



GEORGIA AND BLACK SEA SECURITY

ALEXANDRA KUIMOVA AND SIEMON T. WEZEMAN*

The security environment in the wider Black Sea region—which brings together the six littoral states (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine) and a hinterland including the South Caucasus and Moldova—is rapidly changing. It combines protracted conflicts with a significant conventional military build-up that intensified after the events of 2014: Russia's takeover of Crimea and the start of the internationalized civil war in eastern Ukraine.¹ Transnational connections between conflicts across the region and between the Black Sea and the Middle East add further dimensions of insecurity. As a result, there is a blurring of the conditions of peace, crisis and conflict in the region. This has led to an unpredictable and potentially high-risk environment in which military forces with advanced weapons, including nuclear-capable systems, are increasingly active in close proximity to each other.

In this context, there is an urgent need to develop a clearer understanding of the security dynamics and challenges facing the wider Black Sea region, and to explore opportunities for dialogue between the key regional security actors. This background paper on Georgia is part of the Black Sea Regional Security Initiative, a project launched by SIPRI in 2017 to provide independent data and analysis on security developments in the region and to promote transparency around military issues.² This paper continues by describing Georgia's situation on the Black Sea (section I), it then outlines recent trends in Georgia's defence policy, including an overview of Georgia's national documents (section II), the structure (section III) and deployment (section IV) of its armed forces, its military spending (section V), and its arms holdings and acquisitions (section VI), with a specific focus on their relations with

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¹ Russia gained control over Crimea in Mar. 2014 after a referendum in Crimea favoured secession from Ukraine to join Russia. Russia and a few other countries claim this to be a legal accession. However, Ukraine and most other countries call the referendum and accession to Russia an illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory. This paper uses the term 'takeover' to mark only the factual change of control of Crimea.

² As well as background papers mapping the developments in each of the 6 Black Sea littoral states, the project will publish a paper covering the various conflicts in the region: Klimenko, E., 'Protracted armed conflicts in the post-Soviet space and their impact on Black Sea security', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2018/8, Dec. 2018, and a longer paper on the challenges in the region: Melvin, N. J., *Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 50 (SIPRI: Stockholm, Dec. 2018). The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs provided funding for the project.

SUMMARY

● The Black Sea region is experiencing a changing military balance. The six littoral states (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine) intensified their efforts to build up their military potential after Russia's takeover of Crimea and the start of the internationalized civil war in eastern Ukraine in 2014.

Georgia revised its defence policy significantly after the fighting between Georgia and Russia in South Ossetia in August 2008. Since then, Georgia has continued to perceive Russia's foreign policy as aggressive and a major threat to its security. Georgia views membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union as strategic priorities. Georgia actively participates in and supports NATO activities in the Black Sea region, which it sees as a means to ensure stability in the region.



Figure 1. Map of Georgia

Credit: Ahlenius, H., Nordpil, 2018.

Black Sea security. Conclusions (section VII) summarize Georgia's position on Black Sea issues.

I. Background

Geographically, Georgia is situated in the western part of the South Caucasus, bordered by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey to the south and by Russia to the north (see figure 1). To the west it has a Black Sea coastline of around 132 kilometres (see table 1).³ It claims the standard 12-nautical mile territorial waters and 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ).⁴ The limits of the EEZ are not yet fully agreed with Georgia's neighbours, and the maritime claims are complicated by the status of Abkhazia.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia were autonomous regions of Georgia at the time of the latter's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Both declared their own independence almost immediately and are now de facto states with their own governments, judicial systems, armed forces and other trappings of statehood. Since 2008 their independence has been recognized

³ This excludes Abkhazia's 190-km Black Sea coastline.

⁴ Saunders, S. (ed.), *IHS Jane's Fighting Ships 2016–2017* (IHS: Coulsdon, 2016), p. 289.



by a handful of other states, including Russia. Their de jure status remains unclear as Georgia continues to consider both to be part of Georgia and the vast majority of other states do not recognize their independence.⁵

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, relations between Georgia and Russia have been tense, mainly over the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Relations reached their lowest point in August 2008 when Georgia and Russia were involved in fighting in South Ossetia. Although relations have since improved, the history and potential future threat of perceived Russian aggression continue to play an important role in Georgian security thinking. Having recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, Russia now has troops stationed in both. By 2018 the armed forces of both breakaway regions had become largely integrated into Russia's military forces.⁶

Since 2003 it has been a foreign policy priority of Georgia to increase links with West and Central European partners and the United States. With the goal of joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Georgia has worked to improve interoperability with NATO standards and has implemented defence sector reforms. It is an active participant in NATO activities in the Black Sea region and has hosted large-scale exercises for NATO and NATO partner countries.

