

Georgian Defense Policy and Military Reform

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Georgia's defense posture and, in particular, the fate of military reform depend heavily on the dynamics within the political system in which they unfold. Neither can be understood, elaborated, or successfully conducted if divorced from the country's overall social and political development. Put succinctly, without the establishment of good governance practices, an effective defense system, a coherent security policy, and healthy civil–military relations are impossible. This is true for all countries, but this proposition is especially poignant in Georgia.

Money also matters. Georgia remains a poor state with limited revenues, which restrains reform in all areas, but particularly in the defense and security spheres. Force restructuring, whether downsizing, modernizing, or creating an effective means of control, requires resources. A military should not be allowed to engage in business activity—least of all in illicit commerce—but to avoid this, the state must be able to provide its officers and soldiers with adequate salaries and living conditions. The Georgian state has not done this for most of its first dozen years of independence.

In addition, the ideological and sociopolitical orientations of Georgia as a whole have direct implications for security and defense policies. First, national security policy and the defense posture sustaining it flow from perceived national interests and threats, which returns us to the theme of national stereotypes and values. Values define the threats that a national security policy is expected to contain. National interests and threat perceptions—which directly or indirectly derive from societal values—influence the inner structure, personnel policy, and patterns of relations within the national security sector. Second, the choice of strategic friends

and allies for any country depends heavily on the nature of that country's value system. Compatible values are as crucial as pragmatic economic interests or common geostrategic views in determining the cooperative arrangements a country hopes to build.

At this point, the basic value system of Georgian society, the definition of security threats facing the country (the underpinning for reform of the security sector), and the level of national expertise in the security sphere do not meet a Western standard or match the practices of the Euro-Atlantic community that Georgia wishes to join. State- and nation-building will therefore remain at the top of the country's political agenda for years to come.

In the first decade of its independence, Georgia deteriorated into a weak (or even a failing) state. Whatever Georgia's pretensions, its political practices and its style of management were hardly compatible with modern Western standards. State- and nation-building were too often understood in nineteenth-century terms with stress on nationalist poetry, mythological images of historical heroes, as well as on the values and symbols of the Orthodox Church. Georgians and the country's national minorities failed to create a common national identity. Exclusive ethnicities were often considered to be even more important than individual economic well-being.¹ As a result, a contradictory mixture of liberal-democratic and ethno-nationalist projects came to characterize President Eduard Shevardnadze's regime. It was also heavily shaped by the traditions of the Communist *nomenklatura*. Consequently, reforms were slow and indecisive.

Shevardnadze's regime condemned corruption and xenophobia, but only rhetorically. These two phenomena were too often understood as a peculiar feature of Georgian culture. The working group tasked in 2000 by President Shevardnadze with drafting a Georgian anti-corruption strategy stated: "Corruption has become the way of life in certain areas. Corrupt thinking so broadly embraces public perception that we have to be extremely cautious while drawing a line between the roots of national originality and corrupt customary practices."² Anti-corruption recom-

¹ Theodor Hanf and Ghia Nodia, *Georgia Lurching to Democracy* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2000), pp. 92–102.

² National Anti-corruption Strategy Group, *Saqatvelos erovnuli antikorufciuli programis dziritadi mimartulebebi* privately published, October 31, 2000), p. 9. (The group was created by the president.)

mendations remained on paper only, having little relation to the real pattern of interaction among governmental officials, businesspeople, criminals, and the corrupt pyramids they formed. This purely rhetorical criticism was part of the regime's contradictory approach—balancing between reform-minded young politicians and officers on the one hand and former Communist *nomenklatura* on the other. In Shevardnadze's last years, the state even failed to constrain the use of force in disputes between religious believers. For example, Vasili Mkalavishvili, a defrocked priest from the Orthodox Church who led violent attacks on religious minorities, went unpunished.

