

Georgia and Its Main Strategic Partner: Marking New Principles in Relations?



Victor Kipiani
Chairman, Geocase

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Enough time has elapsed since the inauguration of President Joe Biden in the United States to express certain opinions. Clearly, these views cannot be categorical. The reasons for such caution in assessments can be split into two: first, a period of several months is not a sufficient basis for drawing conclusions; and second, a radical change in the foreign policy of a country like the United States requires much more time and even more effort (not to mention the objective or subjective constraints that hinder noticeable changes or make them almost impossible).

We have already extensively discussed the possibility of a qualitative realignment of the foreign policy vector by the new White House Administration in previous publications. Thus, a reader can learn about our views on those issues in those articles if interested.

Despite the above, virtually every newly elected ruling power in every country, within a few months of coming to power, is characterized by its own signature. It is exactly during this period that the old domestic and foreign

policy agendas are revised, new ones are brought forward, and practical steps are planned. Planning, for the most part, manifests itself in the recruitment of new staff from various parts of the executive branch, which also gives some insight into future actions. Furthermore – especially in the case of the United States – several statements are made selectively, a specially prepared word is uttered, and the so-called Policy Paper is published, which provides additional information on the attitude of the new government towards on-going issues.

A reminder of what we already seem to know

There are several countries in the world today whose study of foreign policy documents or other materials should be a constant priority for us. However, it is unfortunate that not all are given equal attention in this regard, and some may indeed find themselves beyond how much they should get. For example, we rarely come across a qualified assessment of such topical Russian issues. However, perhaps this is not at all so surprising bearing in mind the stigma attached to any interest towards Russia in the community and the threats posed by that interest at one time in the past. Also, the depth of research on the current processes in the Middle East leaves the impression of insufficiency in this regard, which raises questions considering that the region is in Georgia's immediate neighborhood, with more geopolitical influence than many Georgians can imagine.

This list can be expanded, however, in our opinion, virtually all significant political spaces are connected together by a single shortcoming: The inadequate attitude towards in-depth study and analysis by the official and, in some cases, civil analytical circles of Georgia. In this respect, the public sector is probably relatively proactive, although this relative advantage is immediately nullified as soon as the "self-isolation" of official channels occurs and they display inadmissibility of the opinions or evaluations generated beyond them. Eventually, the process of conceptualization is slowed down, the quality of analytics falls, the decision-making process is damaged, and, consequently, the state interest of Georgia is also damaged. In general, this problem needs to be discussed in more detail, especially concerning the example of very specific state institutions. However, we should not get carried away and for now return to the main point of this article.

What we should expect

We mentioned above the need to observe the countries that are particularly important for Georgia's foreign and domestic positioning. We noted the necessity for timely, correct processing of the information obtained as a result of these observations and filtered evaluations through the "oven" of decisions. Reconciling all levels of this unified technology of intellect and politics is especially important when any mistake or misinterpretation can have dire or even irreparable consequences for your homeland. Therefore, it is perfectly natural for the US domestic political current or its entrances to the global arena to attract the special attention of official and public circles in Georgia.

Since the independence of Georgia, the United States has made a special contribution to the development and prosperity of the Georgian state, and it continues to do so in present days. Moreover, the role of the United States, recognized by us as a key strategic partner and ally, will remain so in the foreseeable future. Clearly, the content of the relationship may change under the influence of a global and regional context. But, also, in practice, there is no doubt that in the face of the next few decades, our bilateral relationship must be filled with new elements. It should be filled provided that the parties have a real will and the resources to develop a partnership with both changing realities and changing circumstances while maintaining their ability to adapt adequately.

The past few years have completely changed the foreign policy, geo-economic, and security dynamics. At the same time, it is noteworthy that even this period allows the distinction of individual stages within itself. One

such undeniable milestone was Donald Trump's presidency, during which a number of global challenges were assessed quite differently – in some cases the assessments were fair and, in some others, quite arguable. However, the fact is that several politically and intellectually unresolved issues have been stirred up, their re-evaluation has begun, and several problems have paved the path for quite different resolutions.

Trump's presidency is over (although, Trumpism is not over yet), and the new White House resident, while still campaigning, outlined several aspects of US foreign policy that are directly related to Georgia's future and can directly shape the regional picture.