II. Defence policy

The fighting between Georgia and Russia in South Ossetia in August 2008 radically challenged and changed the security environment in the Black Sea region. It led to a re-evaluation of Georgia's defence policy, including regulations governing the conduct of the armed forces. Modernization of the defence system became necessary.

In December 2011 the Georgian Parliament approved a new national security concept.⁷ This document, which defines national values and interests, was drawn up taking into account the fighting in August 2008. Russia's 'aggressive' foreign policy against Georgia, including 'occupation of Georgian territory', is cited as one of the major risks to Georgia's national security along with conflicts elsewhere in the Caucasus, international terrorism and cyberthreats, which were highlighted by Russia's cyberattacks during the fighting in August 2008.⁸ The new concept, however, notes the possibility of building good-neighbourly relations with Russia based on conditions of 'respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia' and the start of withdrawal of Russian forces from Georgian territory.⁹ The concept also highlights the further development of relationships with Georgia's strategic partners: the USA, Ukraine, Turkey and Azerbaijan.¹⁰

In June 2014 the government approved a new national military strategy, updating the version from 2005 and based on the 2011 national security

⁵ Klimenko (note 2).

⁶ See Kuimova, A. and Wezeman, S. T., 'Russia and Black Sea security', SIPRI Background Paper, Dec. 2018 (note 2).

⁷ Machaidze, R., 'Georgia's new national security concept', Democracy and Freedom Watch, 24 Dec. 2011.

⁸ Georgian Ministry of Defence (MOD), *National Security Concept of Georgia* (MOD: Tbilisi, 2011).

⁹ Georgian Ministry of Defence (note 8), p. 12.

¹⁰ Civil Georgia, 'Georgia's new national security concept', 23 Dec. 2011.

**Table 1.** Basic facts about Georgia and the Black Sea

Area	57 640 km ²
Black Sea coastline ^a	132 km
Waters claimed in the Black Sea ^b	
Territorial waters	12 nautical miles (22 km)
Exclusive economic zone	200 nautical miles (370 km)
Neighbouring countries ^c	
Land borders	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey
Maritime borders in the Black Sea	Russia, Turkey
Population (2018) ^a	3.7 million
GDP (2017)	
Total (current US\$)	\$15.1 billion
Per capita	\$4 099
Membership	
NATO	Not a member; ‘aspirant member’ since 2011
European Union	Not a member; association agreement signed in 2014, entered into force 1 July 2016
Military spending (2017)	
Total (current US\$)	\$332.7 million
As a share of GDP	2.2%

GDP = gross domestic product; NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

^a These figures exclude the de facto independent regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Together, these have an area of 12 060 km² and a population of c. 300 000. Abkhazia has a 190-km Black Sea coastline.

^b No final demarcation of these maritime claims has been made.

^c Georgia also has land and maritime borders with Abkhazia and a land border with South Ossetia.

Sources: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, Apr. 2018; SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, May 2018; Stanchev, H. et al., ‘Determination of the Black Sea area and coastline length using GIS methods and Landsat 7 satellite images’, *Geo-Eco-Marina*, no. 17 (2011); and Oral, N., ‘Summary of EEZ zones in the Black Sea’, Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution, [n.d.].

concept and a 2013 threat assessment document.¹¹ The strategy highlights all major challenges and risks to Georgian security. In line with the other strategic documents, it notes that these include occupation of Georgian territory by Russia and regional instability.¹² It also outlines the military missions of the Georgian armed forces, the main one being an improvement of defence capabilities and force readiness to deter potential aggression towards the country.

So as to reach the main objective identified by the 2014 national military strategy, the defence white paper and strategic defence review for 2017–20 set out guidance for the Ministry of Defence and the Georgian armed forces.¹³ The documents provide for the implementation of ‘total defence’, which, along with establishing a civil defence system, involves building up a well-trained army and developing a new conscription concept and reserve and mobilization systems.¹⁴

Notably, the strategic defence review for 2017–20 officially recognizes the wielding of ‘soft power’ by Russia as a major challenge for Georgian national

¹¹ Gruzziya Online, [The new military strategy of Georgia], 19 June 2014 (in Russian).

¹² Georgian Ministry of Defence (MOD), *National Military Strategy* (MOD: Tbilisi, 2014), pp. 3–4.

¹³ Georgian Ministry of Defence (MOD), *Strategic Defence Review 2017–2020* (MOD: Tbilisi, 2017); and Georgian Ministry of Defence (MOD), *White Paper 2017–2020* (MOD: Tbilisi, 2017).

