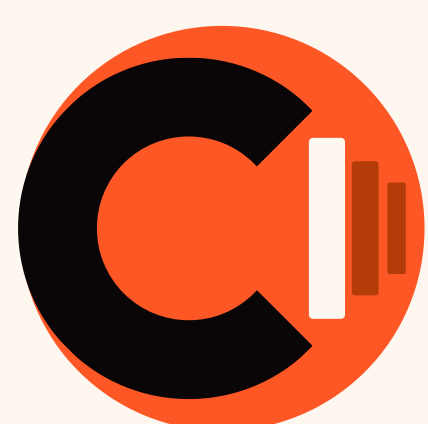


CIVIL INSIGHT

**Does Georgia Remain a Reliable
Anti-Terrorism Partner?**

**December 1-15 in Review:
Politics, Narratives, Prospects**



No.2/2025

1. About us

Meeting challenges by expanding our breadth and focus

You are reading the second issue of Civil Insight, a publication by the network of researchers, journalists and practitioners with deep professional knowledge of the South Caucasus, Eastern Europe and Central Asia regions.

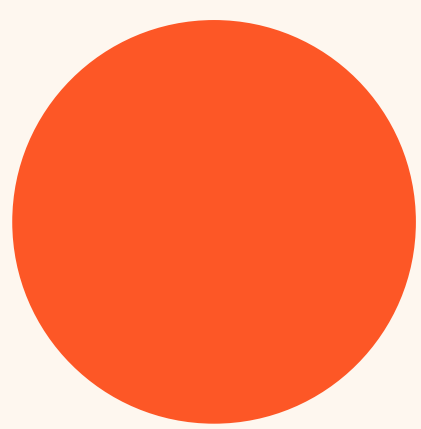
The publication is born from the professional network created by **Civil Georgia (Civil.ge)**, the leading Georgian English-language outlet, its networks and alumni from some 25 years of operation.

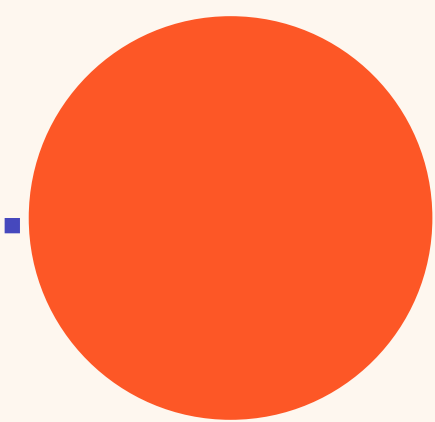
Civil Insight brings you an actionable perspective on the politico-economic context and trends. It is intended for policy-makers and as a reference accompaniment to the field practitioners.

Our mission is to contribute to informed decision-making, and we strive to tap into the best possible expertise available on the ground.

For each issue of the insight, we conduct meetings, interviews, and cross-check our Main Insight with active professionals who review and comment the initial draft.

We are happy to hear your comments.





2. Main Insight

Does Georgia Remain a Reliable Anti-Terrorism Partner?

What is happening

In four months of 2025, the State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG) changed its head twice.

The current head, Mamuka Mdinaradze, came from the party-political position, and purged the SSSG down to the level of the heads of departments. The head of the Counterterrorism Center was also removed, but no information is publicly available about his replacement.

The 2024 Report by the State Security Service – while not being a policy document - clearly points at Western powers as fomenting destabilization through financing anti-governmental actors, propaganda, and disinformation.

Significance

The Georgian government's relations with Western countries have been strained, while the domestic political crisis continues for over a year now.

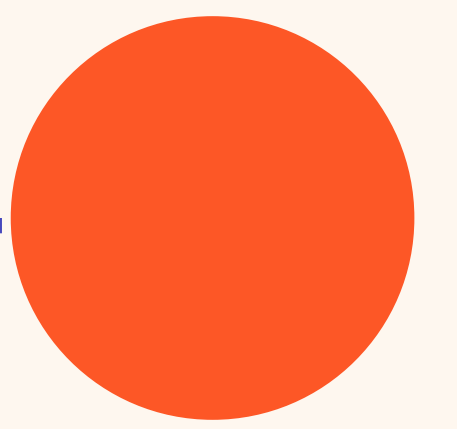
The SSSG has been closely involved in investigations considered by the observers as politically motivated and repressive. The disputed parliament, dominated by the Georgian Dream party, has been expanding the legislative basis for repression, including for crimes that fall under the purview of the SSSG.