During the election, the marked novelties got way more highlighted first during President Biden's visit to the State Department and then during his speech at the recent Munich Security Conference. These two events logically attracted the attention of the Georgian audience to get a more accurate answer to two very specific questions: First, what would be the position of the Biden Administration towards the Black Sea region and, presumably, Georgia? And second, how should we act to further deepen American interest in the Georgian agenda?

Bringing more clarity to these issues became even more urgent when Trump's approach was replaced by Biden's, and any gains from the past Georgian-American partnership required a new guide. Such novelty was led by the coincidence of several key elements, namely the current dramatic social process in the US, the need to redefine the Western security model, and the growing active interest of several regional leaders at the expense of Western interests in the Black and Caspian Sea macro-regions. We are facing a regional situation, which as per one of the top officials of the US State Department, is practically equivalent to a "geopolitical earthquake". Irrespective of whether this comparison is correct or not, it is a fact that the regional dynamics of recent years have not changed for the benefit of Georgia and its key strategic partner. This requires a joint, decisive, and timely effort to overcome the status quo that has already been created – as well as to deal with the (inevitable?) future “aftershocks”, which are typical for earthquakes.

From this perspective (and in view of the historical crossroads so relevant for Georgians), it is necessary to know what the guiding principles of the foreign policy of our main strategic partner and ally are and what conceptual and strategic implications on which the White House Administration and its State Department will rely. It is essential to have an answer to the question we have already raised: What should we expect from the West in this difficult region and what might be the concrete result of this expectation? It is quite understandable that this and other related issues are not just in the field of intellectual exercise. The answers to them and the response based on the answers are directly related to the coherency of Georgia as an international legal entity, its functionality, and the future perspective of Georgian statehood.

To raise a certain awareness around emerging issues, we will use two documents: one is US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's, *A Foreign Policy for the American People*, and the other is the White House *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, both dated March 3 this year. In order to better summarize them, we decided to merge the content of both documents. This way we can better comment on specific aspects. This approach in terms of apprehension is more acceptable to the reader as well. In addition, this assessment of the State Department and White House will allow us to see the picture from the Georgian side better and to analyze it rationally. This approach will be at least an initial attempt for further, more extensive analysis and implementation of theoretical theses in practice. Most importantly, such observation or analysis should become a constant objective for the relevant services and research circles in Georgia. It must also build a credible bridge to translate analytical assessments and conclusions into qualified policy decisions.

With or without a "grand strategy"?

We do not formulate the question in this way by chance. We have already noticed that the era of linear and strictly regimented "strategy" is a thing of the past and it has been replaced by a more flexible, dynamic, so-called emerging strategy. The reason for this is on the surface: A rapidly changing world where the depth, pace, and content of change in most cases cannot be predicted. Hence, the so-called hard big strategies have lost their purpose, the practical value of which was more suited to the static confrontation between the two opposite camps during the Cold War. In the modern world, in the face of the need for leader states to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances without ideology, the attachment of the executive branch to the policy document of the "Grand Strategy" can turn out to be counterproductive only. Thus, the space for operative response to events is limited, the decision-making and implementation quality decreases, and the management of national policy becomes constrained.

At this stage, the document prepared by the White House was called "interim". This is quite understandable as the final document is still being prepared. However, it is likely that the final strategic document will retain the same, high degree of flexibility (some may even disapprove its "amorphousness"). In practical terms, this may prove that modern foreign policy, at the expense of shifting away from "values", further emphasizes pragmatic interests. In addition, the deviation from moral principles in the geopolitical line of any country can further be explained by "technical considerations" for protection of national and strategic interests. In the face of such reasoning, we inadvertently recall the words of Lord Palmerston: "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow". Consequently, such a blatant change in the rules of the game in the foreign arena should mean only one thing for Tbilisi: constant psychological readiness for change and the maximum concentration of political or other resources to respond to them properly. The world politics of such an environment does not need to be evaluated from the point of view of excessive morality. It is simply a matter of looking through the prism of your own national interests and devoting as much time and energy as possible for the systematic and rational – not "doctrinal" – pursuit of those interests.

This is the reality the modern geopolitical landscape offers and we and our partners must face it.