¹⁴ Georgian Ministry of Defence *Strategic Defence Review 2017–2020* (note 13), p. 48; and Civil Georgia, ‘Georgian MoD adopts strategic defence review for 2017–2020’, 25 Apr. 2017.



security.¹⁵ It was the second document issued by Georgia in 2017 mentioning the influence of Russian ‘soft power’. On 13 April the Georgian Government adopted a communication strategy for 2017–20, which covers the Georgian Ministry of Defence and armed forces and has a focus on Georgia’s planned integration into the European Union (EU) and NATO. Among other things, the communication strategy notes that the ‘actions of Russian “soft power” are aimed at weakening state institutions, discrediting Euro–Atlantic integration and strengthening pro-Russian and anti-Western forces’.¹⁶

NATO–Georgian relations

Integration into NATO and the EU remain the key priorities of Georgian defence and foreign policy. All strategic documents highlight the importance of such integration for ensuring peace and stability in the Black Sea and Caucasus regions.

At the NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania, in April 2008 NATO agreed that Georgia would become a NATO member, provided it met all necessary requirements. In September 2008, shortly after the end of the fighting between Georgia and Russia, NATO and Georgia established the NATO–Georgia Commission. The commission was set up to support Georgia in its preparation process for accession to NATO in the form of political consultations and practical cooperation.¹⁷

A major step towards increasing cooperation between NATO and Georgia was the adoption of the Substantial NATO–Georgia Package (SNGP) at the NATO summit in Newport, Wales, in September 2014.¹⁸ The SNGP includes a number of measures aimed at improving Georgia’s defence capabilities and NATO interoperability.¹⁹ The measures are to provide support by NATO allies and partner states in 14 areas including strategic and operational planning, acquisition and procurement, aviation, air defence, and maritime security.

In August 2015, as part of the cooperation package, the NATO–Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Center (JTEC) was opened at the Krtsanisi Military Base near Tbilisi.²⁰ The centre is jointly led by officers from Georgia and various NATO countries and its aim is to improve interaction between the Georgian armed forces and NATO forces by providing training programmes for both Georgian and NATO troops.²¹ At the NATO summit in Warsaw, Poland, in July 2016, the NATO member states and Georgia decided on new cooperation initiatives. One of the commitments made by

The Georgian strategic defence review for 2017–20 officially recognizes Russia’s use of ‘soft power’ as a major challenge

¹⁵ Georgian Ministry of Defence *Strategic Defence Review 2017–2020* (note 13), pp. 53–54; and Gogvadze, G., ‘Georgia officially recognizes Russia’s soft power as a major threat’, *Jam News*, 12 May 2017.

¹⁶ Georgian Ministry of Defence (MOD), *Communication Strategy 2017–2020* (MOD: Tbilisi, 2017); and Agenda.ge, ‘Georgia adopts communication strategy for EU, NATO membership’, 13 Apr. 2017.

¹⁷ Melvin (note 2); and NATO, ‘NATO–Georgia Commission’, updated 4 Dec. 2012.

¹⁸ NATO, ‘Substantial NATO–Georgia Package (SNGP)’, Fact Sheet, [2016].

¹⁹ Georgian Ministry of Defence (MOD), ‘Substantial NATO–Georgia Package’, [n.d.].

²⁰ Agenda.ge, ‘NATO Secretary General opens Joint Training and Evaluation Centre in Georgia’, 27 Aug. 2015.

²¹ NATO, ‘NATO–Georgian Joint Training and Evaluation Center (JTEC)’, Fact Sheet, 27 Aug. 2015.

Table 2. Georgian armed forces, selected years 1992–2017

	1992 ^a	2002	2007	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<i>Personnel</i>								
Active personnel ^b	20 000	17 500	21 150	20 650	20 650	20 650	20 650	20 650
Army ^c	..	8 620	19 345	19 350	19 350	19 350	19 350	19 350
Air Force ^d	..	1 250	1 310	1 300	1 300	1 300	1 300	1 300
Navy	..	1 830	495	–	–	–	–	–
Reserves	500 000	250 000
Paramilitary ^e	3 000	11 700	11 700	11 700	11 700	11 700	5 400	5 400
<i>Equipment</i>								
Tanks	..	90	128	123	123	123	123	123
Other armour	..	185	135	275	275	275	275	275
Artillery over 100 mm	..	109	109	240	240	240	240	240
Combat aircraft	..	7	9	12	12	12	12	9
Helicopters	..	17	35	35	35	35	35	35
Major warships ^f	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Minor warships ^f	–	1	1	–	–	–	–	–

.. = no data available; – = zero.

Notes: Definitions and available information may not be consistent for all years—changes may be partly due to differences in definition or available information. Equipment in storage is included but not all equipment may be operational.

^a No data for individual services or equipment are available for 1992.

^b Total active personnel includes army, air force and navy personnel and, for 2002, other Ministry of Defence staff.

^c Figures for the army include the active reserves of the National Guard.