In addition, the intra-party purges on anti-corruption charges have targeted previous SSSG leadership, but were also undertaken by the SSSG officers, making the service both an object and an instrument of political infighting.

Georgia's anti-terrorism capability has largely been built in the context of threat from the North and with active support of from the Western counterparts, especially the United States.

Despite sharp deterioration in relations with Western countries, Georgia's international cooperation in the fight against global terrorism continues, yet, as the political will for partnership with the West is fading, the practical capacities in counter-terrorism are also degrading.

Georgia remains a partner in global anti-terrorism, but political crisis and confrontation with the West are degrading its capacities.

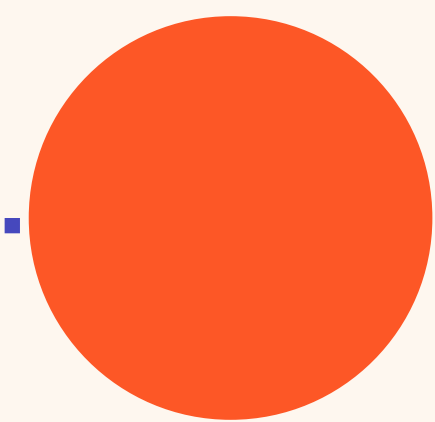


Key points

For Georgia, the context of anti-terrorism is evolving. While the traditional threats have faded, the war in Ukraine brought new challenges. The domestic political crisis is sapping the professional impartiality of the SSSG, degrading its capacity to accurately assess and prioritize the risks, even as its operational capacity remains intact.

- According to international assessments, Georgia is not considered a country at high risk of a terrorist attack and is considered capable of combating terrorism. Georgian Security Service says the risk of terrorist attacks “has decreased significantly.”
- The main targets of counterterrorism operations conducted in Georgia in recent years have been individuals linked to the "Islamic State." The "Islamic State" seeks to use Georgian territory for transit, logistical, and financial operations and rarely considers it as a target.
- Georgia’s vulnerability to terror-like attacks increases in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. Both sides may use Georgian territory for transit, as well as targeting each other’s interests and actors.
- Regions of Georgia occupied by Russia remain of concern as potential sources, conduits and, possibly, targets of such activity.

For Georgia the context of anti-terrorism is evolving. But the domestic political crisis is degrading the SSSG capacity to adequately assess and prioritize risks.



Analysis

Georgia's antiterrorism capacity has developed in the context of threat from Russia and in close and continuous cooperation with the Western, especially U.S. counterparts.

According to the State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG), Georgia still actively cooperates with its international partners in the fight against terrorism: with the USA, Israel, the United Kingdom, Germany, and neighboring states. This cooperation has several forms:

- Information exchange between the SSSG and partner agencies on individuals who are members of or affiliated with terrorist organizations, as well as those wishing to travel in transit;
- Joint building of capabilities for responding to terrorist threats;
- Updating of the unified information databases, to establish a list of individuals with known or possible links to terrorism and monitor their entry and exit;
- Joint training of special operations forces. The Service utilizes international cooperation formats.

This level of cooperation was achieved gradually, after the historic breakthrough in early 2000s.

Background: Threat comes from the North

For Georgia, the threat related to terrorism came originally from the North Caucasus. It developed in the context of near-state failure of the 1990s – civil war in Georgia and the two Chechen wars in Russia have fed lawlessness, created an affluence of arms, strengthened organized crime networks, and opened way to radical ideological influences.

The Pankisi Gorge in Georgia, which borders the Chechen Republic and is populated by ethnic Chechens (Kists), became a safe haven for individuals associated with the criminal underworld and terrorism. The Gorge was virtually outside the control of the central Georgian government, which lacked the

capacity to independently deal with the threats emanating from the gorge.

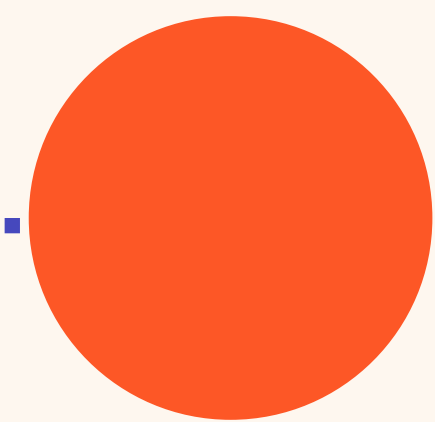
Following the 9/11 attacks, terrorism came to be understood as a global threat, and Georgia received support from the United States. On May 27, 2002, the "Georgia Train and Equip Program" officially began, taking Georgian-American cooperation to a new level. "In parallel with the global fight against terrorism, we hope to strengthen Georgia's independence and stability, as well as support your desire to live in an open, democratic society," said the then-U.S. Ambassador to Georgia, Richard Miles, during his speech at the ceremony.