Not surprisingly, defense policy and the process of military reform reflected these distortions within Georgian society. Defense and security policies were characterized by a constantly shifting foreign policy, inadequate funding for defense, and rampant corruption. Clear strategic guidelines were never articulated, not even a general national security concept. Integration into the Euro-Atlantic space was frequently declared as Georgia's top foreign policy priority,³ but Georgia's political elite also considered pro-Russian strategic choices. Civil–military relations were undemocratic. Inadequate funding was compounded by the misuse of the scarce resources that did exist. Salaries for security and military agencies were in serious arrears, and most military and paramilitary structures had not been effectively integrated or placed under adequate civilian management. Existing legislation was progressive, but not coherent or detailed. In general, the “power” ministries suffered widespread popular mistrust.

Eventually, all of these failings contributed to Shevardnadze's downfall in November 2003. Georgia's new leadership under President Mikheil Saakashvili has shown an unprecedented resolve to break with the corrupt practices of the past and to fight organized crime. Westernized intellectuals that have come to the fore in Georgia recognize the importance of globalization and are using a postmodern political discourse that does not favor nationalism, the idea of unitary states, or the traditional exclusiveness of state actors in the international arena. The new leadership has proclaimed a crusade against corruption and embezzlement, and detained a number of former high-ranking state officials.

³ At the end of the 1990s, Shevardnadze famously stated that by 2005, Georgia would be at NATO's door. See *Svobodnaia Gruziiia*, October 26, 1999.

In January 2005, Mkalavishvili, the vigilante priest, was sentenced to six years in prison.⁴

Yet, not everything about Georgia's new direction has conformed to the regime's stated intention to speed the country's integration into the Euro-Atlantic community.⁵ The new elite still struggles to balance widely popular traditional nationalist sentiments with liberal and democratic imperatives. Along with espousing the ideas of multiculturalism, decentralization, integration into the community of nations, and cooperative security, the new leadership clings to notions of centralism and is reluctant to delegate governmental responsibility down to regional and local bodies. To succeed, the new regime will need to find a way of transcending reform's dependence on the will of individual leaders and create a broad base of support for good governance, including in the sphere of defense.

The new Georgian leadership has been clear about the necessity of fighting corruption and organized crime. It has supported the idea of creating new reform groups and citizens' advisory councils within the security and defense agencies. Some of these groups have started drafting practical recommendations, giving anti-corruption policies that were never implemented under Shevardnadze a second chance. But more needs to be done to articulate the kind of laws and strategic discourse that should govern security agencies, the way these agencies should be structured, and last but not least, their code of conduct and missions.

Georgia's unsolved ethnic conflicts also create an obstacle to defense reform. These conflicts and the potential for renewed armed clashes are not the best environment for restructuring Georgia's military. Indeed, within months of assuming power, the new leadership found itself caught up in escalating tensions over South Ossetia, leading to the deployment of additional Interior Ministry troops to the conflict zone and hampering reforms planned by the new interior minister.

⁴ IWPR Caucasus Reporting Service, no. 272, February 3, 2005, http://www.iwpr.net/home_index_new.html.

⁵ This course has been proclaimed since the very beginning of modern Georgian statehood. The first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, outlined in his presidential program that Georgian defense doctrine would be oriented toward the support of the European security system. This corresponded with his idea of turning Georgia into a bridge between East and West. See *Sakartvelos Respublika*, no. 253, December 27, 1991.

This chapter analyzes the failure of Georgia's defense and security policies and the challenges confronting the new leadership.⁶ It is divided into four parts. The first part explores the various stages in the history of building the Georgian Army, from the late 1980s until the Rose Revolution of 2003. This section lays out the systemic shortcomings of the process and explains a series of dramatic events that shook political–military relations. In the second section, the problem of civilian control over the armed forces—including the relationship between the executive and legislative branches of the government, the question of the defense budget, and the corruption among the military—is analyzed. The third section addresses the challenge of developing a national security concept. This chapter concludes with a fourth section analyzing new trends in defense policy and military reform after the Rose Revolution.