^d From 2010 this is the Aviation and Air Defence command.

^e The paramilitary forces are the Border Guard, the Coast Guard and other Ministry of Interior troops.

^f Major warships are combat ships of 1250 tonnes or more standard displacement; minor warships are combat ships of less than 1250 tonnes standard displacement.

Sources: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, various editions; Georgian Ministry of Defence; and media sources.

NATO member states was to support Georgia in air defence and air surveillance and in conducting military exercises.²² NATO members also discussed measures to strengthen their presence in the Black Sea with the participation of Georgia. In May 2017 at a meeting of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Tbilisi, NATO reaffirmed its broad support for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration.²³ Georgia, in turn, expressed its readiness to support NATO's increased military presence in the Black Sea region.²⁴ Security in the Black Sea region and the relationship with Russia also were the main themes of the next session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, held in Bucharest in October 2017. A resolution adopted during the session called for an increase in Georgia's involvement in NATO activities and policy discussions on Black Sea security.²⁵ The importance of Georgia's active engagement in strategic discussions on the Black Sea was later reiterated at the NATO summit in Brussels in July 2018.²⁶

²² NATO, Joint statement of the NATO–Georgia Commission at the level of Foreign Ministers, Warsaw, 8 July 2016; and NATO, 'NATO–Georgia relations', Media backgrounder, Feb. 2017.

²³ Gruzija Online, [NATO PA adopted a resolution in support of Georgia], 30 May 2017 (in Russian).

²⁴ Civil Georgia, 'Georgian leaders address NATO Parliamentary Assembly', 30 May 2017.

²⁵ NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Resolution 437 on stability and security in the black sea region, 219 CDS17 E rev. 2 fin., Bucharest, Oct. 2017.

²⁶ NATO, 'NATO–Georgia Commission Declaration at the Brussels Summit', 12 July 2018.



Interest in defence issues among Georgians seems high. In a 2015 survey, 76 per cent of Georgian respondents said that they were willing to fight for their country. This placed Georgia among the top 10 of the 64 countries surveyed and as the highest scoring European state.²⁷ The way Georgians view NATO appears to have changed significantly over the past few years. In 2016 a survey in 24 Central and East European countries found that only 37 per cent of Georgian respondents viewed NATO as offering protection for Georgia. While this was less than for almost all Central European NATO members, it was a much more positive view than in any other former Soviet non-NATO state.²⁸ Indeed, only 8 per cent viewed NATO as a threat, which is a more positive score than in most Central European NATO members and substantially better than the view in any other former Soviet non-NATO state. A more recent poll, from June 2018, showed that support for joining NATO among Georgians is very high: 75 per cent of respondents approved of the Georgian Government's stated goal of integration with NATO.²⁹

III. Armed forces structure

Georgia's armed forces were established soon after the declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.³⁰ By 1992 Georgia had a small inventory of heavy equipment inherited from the Soviet Union, but its naval forces were almost non-existent (see table 2). A significant proportion of the equipment was lost during the conflict in Abkhazia in 1992–93.³¹ By 2007 the Georgian armed forces had 21 150 active personnel and there were 11 700 paramilitary forces. In July 2008 the Georgian Government approved an increase in the number of troops by 5000 due to the active participation of Georgia in international peace operations.³² An increased risk of Russian 'aggression' was also given as justification for the increase.³³ However, the approved increase never materialized.

The fighting in South Ossetia in August 2008 significantly damaged the Georgian armed forces, with the loss of most of Georgia's small naval fleet and air force.³⁴ Given the range of losses that Georgia suffered, it decided to restructure its armed forces. In 2009 the coast guard and navy were integrated into a maritime force under the Ministry of Interior, operating more as a police force than a navy.³⁵ This was followed in 2010 by the incorporation of the Georgian Air Force into the Georgian Land Forces. Further reorganization included the formation of two Commands—East and West—in the

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²⁷ Gallup International Association, 'WIN/Gallup International's global survey shows three in five willing to fight for their country', Press release, [Dec. 2015].

²⁸ Smith, M., 'Most NATO members in Eastern Europe see it as protection', Gallup, 10 Feb. 2017.

²⁹ Caucasus Research Resource Center–Georgia, Caucasus Barometer, 'NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia', June 2018.

³⁰ Agenda.ge, 'Officials, troops and citizens mark Georgian Armed Forces Day', 30 Apr. 2017.

³¹ Khramchikhin, A., [Army of Georgia: before and after the war], *Russkaya Planeta*, 11 Nov. 2013 (in Russian).

³² Civil Georgia, [Personnel of the armed forces will be increased by 5000 people], 14 July 2008.

³³ Vesti.ru, [Georgia increases the strength of the army], 15 July 2008.

