on power relations but also on how states interpret and perceive one another.

The subject of the research is regional conflicts, and the object was defined as follows: the impact of ongoing conflicts in the South and North Caucasus regions and the security architecture and economic policies of regional states related to these conflicts, including Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia.

1. Russia in the South Caucasus: An Overview of Regional Processes and Georgia's Security Environment

After the collapse of the USSR, the Caucasus has been a region of geopolitical confrontations and ethnic conflicts, where local interests are often outweighed by the influence of external forces. For centuries, the region has been a battleground for several empires, with Russia being one of the main players from the time of the empire to the present day. The frozen conflicts in the modern period are part of Russia's foreign policy in the Caucasus, which serves to maintain it in order to have constant leverage over neighboring countries. Real peace between Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia will only be possible if the possibility of such external interference in the region is reduced and the political sovereignty of these states is strengthened.

The South Caucasus region is one of the most strategic and dynamically changing spaces on the Eurasian continent. The geopolitical importance of this space is determined by its geographical location - it is a connecting bridge between the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, the Russian Federation, Iran and Turkey. The interests of great powers intersect in the region, which constantly creates risks of tension and instability.

¹ Art, R., Jervis R., International Politics - Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues. Tbilisi: Ilia State University. 2011.

² Wendt, A., Social Theory of International Politics, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

The South Caucasus is a region of particular importance to Russia, both in terms of security and economy. Its strategic location and ethnic and political diversity make it a center of regional and global interests. Several key factors determine the importance of the region:

- The South Caucasus borders the North Caucasus, which is an important area for Russian security. The North Caucasus, especially Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia, is one of the most unstable and conflict-ridden regions within Russia. Russia's vigilance and control over the South Caucasus is essential to prevent the spread of terrorist and separatist movements. The region also represents a weak point from which it could have a devastating impact on internal security;
- The South Caucasus is a geostrategic dividing zone between Russia and its main southern partners, Turkey and Iran. As such, the region has a significant impact on Russia's international relations. Through the South Caucasus, Russia controls energy routes and trade routes to the south, which gives it significant economic and political advantages. At the same time, the activity of Turkey and Iran in the region leads to a confrontation with Russia's interests and requires a cautious policy;
- The region is characterized by high instability and numerous unresolved internal conflicts. The Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia is particularly difficult for Georgia, as is the issue of the occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali. These conflicts create tension in the South Caucasus region, which explains Russia's desire to actively intervene in order to maintain its influence. Instability also increases the risk of future conflicts and hinders economic development;
- The countries of the South Caucasus play a significant role in the development of the rich mineral resources of the Caspian Basin in the region. Oil, natural gas and other natural resources are important not only for the economy of the region, but also for Russia's energy policy as a whole. Control of these resources allows Russia to increase its influence on the energy market and securely connect the energy carriers of the South and the West;
- Global and regional players, including the US, the EU, Turkey, China and Iran, are increasingly interested in the economically and politically important South Caucasus. This is increasing international competition and pressure on Russia, forcing it to actively and effectively manage its policy in the region.³

As geopolitical competition between the Euro-Atlantic community and other major powers has intensified, the South Caucasus has become integral to Russia's broader strategic ambitions. Moscow seeks to consolidate its influence across the Black Sea basin and adjacent regions, extending even toward the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, where Russia remains actively involved in conflicts such as those in Syria and Libya. Following the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, the 2014 annexation of Crimea, and subsequent intervention in eastern Ukraine, Russia significantly reinforced its military posture in the South Caucasus. This included expanding its bases in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Armenia, thereby deepening its regional entrenchment.

By the early 2020s, Russia's dominance in the region had become more pronounced. Its policies effectively hindered Euro-Atlantic integration processes and bolstered its own leverage-particularly amid renewed tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, where Moscow positioned itself as a so-called "peacekeeping" actor.⁴ After Armenia's defeat in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Yerevan grew increasingly dissatisfied with the reliability of Russian security guarantees and began seeking broader engagement with alternative partners, including actors from the Euro-Atlantic space and Iran. Nevertheless, Armenia's security architecture remains deeply intertwined with Russia, especially in light of contemporary threats emanating from Turkey. A key component of Russia's regional strategy is the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a multimodal project involving rail, maritime, and road links connecting Russia with Iran, Azerbaijan, and states across South and Southeast Asia. This corridor provides Moscow with vital transit leverage and helps mitigate the impact of Western sanctions. Beyond its economic significance, the INSTC constitutes a strategic instrument for Russia, allowing it to maintain control over regional transport networks. The potential establishment of the Zangezur Corridor is of particular interest to Moscow, both for geopolitical leverage and for its role in Armenia-Azerbaijan peace negotiations.

