



GEORGIA

A RISK ASSESSMENT BRIEF



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Gaining its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, in 2004 Georgia remains a democratizing state made up of competing regions possessing greater historical and geographical cohesiveness than the country as a whole. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Georgia's first elected president, was overthrown in a military revolt in 1991-1992 and replaced by Eduard Shevardnadze, a former First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party and Soviet Foreign Minister.¹ During that period, conflicts in the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were causing significant national instability. Shevardnadze succeeded in cracking down on paramilitaries, some of whom had assisted in his rise to power, and, by the end of 1995, consolidated most coercive powers under the interior, security, and defence ministries.²

Although Shevardnadze brought a degree of stability, he had little success in resolving the so-called "frozen conflicts," protracted conflicts lacking large-scale, systematic, and countrywide violence but also without a final settlement or agreement, or in restoring territorial integrity. In addition to weak ties between the central government and Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the southwestern province of Ajara is virtually self-governing, though it still participates in Georgian state institutions. Another area, which until recently was largely uncontrolled, is the Pankisi Valley – home to several thousand Chechen refugees.

Under the Shevardnadze regime, endemic corruption and basic social problems fostered widespread discontent, and new parties began to compete with Shevardnadze's Citizens' Union of Georgia. President Shevardnadze was re-elected in 2000 with more than 76% of the votes and an official turnout of 76%; however, independent observers claimed that both figures were erroneous. The November 2003 parliamentary elections were an historic opportunity for the country to take significant steps towards legitimizing democratic reforms.³ Nevertheless, once it became apparent that the government planned to declare and implement a fraudulent election result, the opposition parties mounted an effective civil protest campaign. Discontent in the country was so high that the mass demonstrations, led by Mikheil Saakashvili of the National Movement Democratic Front, quickly escalated to a successful demand for President Shevardnadze's resignation. Saakashvili was victorious in presidential elections held in January of 2004 and took office on the twenty-fifth of that month.

Georgia warrants international concern for a number of reasons. First, the so-called "frozen conflicts," involving Abkhazia and South Ossetia, are by no means completely frozen. In addition, violent incidents occur on a regular basis between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces, and between Abkhazian and Georgian paramilitaries. Beyond this, inter-ethnic alliances benefiting from a "no war – no peace" situation are unstable, short-term and, consequently, highly unpredictable. Finally, the ethnic composition of the region means that international borders are not barriers to the export of instability. Any new conflict or internal disorder in Georgia could have a serious impact in the wider neighbourhood of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and the northern Caucasus.⁴

History of Armed Conflict

Stabilizing Factors	Destabilizing Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A warming trend towards the West occurred throughout the 1990's under President Shevardnadze including a desire to join NATO and increase trade with the West. ▪ Post September 11, 2001, additional international assistance has been provided to shore up the Chechen crime and terrorist problem in the Pankisi Pass. ▪ After the unsolicited Russian raids of 2002, Georgia and Russia enhanced security cooperation including increasing border patrols.⁵ ▪ Abkhazian IDPs (ethnic Georgians from the Gali region) remain a vocal lobby pressuring the Georgian government, which has offered Abkhazia considerable autonomy in peace negotiations in an attempt to bring a settlement to the conflict; however, the Abkhaz insist on independence.⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The 1991-92 war in South Ossetia displaced up to 30,000 Georgians from the area and pushed 37,000 Ossetians to North Ossetia. An agreement was reached in 1997 for their return; however, as of January 2003 at least 12,000 ethnic Georgians remained displaced and authorities have done little to facilitate the return of ethnic Georgians to South Ossetia or Ossetians to Georgia.⁷ CIFP refugees produced score: 3.6 (low-moderate refugees). ▪ Georgia waged a low intensity conflict with Abkhazia in 1992.⁸ ▪ The civil war from 1992-94 fostered widespread chaos, insecurity, and mistrust in political and military power structures. ▪ An estimated 300,000 displaced people from the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have not returned home.⁹ CIFP refugees hosted score: 8 (high refugees). ▪ Isolated outbreaks of violence continue in Abkhazia.¹⁰ ▪ Overall CIFP conflict intensity score: 5.8 (moderate intensity).