³⁴ RIA Novosti, [Russia lost 3 tanks, 6 aircraft and up to 20 armoured vehicles in South Ossetia in 2008], 8 Aug. 2010 (in Russian).

³⁵ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2011* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2012), p. 110.

Table 3. Georgian military expenditure, 2007–17

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 ^a
In national currency (current lari m.)	1 556	1 625	1 008	810	791	812	735	734	756	829	832
Annual change (%)	116.1	4.4	-38.0	-19.6	-2.3	2.7	-9.5	-0.1	3.0	9.7	0.4
In US dollars (constant 2016 US\$ m.)	923	876	534	401	360	374	340	329	326	350	332
Annual real-terms change (%)	98.1	-5.1	-39.0	-24.9	-10.2	3.9	-9.1	-3.2	-0.9	7.4	-5.1
As a share of GDP (%)	9.2	8.5	5.6	3.9	3.2	3.1	2.7	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.2
Per capita (current US\$)	212	251	141	107	112	120	109	104	84	90	85
As a share of total government spending (%)	32.2	26.1	15.7	11.8	11.2	10.5	9.5	8.4	8.1	8.2	7.5

GDP = gross domestic product.

^a Data for 2017 is for budgeted spending; for all other years data is actual spending.

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, May 2018.

Land Forces followed by the establishment of the Aviation and Air Defence Command (bringing together the aviation and air defence components).³⁶

The current unified Georgian armed forces include the East and West commands of the Land Forces, the Training and Military Education command, the Troops Logistic Support command, the Aviation and Air Defence command, the Special Operations Forces and the National Guard.³⁷ By 2018 the total number of active personnel was 20 650.

The Georgian armed forces are manned by both professional soldiers and conscripts, 90 per cent of whom serve under contract.³⁸ In June 2016 the defence minister, Tinatin Khidasheli, announced the end of conscription.³⁹ However, the decision was heavily criticized in Georgia and a new defence minister, Levan Izoria, reinstated the practice but modified the system.⁴⁰ Under the new conscription system, all recruits receive military training to support the professional army and have the opportunity to take part in military exercises.⁴¹ In March 2018 the Georgian Parliament approved a new law on military reserves. According to the new reserve system, the reserve force will consist of two types of unit: a voluntary active reserve and a compulsory mobilization reserve. The active reserve will include three subcomponents—an armed forces reserve, a territorial reserve and a reserve of specialists. An active reserve pilot project was launched in October 2018.⁴²

³⁶ Georgian Ministry of Defence, 'Staff-structure', [n.d.]; Vetrov, A., [Armed forces of Georgia], *Sovremennaya armiya*, 12 July 2012 (in Russian); Georgian Ministry of Defence, 'National Security Council discussed new structure of armed forces', 27 Feb. 2016; and Georgian Ministry of Defence, 'Reform of aviation and air defence', 31 May 2016.

³⁷ Georgia Ministry of Defence, 'Awarding military servicemen', 6 Oct. 2017; and Georgian Ministry of Defence, 'Staff-structure' (note 36).

³⁸ Menabde, G., 'Does Georgia have sufficient resources to create a new military reserve system?', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 25 May 2017.

³⁹ Fuller, L., 'Georgian Defense Minister under fire over conscription decree', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 29 June 2016.

⁴⁰ Menabde, G., 'Georgian authorities reinstate military conscription', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 22 Feb. 2017.

⁴¹ Fuller, L., 'An update on Georgia's military reform', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 17 Feb. 2017.

⁴² *Novosti-Gruziya*, [Georgian parliament approves draft of new military reserve system], 8 Mar. 2018 (in Russian); Georgian Ministry of Defence, [Active reserve pilot program started], 19 Oct. 2018



IV. Armed forces deployment

Georgia, as an aspirant member of NATO and the EU, participates actively in NATO- and EU-led operations. It has nearly constantly deployed troops to NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR), the US-led Multinational Force–Iraq, NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and NATO's anti-terrorism Operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean Sea. Georgia has also participated in the NATO Response Force (NRF) and the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR).

Georgia was one of the largest contributors of troops to ISAF until the operation ended in 2014, and 14 Georgian battalions were trained by the US Marines to deploy in Afghanistan.⁴³ It continues to take an active part in NATO's follow-on Resolute Support mission for training and support of Afghan Government forces, with the deployment of 869 troops.⁴⁴

By 2018 Georgia deployed up to 900 personnel on peace operations in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Mali, Serbia and Ukraine.⁴⁵

Operations and major exercises

Since Georgia expressed its desire to join NATO, it has regularly hosted and participated in NATO military exercises. In recent years, Georgia has hosted an increasing number of multinational military exercises.