This irked Russia, which used the uncontrolled situation in the Pankisi Gorge to exert political pressure on the Georgian government, accusing Tbilisi of supporting terrorism. In August 2002, Russia bombed the Pankisi Gorge.

"The purpose of bombing Georgian villages is to maintain constant tension in Georgia and to disrupt major energy and transport projects," stated Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze at the time.

To prevent a possible Russian military operation, an anti-crime operation was launched in the Pankisi Gorge with Western support, and by August 25, 2002, additional Interior Ministry forces were deployed in all settlements of the Pankisi Gorge. The cooperation with the West, initiated under the banner of the fight against terrorism, thus contributed to the strengthening of Georgia's pro-Western policy.

In the 1990s, the treat of terrorism came from the North Caucasus and was combined with Russian pressure.



Analysis (...)

Safe for Now

The annual report published by the Institute for Economics and Peace - The "Global Terrorism Index" - identified Georgia as a safe country, along with several dozen others, when assessed by the terrorism impact criterion. This indicates that no terrorist incidents were recorded in Georgia and that, compared to the previous year, the situation regarding terrorism in the country has improved.

The U.S. State Department prepares an annual report on terrorism for Congress, assessing the status of terrorist threats in various countries around the world and the global counterterrorism environment. In this regard, Georgia is referred to as a "reliable partner for U.S. global security."

Year after year, the reports give mainly positive assessments of Georgia:

- Georgia is a long-standing member of the global coalition to defeat the "Islamic State" and a "reliable partner for U.S. global security";
- The State Security Service is "well-equipped and trained";
- "Overall, the Georgian government is largely capable of detecting, preventing, and responding to terrorist incidents";
- Georgia is working to strengthen counterterrorism legislation;
- The country is "actively engaged" in counterterrorism matters at international, regional, and bilateral levels, including with NATO, the European Union, Europol, and several European countries.

Key Actors and Counterterrorism Strategy

The State Security Service (SSSG) was established on August 1, 2015, as a result of security sector reform, and is the primary actor international counterterrorism cooperation. The Law lists the fight against terrorism as one of the key tasks of SSSG, which is carried out by one of the security service's structural units, the Counterterrorism Center.

The primary tasks of the Counterterrorism Center, per law, are: combating terrorism, and

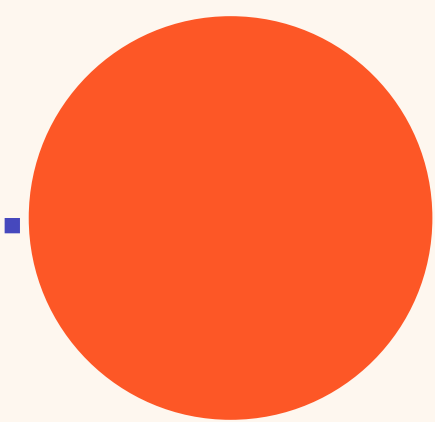
conducting operational-investigative activities in accordance with the procedures established by law, the application of criminal procedural coercive measures and the investigation of criminal cases on matters within its competence, in the grounds and by the procedure established by the Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia; Within its competence, carrying out preventive measures for the purpose of preventing and deterring crime.

Georgia's anti-terrorist legislation, with the regulations of the European Union, is in compliance with international law norms and UN Security Council resolutions, and the country has a comprehensive legal framework for the criminalization of the financing of terrorism. In this regard, Georgia is considered one of the distinguished partners. The forms and legal basis for organizing the fight against terrorism are also defined by the Georgian Law "On Combating Terrorism".

The issue of combating terrorism in Georgia is also outlined in a strategic document. The most recent such document, "The National Counterterrorism Strategy of Georgia for 2022-2026 and its Action Plan," was developed by an interdepartmental standing commission established by a Georgian government decree. The government decree approving the strategy was issued on January 25, 2022.

The main goal of implementing the Strategy and its Action Plan is to protect the state and society from threats posed by terrorism and extremism. The document is based on seven key areas: collection and analysis of terrorism-related information, prevention, protection, preparedness, prosecution, development of the legal framework, and international cooperation. Each of these defines the measures to be taken by the state in a specific area.





