

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of grey dots of varying sizes, with several dots highlighted in red. The dots are arranged in a pattern that roughly outlines the map of Europe and the Mediterranean region.

# Towards A New NATO Strategic Concept

## A View from Georgia

**KAHA IMNADZE**  
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- While emphasizing the need for partnership to fulfil the Alliance's core tasks the report does not adequately address security concerns of partner nations. The new Strategic Concept should retain the dual-track philosophy of the Harmel Report, and constructive re-engagement of Russia should not come at the expense of the security of other partner nations that have embraced democratic values and are working to join the Alliance.
- The report fails to address the issue of using the existing partnership formats, such as the partnership commissions or EAPC, on a broader level to address crisis management (with an early warning capability).
- The pressing need to re-engage Russia seems to be eroding the open door policy, potentially abandoning the interests of other/smaller countries and Georgia in particular.
- Addressing nuclear and conventional arms control issues in close cooperation with Russia is a viable and timely initiative by the Alliance, with the potential to become a solid foundation for constructive re-engagement with Russia.
- Reviving the CFE process is increasingly meaningful for improving the security climate along Europe's eastern and southern borders.
- Georgia should also reassess its policies and concentrate on »spreading its portfolio« and maintaining bilateral contacts with selected allies and partners, rather than putting all its eggs in a single NATO basket.

## Introduction

NATO is widely acclaimed as the most successful political military alliance of all time. Its astute policy kept Europe at peace, averted the threat of a Third World War and allowed a much smoother transition to post-Cold War realities than we might have otherwise expected. Moreover, NATO in fact became a driving force in the formation of the new European space, as the Central and Eastern European countries joined it first, before being admitted to the EU.

Given the political weight of NATO and its role and function in contemporary world affairs, the way this organization evolves will undoubtedly impact not just on its members, but even more on its partners (and the rest of the world), including Georgia. Therefore, although the new Strategic Concept is primarily aimed at reconciling differences between the allies and forging a common vision for the next decade, it is worth scrutinizing it from a Georgian perspective.

Georgia was consulted by the group of experts chaired by Madeleine K. Albright on several occasions at various levels, including consultations with Georgia's diplomatic mission to NATO and a meeting with the Georgian foreign minister at the Third Strategic Concept Seminar in Norway on 13–14 January, 2010. Thus the official Georgian position was adequately conveyed to the Alliance. This paper offers an independent view that should not be taken as the official Georgian position.

## Relations between Georgia and NATO

Following the tectonic geopolitical changes of the early 1990s, when the Eastern European and Baltic countries returned to their natural European harbour, the newly independent former Soviet republics each opted for their own chosen path defined by their singularity, their history, and the values they wanted to espouse. Georgia's choice was integration into the Euro-Atlantic family, renewing the age-old historical aspiration, the inexorable drive to the West of a country located at the crossroads of civilizations.

For Georgia NATO soon became the very embodiment of the entire »Western idea«, much more than simply joining a political-military alliance. The choice was not incidental. Before the European Union designed its enlargement moves, it was the agility of NATO that actually cut the ice, when its Partnership for Peace

Program – designed originally as an alternative to enlargement – grew to become its very tool.

Georgia was among those nations that quickly responded to NATO's new initiative by becoming a partner in 1994. But despite its political aspirations, the first decade failed to produce tangible progress for Georgia on its Euro-Atlantic path. Exhausted by a raft of domestic and cross-border problems, civil and separatist wars, and difficulties related to state-building, the country spiralled into rampant corruption. However, a change of government in 2003 boosted Georgia's drive toward NATO, and the declaration of intent to join the alliance made at the Prague Summit in 2002 was soon being given real content through accelerated reforms in democracy-building and the economy, and a comprehensive defence reform and modernization. In recognition of this, the Alliance started to consider the possibility of Georgian membership. But adamant opposition on the part of Russia turned out to be a major stumbling block. As a result NATO's Bucharest Summit in April 2008 declared that Georgia »will become member of NATO« but no gave specific timeline, thus casting a shadow of ambiguity on the matter.