ARMED FORCES IN GEORGIA: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Despite its long history, Georgia has had little experience with the formation of regular armed forces. In the brief period of independence after the

⁶ The present chapter is based on previous research on security issues and civil–military relations in Georgia. See David Darchiashvili, “Georgia: The Search for the State Security,” *Caucasus Working Papers* (Stanford, CA: Center for International Security and Cooperation, 1997), <http://cisac.stanford.edu/publications/10255/>; David Darchiashvili, “Trends of Strategic Thinking in Georgia: Achievements, Problems, and Prospects,” in Gary K. Bertsch, Cassidy Craft, Scott A. Jones, and Michael Beck, eds., *Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia* (Routledge: New York, 2000), pp. 66–74; David Darchiashvili and Tamara Pataraiia, “Return to Europe? Some Aspects of the Security Orientation of Georgia,” *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift*, no. 1 (2001), pp. 43–55; See also my book, published in Georgian, on Georgian national security and civil–military relations in Georgia in the period 1990–2000: *Politikosebi, jariskacebi, moqalageni: saqartvelos erovnuli usaprtkboebisa da samkhedro-samokhalakho urtiertobebis analizi* (Tbilisi: Tbilisi sakhelmtsipo universitetis gamomcemloba, 2000), <http://www.cipdd.org/en/archive.shtml?lang=eng&detail=1&id=3>; David Darchiashvili, “Power Structures in Georgia,” International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Discussion Paper no. 5 (Printinfo: Yerevan, Armenia, 2003); David Darchiashvili, “Georgian Security Problems and Policies,” in Dov Lynch, ed., *The South Caucasus, A Challenge for the EU*, Chaillot Papers, no. 65 (December 2003), p.107–128, <http://www.iss-eu.org/public/content/chaile.html>; I was also the chief editor of *The Army and Society in Georgia* from 1996 to 2000. Issues for the period 1998–2001 can be found at http://www.cipdd.org/en/publication.shtml?cat_id=6.

Bolshevik Revolution (1918–1921), Georgia did mount a military with 20,000 to 25,000 regular troops and a militia-like Popular Guard. At the time, Georgia had a sizable corps of professional officers of noble descent who had served in the tsar's armies. Mistrust between these officers and the new social democratic government prevented the country from overcoming the many obstacles to fashioning an effective military, and the Georgian Army was poorly disciplined, poorly fed, and poorly equipped. This whole experiment only lasted until 1921, when the Georgian troops were overrun by invading Bolshevik military forces.

On several occasions after Sovietization, Moscow allowed the creation of national military units. These units, however, were hardly an adequate substitute for a real national army. Any movement in this direction completely stopped in 1956 when Nikita Khrushchev banned all national units in the Soviet Army.

The initial stage in the creation of a new Georgian military began with the rise of the Georgian independence movement and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The first Georgian units created by anti-Soviet political groups to deal with emerging internal ethnic conflicts came into existence at the end of the 1980s and operated outside of the law at the time. By the end of 1990, when the first multiparty elections brought Zviad Gamsakhurdia's Round Table bloc to power, these units claimed to have about 6,000 fighters.⁷ This figure, however, is almost certainly exaggerated, since in all armed operations to that point, scarcely more than few hundred troops had been involved. These units were organized and commanded by Georgian officers who had served in the Soviet military, civilian activists, and individuals with a criminal past.

Under these circumstances, the subordination of these units to political authority went largely unaddressed. Since these units did not have a legal status, the question of Soviet control was irrelevant. The anti-Soviet political leaders might have constituted an alternative political authority, but they were in constant disagreement among themselves. As a result, no unified command structure existed. The units themselves were mostly autonomous entities with mixed political–military missions that obeyed only their immediate commander. In some instances, they were affiliated

⁷ *Vooruzbeniie i voienizirovaniie formirovaniia v SSSR* (Moskva: Rossiisko–Amerikanskii centr mezhdunarodnyh i vioenno-politicheskikh issledovani, 1991), pp. 8–9.

with anti-Soviet political organizations that were as numerous as the armed units were. The strongest of these units, the Mkhedrioni, was loyal only to its founder, Jaba Ioseliani, a professor of art and a well-known criminal. Comprised mostly of young urban toughs or the offspring of the intelligentsia, the Mkhedrioni hated Gamsakhurdia, who by 1990 was emerging as the most popular anti-Soviet national leader. They despised his authoritarian style; his populist nationalism, which was not popular in criminal circles; and his heavy reliance on people from the provinces and Tbilisi's outlying areas, who the Mkhedrioni viewed as socially and culturally alien. They also resented his public apology and betrayal of other dissidents when he had been arrested for anti-Soviet activities in the 1970s.