Analysis (...)

Threat Assessment

SSSG regularly reports on threats and counter-terrorism activities. According to reports published in recent years, Georgia is not considered a high-risk country for terrorist attacks; however, the following threats and challenges from international terrorist organizations are listed:

- Attempts by supporters of international terrorist organizations to carry out attacks on the territory of Georgia;
- The possible return to the country of Georgian citizens who are fighting in the ranks of the "Islamic State" and "Al-Qaeda" in the Syria-Iraq territory;
- Attempts by foreign terrorist fighters and individuals associated with terrorism to infiltrate Georgia, including using the country's territory for transit purposes;
- Possible financing or providing other assistance to terrorist organizations;
- Possible recruitment of citizens residing on Georgian territory by terrorist organizations/persons associated with them for terrorism purposes.

Three terrorist groups: the **Islamic State**, **al-Qaeda**, and the **Taliban** are listed by SSSG as main threats, with the latter two fading considerably in recent years.

The Taliban was considered as a threat to the Georgian Defense Forces deployed in Afghanistan as part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission. In December 2019, five Georgian soldiers were injured in a Taliban attack on Bagram Air Base.

In June 2013, seven Georgian soldiers were killed in an attack on a Georgian base in Helmand Province. Since 2021, when the International Security Assistance Force, including the Georgian Armed Forces unit, left Afghanistan, this threat also significantly decreased.

As for the Islamic State, despite its weakening and significant territorial and human losses, the group and its affiliated organizations still

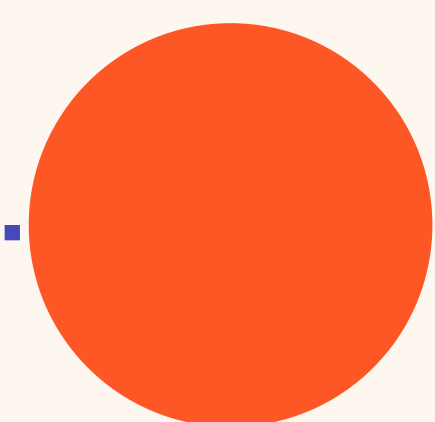
pose a threat. As of 2024, approximately 15 Georgian citizens who had previously fought in the ranks of the terrorist organization, along with their family members, were still in Syria.

Approximately forty Georgian citizens have been killed fighting in the ranks of the "Islamic State." Since 2018, the number and influence of potential "Islamic State" supporters residing in Georgia has decreased.

Local supporters of the Islamic State's ideas do not have the ability to act in an organized and coordinated manner, the "Islamic State's" Interest in the ideology among local youth has faded, members of the terrorist organization can no longer move freely, and opportunities for fundraising are also limited.

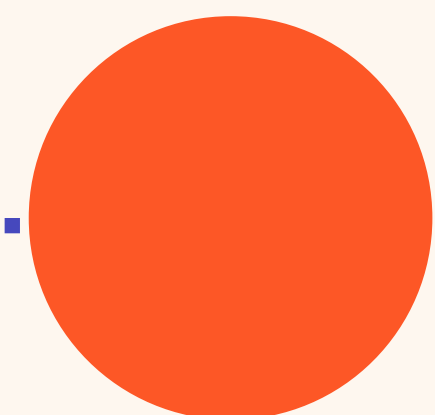
Local supporters of the Islamic State can no longer act in an organized and coordinated manner.