Notwithstanding the above setback, Georgia's drive toward the Euro-Atlantic community has been reinforced by recent developments in Georgian-Russian relations. The Russo-Georgian war of August 2008 was a watershed event in many respects. Much to her chagrin, Russia found that Georgia adhered to its course of Euro-Atlantic integration. Even though none of the existing mechanisms (including the United Nations, the OSCE, and NATO partnership arrangements) had been able to avert the hostilities, the Georgian public remained loyal to NATO, with nationwide polls in 2008 showing 77 percent support for membership. Surveys conducted in 2009 by the NATO Information Office in Georgia, local media, and polling organizations also show 62 to 68 percent in favour. Soon after the war, new, enhanced frameworks were established with the EU and NATO, and the donor conference organized by Brussels pledged \$4.5 billion for post-war reconstruction. An extraordinary meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels on August 19, 2008, just a week after the end of hostilities, decided to set up the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC). Established a month later, the NGC became the overarching framework for NATO-Georgia relations. All other existing cooperation programs, such as the Intensified Dialogue on Georgia and the Planning and Review Process (PARP), were to take

place within this new framework, augmented by the Annual National Plan (ANP) outlining cooperation activities relating to political, military, and security reforms.

A broad consensus within Georgian society in general and the overwhelming majority of its political spectrum, as well as government policy, holds that Georgia's European choice is irreversible, keeping the country poised for integration within the Euro-Atlantic community and structures. However, Georgia is knocking on NATO's door not merely as a country seeking security, but as a nation that already contributes its utmost to the Alliance.

A total of 7,921 Georgian servicemen – a good half of the entire armed forces – served with coalition forces in Iraq in 2003–2008, 2,259 troops served with KFOR in Kosovo, and 3,865 rotated under US and French command in Afghanistan. Today, with 955 servicemen on the ground in the difficult Helmand province, Georgia – a country of just over 3 million – is among the largest per-capita troop contributors to ISAF.

As well as troop contributions, Georgia has also made its Saker Mountain Training School available as a NATO PFP Education and Training Centre.

To summarize:

- Georgia is a long-term partner for the Alliance and an active and important troop contributor to ISAF (per-capita one of the largest).
- Georgia aspires to NATO membership, with Russia adamantly opposing. NATO's Bucharest Summit declaration states that Georgia »will become a member of NATO« but no clear timeframe has been given, casting a shadow of ambiguity on the matter.

## Core Tasks and Functions

The four core tasks named by the group of experts are, without any doubt, those the Alliance should take on. The ability to deter aggression and defend member states against any threat and the transatlantic link (»the only contractual link between North America and Europe«) should remain a genetic continuum.

In a globalised world a single event often has worldwide repercussions; this can be military conflict, terrorist act, cyber-attack, or disruption to energy supplies and trade routes. It is noteworthy that Article 5 was first

invoked (albeit more symbolically than practically) not because of cross-border aggression (which for the foreseeable future is practically unthinkable for the Alliance and its members), but when the United States came under terrorist attack on 9/11. The new threats and challenges of our times require the Alliance to direct its attention beyond its immediate borders and engage in far-off places. Hence the need to contribute to the »broader security of the entire Euro-Atlantic region« and establish partnerships with individual countries, group of countries, and international organizations. In fact, while collective defense and the transatlantic link remain vital at the heart of the Alliance, the provision of broader security in the entire Euro-Atlantic region through the partnerships and being a »pillar of Euro-Atlantic security« are the core tasks that can lead the Alliance into a new decade with the functions and capability to cope with threats both traditional and unconventional as well as the new challenges of an »uncertain and unpredictable world«.

NATO became a pillar of Euro-Atlantic security not only because of its military might, but in large part due to its open door policy that provided »important incentives within Europe for democracy, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and respect for human rights«. It also provided security guarantees for new democracies, without which the assertion of those values would have been difficult if not impossible. The report notes that »NATO also contributes to stability through its open door policy«, calling the latter »the engine of progress towards a Europe whole and free«. But at the same time, there seems to be a certain ambiguity – perhaps an indication that, although the door remains open, the external boundaries of the Alliance have already been set for the foreseeable future. NATO has achieved its »primary goal« of the 1990s, which was »to consolidate Europe whole and free«; now Europe is »more democratic, united, and peaceful than it had ever been«. Indeed, we have near congruence of the political, economic, and security boundaries of »traditional« (i.e. pre-1914) Europe. But a fundamental question remains: is Europe a mere geographic area, or a set of values that transcends even the boundaries of civilizations?

Although the report does mention »further enlargement being under consideration in the western Balkans and with respect to Georgia and Ukraine«, it makes no mention of the Bucharest Summit and other related decisions regarding Georgia's membership aspirations. The recommendations add to Georgia's worries where

they state that: »NATO’s diplomatic efforts with Russia, Ukraine, Georgia and the other countries of the Caucasus, and other non-member states show that nations do not have to be part of the Alliance to join with NATO on projects that benefit all«. This may well be true for nations not seeking NATO membership, but the case of Georgia is different and rather singular. The statement also openly challenges the decision taken at the Bucharest Summit. Furthermore, when talking specifically about Georgia (and Ukraine) the report says that: »Both countries have tailored partnership structures with the alliance in the form of NATO-Georgia and NATO-Ukraine commissions«. While the framework document of September 15, 2008, called for the commission to supervise »the process set in hand at the NATO Bucharest Summit«, the report describes the NATO-Georgia Commission merely as an »excellent channel of communication«.