Georgia has hosted the Agile Spirit military exercise annually since 2011. It originally involved just Georgia and the USA, but more NATO and non-NATO countries have joined the exercise since 2015.⁴⁶ Agile Spirit 2018 was held in Georgia in September 2018. Ten NATO member and partner countries participated in the exercise compared with seven in the previous year. In addition to Georgia, four other Black Sea states participated in 2018: Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine.⁴⁷ Another multinational exercise, Noble Partner, was held in Georgia for the fourth time in mid-2018. More than 3000 troops from 13 NATO member and NATO partner countries took part in the training at the Vaziani Military Base. Noble Partner 2018 was much larger than previous exercises in terms of both the number of troops and the number of heavy weapons involved.⁴⁸ As in 2017, the exercise included US tanks and transport aircraft, and German armoured vehicles.⁴⁹

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(in Georgian); and Sputnik, [Reserve service in a new way: a new project of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia has started], 20 Oct. 2018 (in Russian).

⁴³ Quire, G., 'MCSCG deploys to the republic of Georgia', US Marine Corps, 14 Apr. 2015.

⁴⁴ SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database, June 2018; International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2017* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2017), p. 187; and NATO, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), 'DSACEUR visits Georgian troops preparing for Resolute Support cites 20 year partnership', 25 June 2015.

⁴⁵ SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database (note 44).

⁴⁶ Agenda.ge, 'Agile Spirit 2017: multinational drills kick off in Georgia', 3 Sep. 2017.

⁴⁷ Agenda.ge, 'Agile Spirit: defence drills in Georgia to involve more partner nations', 29 Aug. 2018.

⁴⁸ Georgian Ministry of Defence, 'Multinational exercise "Noble Partner 2018" starts on August 1st', 7 June 2018.

⁴⁹ Agenda.ge, 'Military hardware for Noble Partner drills arrives in Georgia', 24 July 2017; and *National Review*, 'Noble Partner 18', [n.d.].

Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey have been developing their defence cooperation since 2014.⁵⁰ In June 2017 these three countries conducted a joint military exercise, Caucasian Eagle 2017, in Georgia with participation of their special operations units.⁵¹ In September 2017 Georgia hosted Eternity 2017, a joint computer-assisted military exercise for Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. The ultimate aim of this exercise was to strengthen strategic cooperation for the protection of oil pipelines.⁵²

Foreign forces deployed in Georgia

No foreign forces are based in Georgia.⁵³ However, as noted above, foreign military forces have made short-term deployments in Georgia to train Georgian forces and for exercises. In particular, small groups of US Marines have regularly deployed to Georgia since 2009 to train Georgian troops to be sent to Afghanistan as part of the Georgia Deployment Program–ISAF and the Georgia Deployment Program–Resolute Support.⁵⁴ By 2015, over 2000 US military personnel had been deployed in Georgia.⁵⁵ In the framework of the US-funded Georgia Defense Readiness Program (GDRP), in 2018–20 Georgian troops will be trained by 40–50 US Army officers deployed at any one time at a training centre in Vaziani.⁵⁶

Georgian military expenditure has decreased in real terms in all but two of the years since 2007

V. Military spending

In the years before the fighting in South Ossetia, Georgian military spending grew rapidly: by 2007 it was at its highest level since 1996. These increases, which funded some major arms acquisitions, reflected Georgia's preparations to re-establish control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In subsequent years, expenditure fell dramatically—by 64 per cent in real terms between 2007 and 2017 (see table 3). Military expenditure has decreased in real terms in all but two of the years since 2007.

As Georgia aspires to join NATO, it aims to spend at least 2 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defence. It surpassed this level in all years between 2007 and 2017, despite the reduction in absolute spending. In May 2017 Izoria, the Georgian defence minister, told a meeting of the Defence and Security Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly that Georgia is likely to continue to spend more than 2 per cent of its GDP on military expenditure due to the ongoing army modernization.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Mehdiyev, M., 'Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia broaden military cooperation spectrum', *Azernews*, 5 May 2015.

⁵¹ Civil Georgia, 'Georgia hosts joint military exercises with Azerbaijan and Turkey', 5 June 2017.

⁵² Vesti.az, [Azerbaijani military participate in military exercise in Georgia], 25 Sep. 2017 (in Russian); and Shirinov, R., 'Azerbaijani, Georgian and Turkish servicemen hold joint military exercises', *Azernews*, 26 Sep. 2017.

⁵³ However, Russian forces are based in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Kuimova and Wezeman (note 6).

⁵⁴ Quire (note 43).

⁵⁵ Quire (note 43).

⁵⁶ Kucera, J., 'Georgia: Trump administration boosting military aid', *Eurasianet*, 14 Nov. 2017.

⁵⁷ Interfax-Ukraine, 'Georgia's military budget should be over 2% of GDP, it will bring republic closer to NATO standards', 27 May 2017.