Recent Operations Against Terrorism

- **November 21-22, 2017:** Ahmed Chatayev and two others died and one was captured during the anti-terrorist operation in Tbilisi. Islamic State member, originally from Chechnya in Russian Federation, Chatayev blew himself up. The US added Chatayev to its terrorist list in 2015, and the UN Security Council added him to the so-called al-Qaeda sanctions list later the same year. He was also wanted by the Russian authorities. SSSG said Chatayev was identified "through investigative actions and expert analysis conducted with the assistance of American colleagues", with the U.S. Ambassador to Georgia, Ian Kelly, adding that "several experts from the Federal Bureau of Investigation" arrived in the country to assist with the investigation. In November 2025, the SSSG announced that it had discovered ammunition belonging to the Chatayev group in the vicinity of the village of Lechuri in Telavi Municipality.
- **November 15, 2022:** SSSG arrested individuals with Pakistani and Iranian-Georgian dual citizenship for an attempted assassination of an Israeli citizen. The organizers of the alleged crime were also identified, including the alleged mastermind of the assassination, an Iranian citizen, and other individuals.
- **December 8, 2022:** the SSSG arrested Tsiskara Tokhosashvili, a Georgian citizen, at the Tbilisi airport for joining a foreign terrorist organization and assisting in terrorist activities. According to the SSSG, Tokhosashvili joined the "Islamic State" in 2015. He was convicted on August 15, 2023, for joining a foreign terrorist organization and assisting in terrorist activities. Previously, in 2019, Tokhosashvili's younger brother was arrested in Ukraine on terrorism charges. According to information released by the Security Service of Ukraine, Ukrainian law enforcement officers, in cooperation with their Georgian colleagues, arrested one of the Islamic State's commanders, Tsezar Tokhosashvili, near Kyiv. In May 2020, Ukraine extradited Tokhosashvili to Georgia.
- **April 22, 2023:** the SSSG detained Malkhaz Paksashvili, a Georgian citizen and the commander of an Islamic State group. He was a member of the Tokhosashvili brothers' group for a time.
- **May 6, 2023:** the SSSG reportedly uncovered activities planned by the "Islamic State" on the territory of various foreign countries in Georgia and arrested one foreign national.
- **May 17, 2023:** as a result of an anti-terrorist operation, the SSSG arrested six citizens of Georgia who supported the "Islamic State." According to the security service, the detainees were in contact with an influential leader of the "Islamic State" and were planning various types of terrorist activities in several countries under his command, about which partner countries were informed.
- **July 26, 2023:** two Georgian citizens arrested on charges of supporting the "Islamic State." The counter-terrorism operation was conducted simultaneously at four locations in two regions of Georgia.
- **June 6, 2024:** two citizens of Georgia were detained as part of an investigation into a terrorist crime. SSSG reported that the operation was conducted simultaneously at two locations in Batumi.
- **February 20, 2025:** as a result of several simultaneous special operations conducted nationwide, the SSSG arrested two Georgian citizens on charges of possible ties to an international terrorist organization.
- **May 2, 2025:** SSSG arrested a foreign national in the city of Rustavi, wanted on an Interpol circular issued at the request of a foreign country. According to the SSSG, the individual, an explosives specialist, travelled to the Middle East in 2014 and joined the "Islamic State." According to the same information, the arrested individual was "responsible for particularly important activities within the terrorist organization."
- **October 13, 2025:** as part of an ongoing investigation into joining a foreign terrorist organization and assisting in terrorist activities, SSSG arrested three Georgian citizens in Adjara. "Formed on the basis of a terrorist ideology, the members of the so-called 'Takbir jamaat' had ties to influential leaders of the terrorist organization 'Islamic State' located abroad, on whose instructions and future terrorist objectives, forming a group based on a radical-extremist ideology as a jamaat," the SSSG said.



New Threats?

Since the start of Russia's full-scale military aggression in Ukraine, the Georgian government has softened its stance toward Russia, while the relations with the West and Ukraine have worsened considerably.

The war in Ukraine created objective new threat of the Georgian territory and citizens being used for terrorist attacks (as a target, or as conduit) or for military and special operations. The authorities spoke repeatedly about the risk of Georgia “being dragged into war,” while mostly accusing western powers in such attempts. These ideas – actively peddled on the policy and media arena – have not yet been reflected in policy documents.

The 2024 Report by SSSG marked a notable change of tone, pointing to the politicization of its agenda. While continuing to list the Russian occupation of the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions as the main threat, the report hailed electoral victories in western countries of the forces that “are committed to the protection of traditional values and values.” It also repeated the unsubstantiated political allegations of the

The War in Ukraine created a new threat - of Georgia and Georgians being targets or conduits of terrorism.

Georgian Dream about the alleged coup attempts and the alleged planned “liquidation” of representatives of the ruling party. The report also stated “disinformation and propaganda” were used against Georgia by “certain Western countries.” It blamed the West in particular of aiming at “shaping a new generation loyal to foreign countries and aligned with their national and societal values,” political and economic influence activities, financing of the CSOs, political parties and protests by opposition.