One might argue that under current conditions – with violated borders – Georgia cannot be considered for membership. The criteria outlined in the report also clearly stipulate »fair treatment of minority populations« and »peaceful resolution of domestic and international disputes«. The former, along with »domestic political support for NATO membership«, are new conditions, apparently specifically tailored to the cases of Georgia and Ukraine, while the rest reflects the 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement.

I would face vilification in my own country if I were to suggest that – alongside the loss of territorial integrity – the August War of 2008 had liberated Georgia from the burden of »dormant conflicts« on its territory. But would Georgia be taken under NATO’s protective wing if it only recognized the current status quo in Abkhazia and South Ossetia? Hypothetical perhaps, but I am still more than certain that even such an unlikely move by Georgia would not alter the Alliance’s decision.

The logic for rather abandoning Georgia is discernible. Of course it goes without saying that it is crucial for the Alliance to constructively re-engage with Russia on wider Euro-Atlantic security, non-proliferation, missile defense, combating terrorism, achieving lasting success in Afghanistan, and many other tasks. But Georgia’s worry remains, and the concern is legitimate for this small country.

To summarize:

- The four core tasks should remain the heart of the Alliance.
- Emphasis on partnership is expedient to success in addressing new challenges and fulfilling other core tasks.
- The pressing need to re-engage Russia seems to be eroding the open door policy, potentially sacrificing the interests of other (smaller) countries and Georgia in particular.
- Mentioning membership candidates in a context that »nations do not have to be part of the Alliance to join with NATO on projects that benefit all« also casts a shadow on the open door policy.

## Partnerships

Partnerships are an essential part of the Strategic Concept and reflect new thinking within the Alliance. It is quite timely to press for closer relations and even complementarity between NATO and the EU, improvement of institutional links through liaison offices between NATO and UN, and even closer partnership with OSCE and use of each other’s resources. Without such partnerships, a »comprehensive and cost-effective approach to security« would certainly be unthinkable.

Closer links with the UN are paramount, as it is the only global organization that can give incontestable legitimacy to coercive action beyond NATO’s borders, and establishing liaison offices seems a good start. The report also brings up the issue of reforming the UN, but this certainly exceeds the scope of the Strategic Concept.

The OSCE has been an important tool in helping new democracies build democratic institutions, but its track record in addressing the security concerns of partner nations is a list of constant failure. It is unclear what added value the OSCE can give to the Alliance in terms of »soft security«. In any case, revitalization of the role of the OSCE on Europe’s eastern borders should not mean disengagement of NATO from these areas.

While seeing a great potential in partnerships with select nations or groups of nations, the report falls short of addressing the issues of at least some of the partners whose cooperation it seeks in order to fulfil Alliance’s core tasks. The open door policy seems to be further eroded too. It is not hard to notice a shift in

Alliance priorities. At the very outset of its »Analyses and Recommendations« the »Partnerships« chapter boldly states that »NATO's first round of partnerships was aimed primarily at facilitating the entry of new members into the Alliance. A dozen new Allies later, that function has begun to diminish as other purposes have increased«. While NATO does have »other purposes« as it needs partners' cooperation in addressing the Alliance's core tasks, the report seems to overlook the security concerns (not to mention security needs) of at least some of its partners.

»Strengthening routine and crisis consultations with EAPC partners« is a welcome development, although the report leaves it unclear what practical steps should be taken. Since a number of the partners already have »tailored partnership structures«, perhaps it would be more opportune to find the best ways to use these for crisis management in a NATO+Partner or Partners format, as well as the wider EAPC format. The report seems to acknowledge this shortcoming: »The fact that the NATO-Russia Commission was not used to prevent the 2008 crisis in Georgia is unsettling«, and later »One of the major failures of NATO's partnership structure was the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia, in which two Alliance partners engaged in hostilities over issues that remain unresolved«. But it stops at this acknowledgment, without much deliberation as to whether and how this or similar commissions could be used in future. Such a perfunctory attitude is alarming: the failure is recognized but there are no recommendations on how to avoid the same thing happening again. Saying that: »The allies should also employ NATO's crisis management mechanisms, in association with the partnership commissions, to assess and monitor security developments« leaves open what should be done after the developments have been »assessed«, apart from »to discuss mutual security concerns and to foster practical cooperation«, which is embodied in another recommendation. Overall, it remains unclear what mechanisms NATO can employ to ensure stability on its borders in the wider Euro-Atlantic area. Against such a background, the very essence of the partnerships might be undermined by NATO's inability to provide an effective crisis management mechanism (with an early warning capability to diffuse tensions before they escalate to crisis level) for partner nations, still less security guarantees. NATO needs partnerships to cope with its core tasks; the partners need NATO to address their security needs in return.