Governance and Political Instability

Stabilizing Factors	Destabilizing Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shevardnadze brought stability and consolidated most coercive powers under the interior, security, and defence ministries.¹¹ ▪ The opposition was able to overturn the fraudulent election result with an effective civil protest campaign.¹² ▪ Mikheil Saakashvili won presidential elections in January 2004 and was sworn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Corruption undermines the credibility of the government and its reforms and stunts economic growth and investment.¹⁸ Georgia ranks fifth from last (out of 133) in the Transparency International "2002 Corruption Perceptions Index."¹⁹ CIFP corruption score: 8 (highly corrupt). ▪ Assassination attempts were made against Shevardnadze in August 1995 and February 1998.²⁰ ▪ The state is highly centralized. Power is focused in the executive, shared and utilized through personal allegiances, and linked to organized crime.²¹ ▪ The political status of breakaway provinces Abkhazia and South Ossetia is

<p>in on 25 January 2004.¹³ The elections were said to have been orderly and without the violence of the previous elections. Saakashvili received more than 95% of the vote with 1.76 million votes following an 80% turnout, thus signaling democratic legitimacy.¹⁴ CIPF democracy score: 4 (low-moderately democratic).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Saakashvili has stated that a major priority is anti-corruption.¹⁵ ▪ Parliamentary elections are scheduled for March 28, 2004.¹⁶ ▪ Georgia possesses a strong, aggressive, independent media sector willing to criticize the government but lacking in quality (media tend to the blur line between reporting, analysis, and opinion) and struggling financially.¹⁷ 	<p>unresolved, as is the status of the autonomous region of Ajara.²²</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No consensus exists on power sharing arrangements between the central government and the regions.²³ ▪ Parliament has instituted wide ranging reforms to improve human rights especially religious freedoms enshrined in the 1995 constitution, but rights lack enforcement by law enforcement and criminal justice officials.²⁴ ▪ The ineffective tax collection regime results in an annual income of approximately 1 billion GEL from an estimated potential of 3-4 billion GEL. ▪ Although independent media is strong in Georgia, the government maintains control over strategic outlets, including television stations and the only radio broadcasting services with nation-wide coverage.²⁵ The media generally do not enjoy editorial independence in news and political programming.²⁶ CIPF press freedom score: 6.2 (moderate press freedom). ▪ Members of “nontraditional” religions, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, Baptists, and Seventh-Day Adventists, face harassment by authorities and Orthodox extremists.²⁷ ▪ Freedom of association is only sporadically respected and detainees are frequently mistreated by the authorities.²⁸ CIPF political rights score: 5.4 (moderate political freedom).
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Militarization

Stabilizing Factors	Destabilizing Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The US is spending \$64 million to train and equip 2000 border guards and to establish an elite Georgian anti-terrorism force.²⁹ ▪ The NATO-based Partnership for Peace (PfP) program is transitioning Georgian troops up to western standards. Georgia hosted a PfP exercise teaming six NATO forces with six Caucasus forces. Ukraine has been assigned by NATO to initially help train and transform the Georgian forces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low military spending, at \$23 million USD and 0.59% of GDP, combined with forces numbering 16,790 (active) and 250,000 (reserve) fosters low quality and poorly trained security and defence forces.³⁰ CIPF military expenditure score: 3.6 (low-moderate expenditure), CIPF total armed forces score: 8.3 (high number). ▪ The law of “Fees for Delaying Compulsory Military Service” allows the rich to avoid service, thus creating a military made up of the poor and uneducated. ▪ A clear functional boundary does not exist between police, military, and special forces. ▪ The military lacks unification and direction and is composed of fragments of ex-Soviet troops, Georgian regulars, ethnic troops, refugee bands etc. ▪ Morale is low and rates of desertion from security services are high. ▪ Russian military bases deny the government effective control over the entirety of the country’s internationally recognized territory.³¹ ▪ Several rebel, criminal, and terrorist armed forces operate throughout the country.

Population Heterogeneity

Stabilizing Factors	Destabilizing Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There has been a notable decline in violent interethnic conflict post-1995. ▪ Saakashvili has voiced a commitment to making Georgia a “tolerant, multiethnic state.”³² ▪ Saakashvili has recognized concerns of Armenian minority in Samtskhe-Javakheti and has expressed willingness to address them.³³ ▪ Russian minority are unlikely to initiate political action or face repression in the near term. The group is not well organized, does not have a cohesive group identity, lives in predominantly urban areas, and has not experienced communal conflict or political discrimination since independence. They are an economically and to some degree socially advantaged group.³⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Georgia is home to a fairly diverse array of historically competitive ethno-religious minorities, including Georgian (70%), Armenian (8%), Russian (6%), Azeri (6%), Adzar (5.8%), Ossetian (3%), Abkhaz (2%), and other (5%).³⁵ CIPF ethnic diversity score: 6 (moderate diversity), religious diversity: 7 (moderate-high diversity). ▪ The overall risk of interethnic rebellion and/or violence remains high. CIPF risk of ethnic rebellion score: 8 (high risk). ▪ There is an unresolved dispute between the central government and the Abkhaz. The group has experienced repression and rebellion in the recent past, is highly organized in military and political terms, and is concentrated in a distinct region.³⁶ ▪ The central government has a history of religious-based repressive measures against the primarily Muslim Adzar. The group is concentrated in Ajara and has high group cohesion. However, the group is not ethno-culturally distinct from ethnic Georgians and enjoys a “great degree of economic prosperity.”³⁷ ▪ Negotiations between the central government and the South Ossetians have not led to settlement; however, the Georgian government maintains a moderate attitude due to the fact that South Ossetians did not carry out full ethnic cleansing or subject all Georgian villages to their control. Risk factors include a high level of group cohesion and geographic concentration.³⁸