Ioseliani found common ground with the last Georgian Communist leader, Givi Gumbaridze, who himself was moving closer to the growing national movement. As a result, Ioseliani and the Mkhedrioni were allowed to register the so-called Rescue Corps as an alternative military service institution, one intended to assist the government in dealing with natural disasters. Then there was the armed wing of the Merab Kostava Society led by Vaja Adamia, a Gamsakhurdia loyalist. Two other organizations—the Legion of Georgian Falcons and Imedi, the military wing of the Popular Front—maintained relative neutrality in the Gamsakhurdia–Ioseliani rivalry. Frequently, however, sub-groups within these various organizations switched allegiances. For example, a part of Imedi later joined the Mkhedrioni, while Ghia Kharkharashvili, who was initially affiliated with the Mkhedrioni, later formed a separate unit called “White Eagle.”⁸ Most of the military operations conducted by these units occurred during the first clashes between Georgian nationalists and ethnic minorities. From a military perspective, these units were small-scale and disorganized, and required only small numbers of fighters.

After the first multiparty elections in October 1990 and the victory of the anti-Communist Round Table, a new stage in the construction of the Georgian military began. The new government created the National Guard. Its name, mission, and subordination to the Ministry of Interior reflected its paramilitary nature. It was to be responsible for protecting public order and the integrity of the state.⁹ Its gendarmerie-like guise

⁸ All these data were collected through personal interviews with former fighters as well as politicians during the 1995–1999 period.

⁹ *Sakartvelos Uzenaesi Sabchos Utskebani*, no. 12, 1990.

served two purposes. First, because Georgia remained a part of the Soviet Union, the new elite hesitated to take steps implying full independence and risk a sharp reaction from Moscow. Creating a police agency seemed less provocative than forming a national army. Second, the threats facing the Georgian government at that time were inchoate separatist movements in the autonomous regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. To combat these movements, paramilitary forces were adequate. Meanwhile, external defense remained the responsibility of the central Soviet government.¹⁰

That said, it was clear that Georgian leaders saw the National Guard as the nucleus of a future national army. They had made explicit their intention to achieve national independence sooner or later, and in this context described the guardsmen as defenders of the homeland, a claim given practical form in the National Guard's staffing and training procedures. The National Guard operated on the basis of two-year compulsory service. All paramilitary units formed earlier were required to join the National Guard or disband. In spring 1991, the guard comprised 12,000 men. Young men accepted conscription with enthusiasm, which would hardly have happened if the society viewed the guard as simply a police agency. Many Soviet officers of Georgian origin joined the National Guard. Units such as White Eagle and Imedi were incorporated into it. The Mkhedrioni, which refused to reconcile with Gamsakhurdia's government, was banned and many of its members were imprisoned.

Meanwhile large units of the Soviet Army were still positioned in Georgia. Under certain conditions, they probably could have played a role in the foundation of a national army, as happened in Ukraine and Belarus. In Georgia, however, this was impossible. First, the number of Georgian officers in Soviet units was minimal, largely because the prestige of a military career among Georgians had drastically declined in the last years of the Soviet Union. Out of several hundred cadets in the Tbilisi Artillery School (the only military school in Soviet Georgia) in 1978–1979, only about twenty were Georgians.¹¹ According to one Georgian general, at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgians were seventy-second among Soviet nationalities in terms of the number of officers per 1,000 citizens. Partly for this reason, but also

¹⁰ *Akhali Sakartvelo*, November 15, 1990.

¹¹ Former graduates from the Tbilisi Artillery School, interview with the author, December 1996.

because of the increasingly ethnic-nationalist mood in Georgian society, Soviet troops were perceived as occupational forces. One of the main demands of Gamsakhurdia's government was their withdrawal, and, indeed, they were then slowly withdrawn, a process that stopped in 1993, leaving 15,000 to 25,000 former Soviet troops in Georgia, which were converted into the Group of Russian Forces in the Transcaucasus.