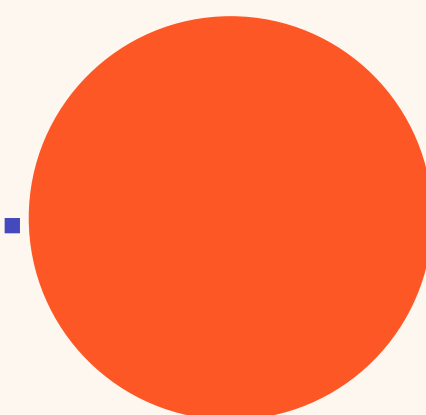
In addition, since the end of 2024 the government in Tbilisi faced an acute crisis of political legitimacy, has considerably reduced civic space and used excessive police force and security service pressure against the protesting citizens.

Against the backdrop of these two developments, alleged terrorist plots have come under the shadow of doubt, due to suspicions of partisan-political manipulation.

In the last two years, SSSG publicized two alleged cases in which Georgia was used as a transit territory by Ukrainian special services to plan military operations on Russian territory. These cases were classified as terrorism by the Georgian side:

- On February 5, 2024, SSSG seized several explosive devices and a large quantity of explosives. According to the SSSG, these were brought into Georgia from the Ukrainian city of Odessa via Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey on January 19, 2024, through the Sarpi border control point, in a minivan owned by a Ukrainian citizen. SSSG alleged that the devices were en route to the Russian city of Voronezh via the Dariali border crossing. The SSSG said that “the details and factual circumstances of this case provide grounds for suspicion that the use of Georgian territory and the extensive involvement of Georgian citizens in this entire process, was intended to create the impression that terrorist acts, whether carried out in or outside of Georgia, were to be blamed on Georgia, both in their planning and execution.”
- A similar incident was recorded on September 11, 2025. According to the SSSG, two Ukrainian citizens were detained after 2.4 kilograms of hexogen, a powerful explosive, were discovered in the truck. The truck, with Ukrainian license plates, allegedly entered Georgia on September 10, traveling from Ukraine via Romania and Bulgaria, and subsequently from Turkey through the Sarp border crossing. A month before the security service's announcement, Russia's Federal Security Service announced that a “terrorist act” on the Crimean Bridge was foiled and the attack was planned by Ukraine, for which a car loaded with explosives entered Russia through the Lars checkpoint on the Georgia-Russia border.
- Russia also stated that Georgian territory was used to blow up the Crimean bridge in October 8, 2022.

Irrespective of whether these cases are substantiated,



presence of Ukrainian and Russian refugees in Georgia, and the porosity of its borders to the nationals from both countries, creates objective security threats.

Occupied Territories and Terrorism

The threat of terrorism to Georgia is exacerbated by the Russian military and security presence in the occupied Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region.

The annual reports published by the SSSG and in the Counterterrorism Strategy for 2022-2026 note that the Tbilisi is unable to exercise effective control over the territories, which creates a favorable environment for terrorism and other criminal activities on the ground.

To date, there have been numerous cases of criminals (most of whom are Turkish citizens) traveling from the territory controlled by the central government to the occupied regions, especially Abkhazia. Reports about organized crime surface in the forms of criminal gang clashes, relatively frequent in Abkhazia.

Russia has also been using the occupied regions of Georgia in its war against Ukraine.

Servicemen of the 7th and 4th military bases of the Russian Armed Forces located respectively in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, as well as local „volunteer“ groups have been deployed on the frontline in Ukraine.

Russia is also the banking system of the occupied regions for illegal financial transactions as well.

On September 19, 2024, it became known that the US Treasury Department had added the “Bank for International Settlements” registered in Tskhinvali to the sanctions list due to its participation in the mechanism of illegal payments between North Korea and Russia.

According to the US State Department, the bank is involved in illegal financial schemes, which allows North Korea to gain access to the international banking system in violation of financial sanctions. In 2023, the bank was also included in the 11th package of sanctions imposed by the European Union.

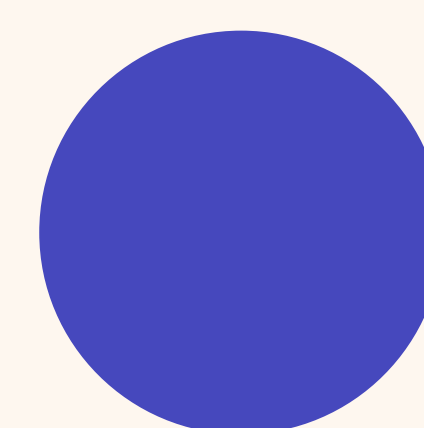
According to the document, the bank operates in the Russian-occupied Kherson and Zaporizhia regions and provides some banking services under the control of the Central Bank of Russia. The bank also has a branch in Luhansk. This creates risks for the financing of terrorism.