Demographic Stress

Stabilizing Factors	Destabilizing Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The 2002 census recorded a near even mix of urban and rural population (52.3% urban and 47.7% rural). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Since 1989 the population has shrunk by 900,000 to the current 4.9 million residents. Many left to seek employment in Russia and the Ukraine.³⁹ CIFP population score: 5 (moderate size). ▪ The population growth rate was negative, at -0.53%, in 2003.⁴⁰ ▪ The move to a market economy has led to growing migration to the large towns at an average rate of 0.8% per year.⁴¹ CIFP urban population score: 6 (moderate size), CIFP urban population growth rate score: 2.2 (low growth rate). ▪ The youth population is expected to drop from 15.6% to 10.8% by 2030, fuelled in part by high youth unemployment.⁴² ▪ High levels of migration are causing demographic and gender imbalances and a loss of the most able-bodied groups of people.⁴³ ▪ The ageing population is stressing the social security and pension systems. The dependency ratio (proportion of employed people to pensioners) dropped from 2.8 in 1990 to 0.8 in 2002.⁴⁴

Economic Performance

Stabilizing Factors	Destabilizing Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The economy is growing, with a GDP growth rate of 3% in 1999, 2% in 2000, 4.5% in 2001, 5.3% in 2002, and 8.3% through the first nine months of 2003.⁴⁵ CIFP score: 4.8 (moderate growth). ▪ The US is a significant investor in Georgia, contributing between 20-34% of FDI in recent years.⁴⁶ ▪ An agreement on bilateral creditors regarding the debt in 2001 significantly assisted debt sustainability.⁴⁷ ▪ Total debt service as percentage of GDP is 2.5%. CIFP score: 1 (low). ▪ The Lari is stable and inflation is under control, at 3.4%, in 2001. CIFP exchange rate score: 2 (low).⁴⁸ ▪ A GINI coefficient of 38.9 indicates moderate inequality.⁴⁹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ GDP per capita was \$594 US in 2002.⁵⁰ CIFP score: 6 (moderate). ▪ Severe political and economic turbulence following independence in 1991. By 1994, Georgian production was at only 25% of total output recorded in 1990.⁵¹ ▪ Economic activity and trade flows are below potential due to eroded investor confidence resulting from poor fiscal management, rampant corruption, and the arbitrary implementation of laws and regulations.⁵² CIFP trade openness score: 7.4 (moderate-low openness). ▪ FDI decreased to 61.8 million in 2001 from 83.65 million in 1999.⁵³ ▪ Energy dependence on outside sources is causing acute shortages, undermining economic performance, and fostering popular unrest.⁵⁴ ▪ A large shadow economy constituting 40-42% of total industrial production is a major reason for the prolonged budget crisis.⁵⁵

Human Development

Stabilizing Factors	Destabilizing Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 79% of the population had access to an improved water source.⁵⁶ ▪ 100% of the population had access to improved sanitation.⁵⁷ ▪ The average life expectancy is high at 78 years in 2003.⁵⁸ CIFP score: 3 (high). ▪ The infant death ratio is low at 24 per 1,000 live births.⁵⁹ 102 children out of 1,000 die before the age of 5.⁶⁰ CIFP score: 3 (low). ▪ The maternal mortality rate is relatively low at 50 per 100,000 live births.⁶¹ CIFP score: 3. ▪ Less than 0.1% of adults aged 15 to 49 are known to be infected with HIV.⁶² CIFP score: 1 (low). ▪ The school enrollment rate is approximately 98%.⁶³ ▪ Child labour laws are generally respected and enforced. CIFP score: 1 (low percentage of children in labour force). ▪ Poverty levels are declining in Tbilisi and Imereti.⁶⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Poverty levels are high. In 2002 the level of poverty was 52%.⁶⁵ ▪ Poverty levels are increasing in Kakheti, Kvemo-Kartli, and Guria.⁶⁶ ▪ Government spending on education is only 2.5% of GDP.⁶⁷