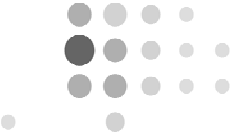
Lastly, addressing partnerships with Georgia and Ukraine, the report recommends: »the clearer NATO articulates its position to the partners and the more accurately it can assess their perceptions, the more adept the Allies will be at defusing crises and building trust«. With not a single word mentioning the Bucharest Summit in connection with Georgia (and Ukraine), that recommendation represents a clear departure from earlier decisions. Nevertheless, »clearer articulation« is always better than an ambiguous promise. Perhaps Georgia should also reassess its policies and concentrate on »spreading its portfolio« and maintaining bilateral contacts with selected allies and partners, instead of putting all its eggs in the NATO basket.

To summarize:

- Enhancing complementarity with the EU and establishing closer partnerships with the UN and OSCE are indispensable if the Alliance is to effectively address its challenges.
- Revitalization of the role of the OSCE on Europe's eastern and southern borders should not come at the expense of gradual NATO disengagement from those regions.
- The report does not adequately address the security concerns of partner nations.
- The report fails to address the issue of using the existing partnership formats, such as the partnership commissions or EAPC, on a broader level to address crisis management (with an early warning capability).
- The report discards the decisions of the Bucharest Summit concerning Georgia (and Ukraine).

## Disarmament

Technological advances in a globalised world make the threat of terrorism in combination with the weapons of mass destruction one of the prime dangers of our time. The Alliance cannot stay aloof from such a momentous challenge, so addressing it in the new Strategic Concept is timely and expedient. The Alliance – primarily the United States – and Russia possess the majority of the nuclear arsenal. With nuclear non-proliferation a core topic in US-Russian relations, bringing the task within NATO would definitely be a step forward, particularly in light of the recommendation to »convene a Special Consultative Group in order to inform and coordinate its internal dialogue about nuclear-related issues«. It might prove useful to consider inviting other nuclear states on a case by case basis to participate in



the open/expanded meetings of the proposed Special Consultative Group.

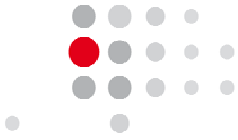
Given the shift in the Alliance's open door policy and the danger of creating a security vacuum along Europe's eastern/southern borders, reviving the CFE process to ensure mutual transparency, restraint, and host-nation consent for stationing of foreign forces, with set limits on equipment becomes increasingly meaningful. Addressing this task in the Strategic Concept, and further enhancing the relevant OSCE would enhance the security climate in the area and serve the interests of both the Alliance and its partners, Georgia included.

To summarize:

- The recommendation for the Alliance to address nuclear and conventional arms control issues in close cooperation with Russia is viable and expedient, and may well become a solid foundation for constructive re-engagement with Russia.
- Revival of the CFE process is increasingly meaningful for improving the security climate along Europe's eastern and southern borders.

### Recommendations for the new Strategic Concept

- The new Strategic Concept should devote greater attention to the security concerns of the partner nations. By failing to address them, the Alliance would risk undermining the very essence of partnership.
- Effective practical mechanisms for crisis management should be elaborated using the existing partnership structures and formats (EAPC, partnership commissions) that not just monitor and assess, but also manage and defuse crisis situations.
- The new Strategic Concept should retain the dual track philosophy of the Harmel Report, and constructive re-engagement of Russia should not come at the expense of the security of partner nations that have embraced democratic values and are working to join the Alliance.



#### About the author:

**Kaha Imnadze** served as the Deputy Chief of the Mission of Georgia to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1994-1998; between 1998-2000 Mr. Imnadze was the Deputy Secretary of the National Security Council of Georgia, supervising defense and foreign policy. He then worked as Spokesman and Press Secretary for the President of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze (2000-2003). He currently works at the Georgian Institute for Russian Studies as the Program Director.

#### Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung  
International Policy Analysis  
Hiroshimastraße 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:  
Dr. Gero Maaß, Head,  
International Policy Analysis

Tel.: ++49-30-269-35-7745 | Fax: ++49-30-269-35-9248  
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