The Counterterrorism Strategy emphasizes that to effectively combat terrorist and violent extremist threats originating from the occupied territories, Georgia will actively cooperate with partner countries and international organizations, and in this regard, appropriate defensive measures will continue to be taken along the occupation line and in the adjacent territory to fulfil its international obligations and the protection of the agreement.

Currently, the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) remains the only international organization monitoring the occupation line.

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Russian occupation exacerbates terrorist threats due to military and intelligence presence, as well as the use of the banking systems to finance its wartime partners and clients.



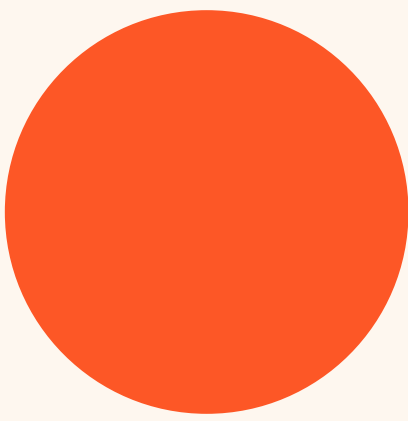
Outlook

The Georgian Dream government has been questioning its traditional pro-Western security alignment and levelling heavy accusations of political and security inference against its erstwhile partners. SSSG has become the instrument of this political manipulation, but also suffered rapid and potentially destabilizing management changes.

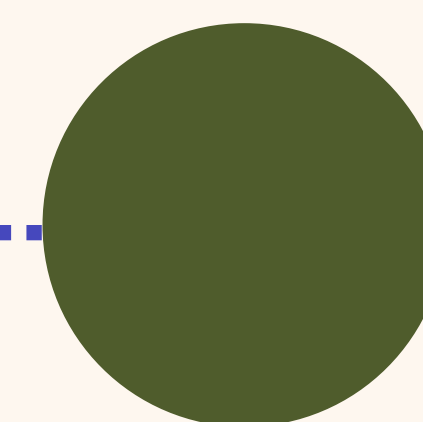
These changes and the political tensions that surround them reportedly resulted in an outflow of experienced personnel, including from the commanding positions of the Counterterrorism Center, thus weakening SSSG's ability to adequately assess and, especially, prioritize external threats. The undergirding political rhetoric of mistrust sows distrust among international partners

Crucially, the parliamentary oversight is failing due to the disputed legitimacy and the essentially one-party nature of the current Parliament. This affects the policy direction and scrutiny that the SSSG is receiving.

Despite all of this, international cooperation in the fight against traditional threats of global terrorism remains a matter of interest for the Georgian Dream, and the one that still keeps the links of partnership alive with its Western counterparts.



The breakdown of relations with the West and purges affect the SSSG's ability to adequately prioritize threats. Still, international cooperation against terrorism remains in Georgian Dream's interest.



3. Context

December 1-15 in Review: Politics, Narratives, Prospects

The first two weeks of December were dominated by controversy fuelled by a BBC investigation alleging the use of toxic chemicals against Georgian protesters last year. The disputed parliament adopted the 2026 state budget and laws further restricting protest rights and radically overhauling the higher education system. The authorities signed a new cooperation agreement with the UN, and further controversies were sparked by foreign policy developments, including the prime minister's appearance alongside Vladimir Putin in Turkmenistan and the uncertain fate of the U.S. MEGOBARI Act.

Below is a breakdown of key developments in the first two weeks of December in Georgia's domestic politics, foreign policy, media, and economy, along with a glimpse of what to expect.

Domestic politics

BBC Report: December began with a bombshell BBC investigation alleging that Georgian authorities used the “WWI-era” toxic compound camite against protesters in November and December. The Georgian government denied using camite but confirmed that an unspecified substance had been mixed into water cannons, later claiming it was CS gas (tear gas). Georgian Dream vowed to sue the BBC and called on the UK to issue an apology, while the opposition continues to demand an independent international investigation.

Laws: Georgian Dream also rushed through controversial legislation, including extending protest bans to sidewalks and tightening advance-notice requirements, in an apparent response to the fluid, daily protest marches in Tbilisi that emerged after police sought to restrict road blockages. While the new laws have entered into force, no strict enforcement has been reported so far. A further, more indirect response to the protests may be the recently revealed plans to relocate state institutions - including parliament and key ministries - to a centralized “government town” on a hill overlooking Tbilisi.