When domestic determines foreign

The existing connection of the foreign policy with domestic at the level of declaration was still evident during the Obama Administration, when the Administration at that time pointed to the "undoing" of countries with "peripheral interests". However, a serious attempt to turn this line into official policy took place during the Trump era. At the time, this attempt was not entirely successful due to the close interdependence that characterizes the global supply chain system. Dissatisfied with Trump's policies, Biden's team seemed to be the one to put an end to this Obama-Trump "legacy", but it has not happened so. Even at the time of the pre-election campaign, both the presidential candidate and his team spoke explicitly about determining the effectiveness of foreign policy through the outcomes of domestic political life. Moreover, the Democrat candidate called for U.S. efforts abroad to focus primarily on the welfare of the American middle class, and the American family has become one of the cornerstones of the conceptual documents already discussed in this article.

Such a relationship between domestic and foreign policy is perfectly appropriate and justified. Furthermore, we think, there is another circumstance that prompted the US executive to demonstrate this relationship – the skepticism of American voters about the virtually indefinite expansion of recent foreign policy activities. This, coupled with the disproportionate expenditure of such precious military-political and economic resources, has again and again shaken the legitimacy of American foreign policy in the eyes of its own people. As a result,

due to global and national considerations, the country has stepped up to streamline and optimize the country's foreign vector.

The proposed approach reminds Georgians many times that foreign policy is a natural continuation of domestic policy and when the country is unsuccessful within its borders, it is impossible to be successful in the foreign arena. It is also futile to use resources for state functions abroad, if it does not, first of all, concern the daily life of your citizens and the tangible improvement of their well-being. This is one of the big issues that is talked about a lot and which, as we mentioned in the previous publication, is related to the fundamental reorganization of the Georgian public and official system.

At the same time, there is another, very important and thought-provoking factor: How much the implementation of the proposed American political handwriting will affect the quality of attention and support for the Black Sea region and our country. This question will be even more relevant if we remind the reader of the need for such support and a qualitative increase in resources due to the complicated regional context. We agree that the current situation does not fully respond to the challenges posed, and Washington and Tbilisi have not yet clearly stated their readiness to modernize the Georgian-American partnership, and so a question arises: Will our region remain in the center of American geopolitical attention just as it has already been openly declared by Washington in connection to some critical regions? And if geopolitical and security "coverage" by our strategic partner does not cover the entire region equally, to what extent and to what degree will the US retain one of its strongest partners in the Black and Caspian macro-region? Even in the most conservative scenario, we believe that the socio-political model of the Georgian state and its defense system, as well as the path taken by the Georgian nation towards Euro-Atlantic integration, absolutely justify such selectivity. And, in case of reconciling an issue with a political component with its main strategic partner, another task is to practically execute such in an optimal period.

Certain passages of the above-mentioned documents answer this "dilemma", but in the prism of Georgian interests, probably only partially. In the meantime, the issue needs to be "broken down" more and better.

Alliances, partnerships...

In the context of US foreign and security policy, the importance of alliances and partnerships is constantly discussed. Clearly, the March documents did not make an exception to bypass either of these highly key areas. It is hopeful for us that we are talking about a non-partisan approach to the issue by the United States, which is a kind of precondition for consistent policy. It is also important to note that appropriate decisions must be made with the "informed consent" of the American people.

The focus on a people's "informed consent" is more of a political reverence. Essentially, we want to read the following behind these words – foreign policy and security decisions should be made on the basis of qualified expert assessments. In reality, there is nothing alien in this approach, if we do not recall the highly original and personified management style of the previous White House Administration. Accordingly, the return of the governing handwriting to the "old beginnings" should form the basis of a real result-oriented policy for both our allies and us.

At the same time, the feeling that the Georgian topic has not yet found a proper place in the American public space of the relevant profile does not abandon us, and this is at a time when the issue of occupation and annexation of Ukraine is much more pronounced in the American narrative.

Furthermore, in our view, neither does the Black Sea region receive the attention it deserves for its importance in terms of the balance of geopolitical forces in Eurasia. This shortcoming is observed not only in the political

documents of the United States, but also in the North Atlantic Alliance, and we find it impossible to ignore this in this publication (like previous publications).

Of course, we are fully aware of the role of other critical regions in global security, especially since we quite well understand that the old model of security can no longer respond to the existing challenges, and the outline of the new model is not yet complete. However, given the specifics of this transitional phase in the world, it is necessary for the Black Sea region to play an extraordinary role in general Western policy, and Georgia, as a pillar of Western security on the Black Sea, should gain a special niche and regard. This is a necessary requirement of what is geopolitically and geoeconomically known as a "two-way street". If this is not realized timely, then the West will face a real threat of weakening its grip on the region, and Georgia will lose an active supporter on the path to the further development of its statehood.