Environmental Stress

Stabilizing Factors	Destabilizing Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategically located east of the Black Sea, Georgia draws security from its control of much of the Caucasus Mountains and the routes through them.⁶⁸ ▪ The rate of deforestation is low. CIFP score: 2 (low). ▪ Considerable natural resource deposits exist, including fifteen known oil (11.4 million reserve tons) and two known gas (82 million cubic meters) deposits.⁶⁹ ▪ Between 1995 and 2000, production in the mining industry grew by 14.2%, largely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Landmines leftover from the 1994 conflict are numerous around the Abkhazian border. The US is assisting in the de-mining process. ▪ Inadequate supplies of potable water exist. ▪ Toxic chemical waste has created

due to a 35% increase in oil production.⁷⁰

localized soil pollution.⁷¹

International Linkages

Stabilizing Factors	Destabilizing Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ A member of the UN, CIS, OSCE, WTO, and Council of Europe.▪ A member of the PfP and desires membership in NATO.⁷²▪ Signed a partnership and cooperation agreement with the EU.⁷³▪ The UNOMIG observer force and a Russian peacekeeping mission under the authority of the CIS is stationed in Abkhazia. Their activities are hampered by land mines and guerilla activity.⁷⁴▪ An international group, including the US, France, the UK, and Russia, working through the UN and the OSCE, is encouraging a comprehensive settlement to the Abkhazia conflict.⁷⁵▪ Turkey has proposed a Caucasus Stability Pact aimed at developing a web of cooperative trade and transport arrangements among Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia.⁷⁶▪ Good relations currently exist with Azerbaijan and the Ukraine.▪ Georgia is viewed as a key transit country on the Southern Caucasus corridor and identified by Western companies and governments as their preferred route for bringing Caspian oil and gas from Azerbaijan to world markets without passing through Russia.▪ Level of international disputes/conflicts currently low. CIFP total international disputes score: 2 (low).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Russia maintains bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki, failed to internationalize its peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia, and supports separatism in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Ajaria.⁷⁷▪ A visa regime instituted by Russia exempting South Ossetia and Abkhazia indicates “that Russia remained interested in integrating territory and populations and that it effectively considered Georgia a domestic rather than foreign affairs issue.”⁷⁸▪ The Caucasus have experienced more armed conflict than any former Soviet region.⁷⁹ Russian arms sales and other military involvement in Armenia, Chechnya, and other neighboring countries poses a continual threat.▪ CIFP economic linkages score: 9 (low).▪ CIFP UN linkages score: 5-6 (moderate).▪ CIFP security linkages score: 9 (low).▪ CIFP multipurpose organizations linkages score: 7 (moderate-low).

Scenarios - 2004

Worst Case Scenario: Return to Violent Conflict and State Failure

- Violent overthrow of government by hard-line groups.
- Resumption of violent separatist conflicts with Abkhazia and/or South Ossetia.
- New violent separatist conflicts involving Javakheti, Samegrelo, Ajara, and/or Kvemo-Kartli.
- Capital flight, disruptions in international trade, and economic recession.
- Widespread unemployment, poverty, civil unrest, and inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict.
- Collapse of pension and social security systems.
- Conflict on border regions with neighboring countries (Russia, Armenia, Turkey, Azerbaijan) resulting in militarized disputes, refugee flows, and border closures.

Best Case Scenario: Peaceful Coexistence

- Heightened sense of national cohesion coupled with a decline in ethnic, religious, and regional tensions.
- Significant declines in government corruption at all levels.
- Reintegration of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Ajara into the federal political system.
- Central government establishes more equitable power sharing arrangement with the territories.
- Disputes with Russia over military presence and bases and also visas resolved amicably.
- Integration of regionally-based autonomous security forces with national security forces.
- Internal refugee crisis is resolved through the use of resettlement programs.
- Integration into North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Most Likely Scenario: Building on the Status Quo

- Continued ethnic and regional tensions.
- Greater government transparency and reductions in corruption.
- Continued yet fluctuating economic growth.
- Growing trade, especially in the natural resources sector (largely if oil production and pipeline projects are successful), resulting in lower unemployment and greater overall prosperity.
- Despite continued engagement, “frozen conflicts” resist settlement.
- Generally stable relations with neighboring countries; however, tensions with both Russia over military bases and “peacekeeping force,” and Chechnya over the operation of Chechen fighters in Georgian territory may continue to be a problem.
- Continued modernization of security and defence forces.
- Stronger ties with United States and Europe.

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- 7 GDP, 1.
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- 10 USDS, 4.
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- 40 USCIA, 4.
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- 55 Ibid., 8 and 16.
- 56 UNDP, 255.

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- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 1.
- ⁶¹ UNDP, 263.
- ⁶² Ibid., 259.
- ⁶³ IMF, 8.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 16.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 13.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., 13.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 15.
- ⁶⁸ USCIA, 4.
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- ⁷¹ USCIA, 4.
- ⁷² USDS, 6.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 6.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 6.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., 6.
- ⁷⁶ Phillips, 20.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 4.
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