³ Naumkin1, Vitaly V. Russian Policy in the South Caucasus. Columbia University. 2020.

⁴ Ibid.

Taken together, these developments demonstrate Russia's determination to preserve military, economic, and political primacy in the South Caucasus. The region's geostrategic value stemming from its location, energy access, and transit routes positions it as a buffer zone in Russia's efforts to counter NATO and broader Western influence. Additionally, Moscow's long-standing practice of manipulating ethnic and separatist conflicts remains a core instrument in maintaining hegemonic influence across the post-Soviet space.

2. Georgia's Geostrategic Position in the Context of South Caucasus Security

Georgia plays an important role in connecting Central Asia and Europe. This South Caucasus country is crossed by 1,467 kilometers of international transit routes. Cargo transportation through Georgia is carried out by sea, rail and road. Road transport accounts for about 59% of Georgia's total freight turnover, which averages 17.2 million tons per year. In the period from January to June 2024, 249,400 trucks passed through Georgia, which means 87.2 million GEL (approximately 32.3 million USD) in revenue for the state budget.⁵ More than 40 percent of this amount (approximately 13 million USD) was accounted for by Armenian trucks. About 40% of the total volume is related to transit through Armenia. The only land route between Armenia and Russia, the Mtskheta-Stepantsminda-Larsi section, passes through Georgia. Transit transportation is an economically significant benefit for Georgia. Each truck pays 350 GEL (about 130 USD) to move through the country - up from 200 GEL (about 75 USD) until 2022.

In recent years, the number of trucks crossing the Georgian border has been steadily increasing: in 2020 - 315,300, in 2021 - 322,100, in 2022 - 496,300, and in 2023 - 520,000. In the first eight months of 2024, 336,402 trucks have already crossed the Georgian border.⁶

Following the 44-day war in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020, both countries signed an agreement to open all economic and transport routes in the region. Under the agreement, Armenia commits to ensuring a secure transport link between Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan, which aims to ensure the freedom of movement of people, cargo, and vehicles. Additionally, it should be noted that despite the agreement reached in 2020, the transport routes were opened only in October of the current year, and both sides are still working toward determining whether they can ultimately reach an agreement on this corridor.

There is growing concern in Tbilisi that the possible opening of regional infrastructure could reduce the volume of cargo transported through Georgia and harm the country's economic and logistical positions.

Paata Tsagareishvili, Director of the Georgian Transport Corridor Research Center, notes that the ongoing changes in the region have a significant impact on transit dynamics. – “We expect competition to intensify. If relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan stabilize and the road to Nakhichevan and Turkey opens through Armenia, this will create serious competition for Georgia as a transit route. In such a case, a decrease in cargo volumes is fully expected.”⁷ The study conducted by Tsagareishvili indicates that the restoration of the functioning of the railway through the territory of Armenia may activate transport routes that were previously unused. This opinion is based on the changes that have been developing in the region since the Karabakh conflict.

It should be noted that Armenia is a significant producer of resources such as iron, perlite, and various non-ferrous metals, which are supplied to China and other markets through Georgian ports. The launch of alternative routes could significantly damage Georgia's position as a transport hub, especially in the railway direction.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline is one of the most strategic energy projects in the South Caucasus region, connecting Azerbaijani oil to the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan in Turkey, bypassing the Black Sea. For Georgia, this route is not only a source of economic benefits (in the form of taxes and transit

⁵ Elibekyan, G., Hovsepyan, M., Regional transportation routes: How Georgia's transit role is changing in light of new realities, JAM NEWS, 2024.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

fees), but also increases the country's geopolitical importance for the Western energy market. This project has strengthened Western interests in Georgia's security and stability, which is one of the main axes of the country's foreign policy.

Regional conflicts have a significant impact on Georgia's function as a transit corridor. The emergence of new routes, especially in the context of possible cooperation between Azerbaijan and Armenia, creates competition for Georgia. Military tensions and security risks also hinder stable ties and long-term projects. Against this background, Georgia is trying to maintain its transit role through political and economic integration with the West. Strengthening infrastructure and developing adequate responses to regional processes are critical for Georgia.