In order to avoid this undesired outcome, along with Western and American efforts, it is necessary to activate an official Tbilisi. We need to do our best to get our voice heard in Washington – that the time has come for the strategic partnership with the United States to shift to a full-fledged strategic alliance. This will serve our mutual interests. Besides, primarily, it is the duty of the Georgian side to finally make the Europeans understand that the determinant of security of their capitals also includes the security of the capital of Georgia. We must explain to Berlin or Paris that our country is on the southern flank of the common European security (under NATO's "umbrella" or "European autonomy") as not merely the end point but an essentially organic part of European political unity.

A “New Vision” of Foreign Policy

This is one of the main implications of the March 3 documents and we will draw on this pathos in the concluding section of this article. We also note that we have talked about the necessity of realignment of Georgian foreign policy and its separate aspects in many publications. We shall now confine ourselves to conveying only a few additional views, where, in part, there will be both the spirit of what has already been said and new facets.

Clearly it is difficult to fully assess Georgian foreign policy in a short article. As this topic is so wide and pressing, developing such an analysis and recommendations would be possible only within a well-organized, cohesive team of merited prominent practitioners and genuinely scholarly specialists. We would like to emphasize that the emphasis on "merited prominent practitioners" and "genuinely scholarly" has not been chosen by chance, and the audience will understand the basis of special emphasis on the case.

Likewise, a necessary condition for work like this should be of a sincere interest to our state in its results with a selfless readiness to apply the relevant recommendations into practice. Without all this, the expectations created will be futile, and the process will be false and hypocritical. We've already seen such precedent in recent history and unfortunately it does not "indulge" us with a praiseworthy experience.

Here, we should remind ourselves that with the change in the essence of foreign policy (which in present days completely absorbs domestic political elements and practically is inseparable from them), the perception of national security has changed. Through a contemporary view this is no longer just the readiness of the defense system or the inviolability of borders, but equally includes the economy, education, technology, medicine, and all other layers that are linked to the resilience of a national state system and the skills necessary to overcome any challenges. At the given historical stage, it is completely correct: The modern state is no longer a structure divided into different agencies or redistributed powers. It is a collective national melding of physical, logistical, or moral-psychological resources.

The above-mentioned condition should be clearly reflected in the approach of the Georgian Foreign Service and should be seen in its decisions or actions. It is inconceivable that the function of the "Foreign Office" of Georgia is limited to responding to crises, which we are witnessing today. The times demand it to act in line with strategic national goals, offering new solutions and conceptual offers to Georgian and external audiences. After all, this excludes the Foreign Service from being politicized or partisan. It should be noted that parting with such vicious "experience" would not harm many "ill" agencies, but in this article we are talking mostly about Georgian diplomacy. It should be the order of the society to take this most important direction to the highest level, through the ascent of its creative thinking. It is crucial to instigate further the Georgian Foreign Ministry's sense of connection with the "average" citizen of Georgia and to make their work practically valued in order to solve the objectives standing before the country. Appreciating the path taken by generations of Georgian diplomats will vastly facilitate the growth of the reputation of the Service, which will be a precondition for tangible or intangible support to future generations.

And finally, one brief but essential point

Today's world has become so "unconventional" that it is so unusual to do things in a conventional, standard, stereotypical way, which is mundane for friends and at the time easily predictable for opponents. This reminder equally applies to the foreign policy of the Georgian state, where the pursuit of "new ideas" by "old means" is in dissonance with time and expectations. The so-called age of normal foreign policy is a thing of the past, and real results in the current and subsequent stages of the process can be achieved by combining ordinary (conventional) and unordinary (unconventional) methods. Such an approach is furthermore increasingly relevant when the system of international relations is going through another stage of fragmentation, which on the one hand is characterized by the proliferation of regional geopolitical centers and on the other hand by the rise of irregular nationalism in relations. These and other factors make the rapid modernization and rationalization of the Georgian public-civil service system and at the same time foreign policy even more topical and urgent.

The world around us is approaching new realities, and this will lead to a timely and high-quality implementation of changes from the Georgian nation at the appropriate time. As a nation, we must acquire the necessary competitiveness in a complete world and avoid the unfavorable role of an outsider.