According to the defence white paper for 2017–20, the share of the defence budget allocated to major arms acquisition will grow from 4.1 per cent in 2017 to 8.5 per cent in 2020, or from 27.5 million lari (\$11 million) to 61.2 million lari (\$24 million at 2017 exchange rates).⁵⁸ However, this share is small compared with many countries—it is common to spend more than 15 per cent on procurement—and the values are small. For example, the limited air defence system that Georgia ordered from France in 2015 will alone cost around \$110 million (see section VI), more than the total procurement budget for 2017–20.

In addition to its own military spending, Georgia has received military aid from the USA, largely in the form of US foreign military financing (FMF). This is normally used to pay for acquisitions of military equipment from the USA. Between 2009 and 2014 Georgia received FMF of \$10–16 million annually.⁵⁹ It then increased to \$30 million annually in 2015–16 and Georgia received additional funding under the USA's European Reassurance Initiative to fund expanded cooperation between NATO and NATO partners.⁶⁰ Georgia received \$30 million FMF in 2017 and will receive \$35 million in 2018.⁶¹

VI. Arms holdings and acquisitions

Until 2003 the Georgian military had only outdated (and often dilapidated) equipment inherited from the Soviet Union. The modernization of the Georgian Army began as soon as President Mikheil Saakashvili came to power in January 2004. Saakashvili recognized the necessity of strengthening the capacity of the Georgian armed forces by equipping them with modern weapons and military equipment.⁶² Among the NATO member states, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Turkey and the USA have been the most active suppliers of major arms to Georgia.⁶³ Israel and Ukraine have also delivered significant amounts of weapons and military equipment to Georgia.⁶⁴

Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Turkey and the USA have been active suppliers of major arms to Georgia

Army and Air Force

Georgia worked with Israel on the modernization of Georgia's Soviet-era Su-25 ground-attack aircraft.⁶⁵ In 2007, along with infantry weapons and Lynx multiple rocket launchers, Georgia purchased from Israel several unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), including Hermes 450 reconnaissance

⁵⁸ Georgian Ministry of Defence, *White Paper 2017–2020* (note 13), p. 28.

⁵⁹ US Department of State, 'Foreign military financing account summary', [n.d.]; and Security Assistance Monitor database, accessed 5 June 2018.

⁶⁰ Goodman, C. and Khmolovska, N., 'Pentagon set to increase military aid to Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine', Security Assistance Monitor, 27 May 2015; US Department of Defense (DOD), *European Reassurance Initiative: Department of Defense Budget Fiscal Year (FY) 2016* (DOD: Washington, DC, Feb. 2015); and Security Assistance Monitor database (note 59).

⁶¹ Kucera (note 56).

⁶² Sozaev-Guryev, E., [The Georgian army turns to a new enemy], Infox, 3 Feb. 2010 (in Russian).

⁶³ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Mar. 2018.

⁶⁴ Kucera, J., 'Georgian and Ukrainian generals meet, discuss Russia', Eurasianet, 14 Aug. 2015; and Agenda.ge, 'Georgia and Israel—a long history of diplomatic relations', 10 Jan. 2017.

⁶⁵ Perelman, M., 'Israel's military on display in Georgia', Forward, 11 Sep. 2008.



drones. By 2008, according to President Saakashvili, Georgia had about 40 UAVs.⁶⁶ Between the late 1990s and 2008 Israel supplied Georgia with military equipment valued at approximately \$400 million.⁶⁷

Georgia lost a considerable amount of heavy equipment in the fighting in August 2008. Modernization of the army's air defence, anti-armour, engineering, artillery and intelligence systems was subsequently prioritized, but few actual orders have yet been placed. The largest acquisition since 2008 was the order in 2015 for an air defence system from France for around €100 million (\$110 million).⁶⁸ The first batches of Ground Master (GM) 200 and GM 400 radar systems had been delivered to Georgia by mid-2018.⁶⁹ As part of the GDRP launched in 2017, Georgia plans to acquire new infantry weapons, including replacing its Soviet-era PK machine guns with the US M240.⁷⁰ The first batch of M240 machine guns was delivered to Georgia in May 2017.⁷¹ New anti-tank systems are planned and in November 2017 the US Department of State approved a potential \$75 million sale of 410 Javelin anti-tank missiles and 72 launchers.⁷² The first batch of Javelin missiles, valued at 100 million lari (\$40 million), was delivered to Georgia on 23 January 2018.⁷³ These acquisitions from France and the USA further enhance Georgia's interoperability with NATO militaries.