2.1 Challenges to Georgia's Security Policy

The conflict hotbeds in the South Caucasus – such as the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the occupation of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, or Russia's attempts to dominate security – directly and indirectly reflect on Georgia's security. Each of these cases poses risks for Georgia, both in terms of direct military escalation and diplomatic isolation. For example, the 44-day war between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2020 once again demonstrated how fragile regional stability is. Although Georgia was not directly involved in this conflict, the war significantly affected its economic and transport security. The discussion of new transit routes, including the opening of direct Armenia-Azerbaijani roads, has increased the potential competition for Georgia as a regional transit hub.

In addition to economic aspects, the geopolitical configuration of the South Caucasus directly affects Georgia's defense capabilities. Russia's continued militarization of the occupied territories and Moscow's growing influence in Armenia mean that Russia's security architecture in the region remains strong and can escalate the situation at any time. In addition, Georgia's integration with Western security structures is still ongoing, making the country's foreign policy even more vulnerable in times of crisis.

At the same time, Georgia has certain strategic advantages that allow it to strengthen its position in the region. First of all, this is its geostrategic location, which roughly integrates the country into the energy and transport networks of Europe-Asia. On the other hand, Georgia has managed to maintain stable political structures, which makes it relatively unique compared to other countries in the region.

For Georgia, as an important state in the South Caucasus, positioning itself in this environment is difficult and at the same time strategically important. The Georgian authorities are constantly trying to pursue a balanced foreign policy – on the one hand, it strives for European and Euro-Atlantic integration, and on the other, it experiences geopolitical pressure from Russian interests. This circumstance makes Georgia's security policy more complex.

It can be said that the geopolitical environment of the South Caucasus represents a combination of both opportunities and threats for Georgia. The country's stability, security, and development prospects closely depend on how it manages to reassess its role in the geopolitical balance of the region, diversify its relations with its neighbors and Western partners, and effectively balance internal stability and the protection of national interests.

Abkhazia And Samachablo Conflicts for Georgia Strategic, political And Security In terms of Many Serious Result caused. this Conflicts First More Soviet Union Disintegration Then It started when Ethnic Controversy, separatism And Russia Intervention Combined was creating Permanently Danger Georgia for the sake of the state - for the sake of humanity.

As a result of the conflict, state sovereignty was partially compromised and territorial integrity was violated, which generated structural destabilization within the country and significantly increased the number of internally displaced persons.

The unresolved conflicts in the region were not merely remnants of the past; they served as critical preconditions for the outbreak of the 2008 Russia–Georgia war. The preceding dynamics made evident that any shift in regional power alignments was unacceptable to the Kremlin, which ultimately escalated into open military confrontation.

The August 2008 war posed a number of strategic, political, and economic challenges for Georgia. Although the fighting was short-lived, the long-term consequences of the conflict had serious repercussions on the country's security architecture and international positioning.

One of the main consequences of the war is the worsening situation of territorial integrity. The recognition of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia) as independent states by the Russian Federation not only deepened the existing conflict, but also hindered the possibility of a resolution based on international legal mechanisms. Russian military bases are still located on these territories, which threatens Georgia's sovereignty and disrupts the balance of power in the region.

In terms of security, Georgia's strategic situation has become even more complicated. The constant shifting of occupation lines - the so-called borderization - creates a tense environment among the local population and disrupts the free movement of citizens. At the same time, this process often takes place without a response from the international community, which gives Russia more room for maneuver.

The war has brought about fundamental changes in Georgia's defense policy. The country has strengthened military cooperation with the West, especially NATO, although the process of full integration remains fraught with challenges. After the war, the number of exercises has increased, the communication system has been improved, and strategic plans have been revised, although the country's military potential remains limited compared to Russia.

On the international stage, Georgia is increasingly seeking to deepen ties with its partners. The Association Agreement with the European Union, visa liberalization, and the process of economic integration indicate the path Georgia is taking. However, at the same time, the country remains under constant threat — the risk of conflict with a neighboring state escalating into war, which continues to make Georgia's security environment unpredictable and sensitive.

The war has clearly demonstrated that security is not determined by military capabilities alone. It requires strong institutions, democratic governance, and a sustainable system of international support. Georgia will only be able to address these challenges with a long-term strategic vision and a unified national consensus.

Conclusion

The conflicts in the Caucasus region are the result of complex historical, ethnic and geopolitical components, in which the involvement of the Russian Federation has a major impact on the countries or autonomous republics. Analysis of the conflicts reveals that the dynamics of regional security depend to a large extent on the role of Russia, historical heritage and the conflicting interests of local actors for territorial gains.