Other legislative changes included similarly fast-tracked laws targeting state universities, notably through an overhaul of

the public funding model, the introduction of a *one-city-one-faculty* principle, and a ban on state universities enrolling foreign students. Critics warn that the reforms could trigger personnel purges and plunge the public higher-education system into chaos. Another law adopted by the GD foresees creating a centralized mental health database, prompting warnings from mental health professionals about risks of stigma, privacy violations, and potential abuse.

The proposed Emirati *Eagle Hills* investment also remained in public discourse, though with reduced intensity, as far-right groups mobilized large crowds to protest the planned real estate project, which authorities have vigorously defended. In December, Georgian authorities also signed a *cooperation framework* with the United Nations for 2026–2030.

Foreign Policy

No major shifts were recorded in foreign policy in December, aside from reports that progress on the MEGOBARI Act - a bill envisaging sanctions against Georgian Dream officials - was blocked in the U.S. Senate. Supporters had sought to attach the bill to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), an annual must-pass piece of legislation, to advance it more easily, but the Senate majority leader prevented the move, leaving the bill's prospects more uncertain.

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Parallel efforts by Georgian authorities to cultivate alternative ties were accompanied by fresh controversies. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze's appearance in a group photo alongside Russian President Vladimir Putin at an international summit in Turkmenistan triggered public outrage in Georgia.

At the same time, Tbilisi came under pressure from Azerbaijani pro-government media over alleged transit issues, in what appeared to be a more discreet attempt by Baku to exert leverage in separate talks with the Georgian authorities.

Economy

Parliament approved the 2026 state budget on December 10, projecting real economic growth of 5 percent and inflation at 3.3 percent, while forecasting GDP per capita to exceed USD 11,300. Although the budget's nominal size has increased compared to the previous year, there are perceptions that the authorities are seeking to curb spending, including by discontinuing the public employment program that tied social assistance to participation in public works.

In separate remarks, GD Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze said the growing number of people reliant on targeted social assistance - currently exceeding 700,000 - needs to be reviewed, attributing the increase to eligibility checks suspended during the COVID-era moratorium.

Reports also emerged about a nearly completed motor-vehicle transit hub in Gali, in occupied Abkhazia, reportedly envisioned as an alternative route linking Russia and Georgia amid continued disruptions at the Upper Lars crossing, the only official overland border point between the two countries. Georgian authorities, however, have so far distanced themselves from such plans.

Narratives

A Georgian Dream-aligned hardline group, *United Neutral Georgia*, formally registered as a political party in December and promoted rhetoric advocating Georgia's neutral status, citing a shifting geopolitical landscape following Donald Trump's new national security doctrine.

These developments coincided with parallel, cautious calls for "dialogue" with Russia among pro-Georgian Dream voices, particularly after Kobakhidze's Turkmenistan-related controversy.

At the same time, Russian media outlets have for weeks promoted claims that a so-called "Russian WikiLeaks" project launched in November is publishing alleged leaks from Georgian public health authorities, pointing to a conspiracy theory about the development of bioweapons at a U.S.-funded laboratory near Tbilisi. Similar conspiracy narratives have been circulated by Russian sources in previous years, and it remains unclear why the issue has been revived now.

Prospects

As the holiday season approaches, which in Tbilisi traditionally extends into mid-January, political activity may slow, except any protest-related escalation.

One of the main developments is the gradual release of jailed opposition politicians. The first is Zurab Girchi Japaridze of *Girchi – More Freedom*, who is set to be released on December 19 after serving seven months for boycotting a Georgian Dream parliamentary commission. In the following weeks, Giorgi Vashadze of *Strategy Agmashenebeli* and Nika Gvaramia of *Ahali/Coalition for Change* are also expected to leave custody.

December 1-15 in Review

At the same time, other opposition figures — including Nika Melia of *Ahali* and former Defense Minister Irakli Okruashvili — saw their sentences extended on separate charges.

Separate developments in December concern the European Union, including the European Council meeting on December 18–19, which will discuss enlargement, and the European Commission's annual visa-suspension report, also expected this month.

The report is likely to outline possible visa-related sanctions against Georgian officials, though the likelihood of applying stricter measures against the entire population appears lower than previously anticipated.

Additionally, the European Parliament is scheduled to debate the situation in Georgia on December 17.

Civil Insight is a regional analytical publication of the research and practitioner network.