The unresolved conflicts with Russia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain a major barrier to Georgia entering NATO

Navy

Since NATO members agreed to strengthen their presence in the Black Sea region, the issue of recreation of the Georgian Navy has taken on new importance. The Georgian Government, however, is currently not planning to recreate the fleet, which was almost destroyed in August 2008.⁷⁴

VII. Conclusions

The main direction of Georgia's defence policy has remained the same since 2008. In terms of finding political and financial support, Georgia sees access to international organizations as crucial. Georgia has maintained

⁶⁶ Maistrovoi, A. and Kotlyarskii, M., [Verification by battle, or the other side of war], *Russkaya Planeta*, 27 Aug. 2014 (in Russian). At least 3 of the unmanned aerial vehicles were reportedly shot down over Abkhazia in 2008. Civil Georgia, 'Elbit Systems says dispute settled with Georgia', 2 Jan. 2012.

⁶⁷ Shachtman, N., 'How Israel trained and equipped Georgia's army', *Wired*, 19 Aug. 2008.

⁶⁸ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database (note 63).

⁶⁹ Civil Georgia, 'Georgia says signed deal in France to buy "air defense system"', 16 June 2015; Agenda.ge, 'Georgia, France ramp up air defence deal with new contract', 11 Apr. 2017; and Georgian Ministry of Defence, [Military Air Defence Day was celebrated at Alekseevka Military Base], Facebook, 31 May 2018 (in Georgian).

⁷⁰ *Segodnya*, [Georgia plans to buy machine guns and rifles in the USA], 11 July 2017 (in Russian).

⁷¹ Novosti-Gruziya, [The Georgian army will gradually replace the Soviet Kalashnikov machine guns with American M-240s], 30 May 2017 (in Russian).

⁷² US Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 'Georgia: Javelin missiles and command launch units', News Release no. 17-59, 20 Nov. 2017; Venkina, E., [US State Department approved the sale of anti-tank missile systems to Georgia], *Deutsche Welle*, 21 Nov. 2017 (in Russian); and RIA Novosti, [State Department approved the delivery to Georgia of Javelin ATGM], 21 Nov. 2017 (in Russian).

⁷³ Georgian Ministry of Defence, [The Javelin systems are already in Georgia], 23 Jan. 2018 (in Georgian); and Charkviani, N., [Javelin ATGM delivered to Georgia], *Golos Ameriki* (Voice of America), 24 Jan. 2018 (in Georgian).

⁷⁴ Caucasian Knot, 'Georgia gives up restoration of its naval forces', 8 Nov. 2016.



continued readiness and interest in developing cooperation with NATO and NATO partner countries. However, the unresolved conflicts with Russia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain a major barrier to Georgia entering NATO. By participating in and hosting major political and economic events, Georgia has indicated a willingness to participate in strategic discussions, including those on Black Sea security. According to defence documents and statements made by Georgian officials, 'Russian aggression' continues to be a major threat to Georgian security, hence the strategic importance of the Black Sea region for Georgia. Georgia has expressed its full support for the strengthening of cooperation on Black Sea security and the expanded presence of NATO and NATO partner countries in the region.

Enhancement of the defence capabilities of the Georgian armed forces is one of the main goals set by the Georgian Ministry of Defence to deter potential aggression and defend the country. As Georgia has neither a navy nor a significant air force, it focuses on the security of its land borders. The recent procurements of a French air defence system and a US anti-tank system have made a significant contribution to building Georgia's defence capacity. They may not significantly affect the balance of forces in the Black Sea region but could lead to a destabilizing of the situation on the borders with Russia.



Abbreviations

BLACKSEAFOR	Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group
EEZ	Exclusive economic zone
EU	European Union
FMF	Foreign military financing
GDP	Gross domestic product
GDRP	Georgia Defence Readiness Program
GM	Ground Master
ISAF	NATO International Security Assistance Force
JTEC	NATO–Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Center
KFOR	NATO’s Kosovo Force
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NRF	NATO Response Force
SNGP	Substantial NATO-Georgia Package
UAV	Unmanned aerial vehicle



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STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Signalistgatan 9
SE-169 72 Solna, Sweden
Telephone: +46 8 655 97 00
Email: sipri@sipri.org
Internet: www.sipri.org

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GEORGIA AND BLACK SEA SECURITY

ALEXANDRA KUIMOVA AND SIEMON T. WEZEMAN

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alexandra Kuimova (Russia) is a Research Assistant with the SIPRI Arms Transfers and Military Expenditure Programme. Working with the SIPRI Military Expenditure, Arms Industry and Arms Transfers databases, she focuses on developments in the Middle East and North Africa region, and post-Soviet states.

Siemon T. Wezeman (Netherlands) is a Senior Researcher with the SIPRI Arms Transfers and Military Expenditure Programme. His areas of research include the monitoring of arms transfers, with particular focus on the Asia–Pacific region and former Soviet Union, and the use of weapons in conflicts.