The conflicts in the North Caucasus are an example of Russia's attempts to strengthen centralized rule and suppress separatist movements. These processes have exacerbated the security situation in the region and deepened distrust of Moscow's policies, which has had an impact on the entire Caucasus. However, it should be noted that at the same time, dependence on the Russian economy makes it relatively easy for Russia to suppress separatism. Moreover, in the autonomous republics, Russian is declared the main language, and although they may differ in cultural or religious terms, the majority of the population still prefers to remain under the protection of Russia.

Russia uses military, economic, and diplomatic leverage in the Caucasus region to maintain its influence in the region. Its involvement not only contributes to the escalation of conflicts, but also often complicates international efforts to restore stability.

Georgia plays an important role at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, which creates opportunities for economic development for the country. However, in the context of regional competition and a volatile security environment, its transit position faces constant challenges, especially when 20% of its territory is occupied and certain threats are felt from Russia, especially in the development part of the country.

The political background in the region decisively determines Georgia's security strategy, and in addition, this very background determines the country's economic development. Conflicting

neighborhoods, unclear routes, and Russian interests pose a multifaceted threat to the country's security. In order for Georgia to stand strong, especially against Russian aggression, it definitely needs a strong neighboring environment, which, unfortunately, is not reflected in today's reality through Armenian-Azerbaijani communications.

Unfortunately, the events in Abkhazia have shown how fragile coexistence between ethnic groups can be in the face of a weakened central government. Analyzing the historical background helps us better understand the nature of the conflict and its devastating consequences for Georgia.

After the 2008 war, Georgia faced even more security problems when Russia attacked us. The territories occupied by Russia, including Abkhazia and Samachablo, the concentration of military forces, and the barbed wire dividing lines hinder the country's development process and require new mechanisms for protecting national interests, which, on the one hand, are aimed at the country's survival.

The conflicts developing in the Caucasus region – be it the ethnic-military conflicts in the South Caucasus (Karabakh crisis) or the security challenges in the North Caucasus (the Chechen wars, terrorist hotbeds, etc.) – create a unified picture that emphatically points to Russia's geopolitical interests and its constant attempts to maintain its influence over neighboring countries.

In the South Caucasus, the Karabakh conflict has reshaped the map of transport and energy corridors, with direct implications for Georgia, especially when it comes to the future plans for the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan project. In the North Caucasus, Russia's repressive policies in Chechnya and Dagestan have exposed systemic inequalities that remain the basis of the region's fragile balance.

Georgia, as a regional transit bridge in the Caucasus, simultaneously enjoys the strategic advantage of its geographical location and, at the same time, experiences the threats posed by its background. The experience of the Russian-Georgian war, the status quo in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, and the future impact on energy projects clearly show that the challenges facing Georgia are multifactorial and require close international cooperation and a shrewd domestic policy aimed at maintaining and developing the country's pro-Western course. Accordingly, several recommendations were developed during the analysis of the work, the most significant for Georgia.

Outlined key recommendations:

- Strengthening and deepening international strategic partnerships - Georgia should continue to cooperate with Western institutions (the European Union) to enhance its security guarantees and help maintain international support in the face of Russian aggression. Given our country's resources, it is important to have a strong foothold in international politics, including in terms of economic support;
- Strengthening multilateral diplomacy in the region, I think we need to get closer to Azerbaijan and Armenia - Tbilisi should be actively involved in the development of new transport corridors in the South Caucasus, so as not to remain excluded in the context of possible Azerbaijan-Armenia-Turkey cooperation, which stems from the current policy of de-escalation of the Karabakh conflict;
- Strengthening information and security policy in terms of monitoring the processes in the North Caucasus - it is vital for Georgia to analyze current security trends in the region and strengthen preparedness for crises, since it is Russia that often uses this northern part to attack Georgia;
- Internal political consolidation and a long-term strategy for conflict regions – it is necessary to pursue an effective and stable policy towards Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, which will take into account not only the de-occupation strategy, but also the maintenance of real ties with the local society. Some involvement from Russia may be required in this issue, but when it comes to the unification of our country, it is necessary to pursue all the right policies;
- Strengthening energy and transport independence - Georgia should diversify its infrastructure resources, strengthen Black Sea ports, and promote new projects to reduce the impact of regional volatility.

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