The third stage in the reconstruction of the Georgian Army started after the April 1991 declaration of independence and Gamsakhurdia's election to the presidency. Once his position had been elevated from parliamentary chairman to president, Gamsakhurdia attempted to get rid of the influential civil-military barons and to establish personal control over the armed forces. A presidential decree of August 19, 1991, reduced the status of the National Guard to the level of a police unit and abolished the position of commander of the guard. In acting he responded to the order of the short-lived State Committee for Emergency Situation (GKChP), during the attempted putsch in Moscow in August 1991, to abolish non-Soviet armed formations. In part, Gamsakhurdia was motivated by a genuine fear of Moscow's retribution if he did not act (behavior that undermined Gamsakhurdia's popularity in Georgian nationalist circles), but he also saw the order as a good excuse to get rid of the independent leadership of the National Guard. After the *coup d'état* in Moscow failed and Russia itself moved toward independence, Gamsakhurdia ordered the creation of the Ministry of Defense on September 9, 1991. The guard was restored to its previous status, but subordinated directly to the president, while the Ministry of Defense was given responsibility for its logistical support.¹² At the same time, new troops under the Ministry of Interior relieved the guard of its policing function.

This shift in Gamsakhurdia's state-building strategy has to be understood in the particular context of the time. The transitional period from Soviet rule to independence had ended, and Soviet laws and structures had ceased to apply in Georgia. But the process of state- and army-building did not go smoothly, ending in an armed uprising and Gamsakhurdia's ouster. One of the many reasons for this turn of events was Gamsakhurdia's failure in the military field. The leadership's vacillation in handling the National Guard issue contributed significantly to the instability of the military reform process. The guardsmen never forgave the

¹² Major-General Guram Nikolaishvili, interview with author, October 1996.

president for the August 19 decree where he had downgraded their status, and this helped trigger the armed uprising in winter 1991.

There are other factors behind the chaotic pattern of civil–military relations in Georgia. To begin with, a number of paramilitary units were never integrated into the National Guard. The Merab Kostava Society, which was allied with Gamsakhurdia, remained armed and autonomous. Its leader, Vaja Adamia, became chairman of the parliamentary Commission for Defense, Security, Law, and Order. Adamia combined the positions of party leader, unit commander, and legislator. The same can be said about Tengiz Kitovani. He was simultaneously a parliamentary deputy, head of the governmental Commission on Defense, and commander of the National Guard. Kitovani’s position made the guard’s subordination to the Ministry of Interior a mere formality. He cultivated personal loyalty among guard officers, who themselves were mostly former civilian volunteers unattuned to professional military ethics. Thus, under the guise of formal labels, the old clan or feudal spirit lingered within Georgia’s armed forces. Professed loyalty to the nation never turned into a loyalty to the state’s institutions.

The dismissal of Adamia and Kitovani in August 1991 united these two warlords who had initially disliked one another against Gamsakhurdia. In December 1991, after armed fighting between their followers and Gamsakhurdia’s supporters in the capital, they were joined by a reconstituted Mkhedrioni. To further complicate the picture, all sides sought to enlist Russian military support—some at a high political level, others at the level of commanders of locally deployed Soviet troops. Not surprisingly, Russian sympathies, although cautious, were on the side of the rebels; Gamsakhurdia’s nationalistic rhetoric had not served him well in relations with Russia.

The period from 1992 to 1993 represented the fourth stage in Georgia’s efforts to build a military. It was the most chaotic and conflict-laden period in modern Georgian history. As a result, the armed forces developed on an ad hoc basis, again without conceptual guidance.¹³ On paper, things seemed more or less organized, although susceptible to frequent changes. After Gamsakhurdia’s ouster in January 1992, the Military Council assumed the role of supreme authority, but only briefly. It was

¹³ Richard Wolff, “The Armed Forces of Georgia—An Update,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review, Europe*, vol. 6, no. 12 (December 1994), pp. 559–561.

superseded a few months later by the State Council under Eduard Shevardnadze, who had recently been invited back from Russia. Shevardnadze started the organization of the Ministry of Defense from scratch. Troops were to be organized along the lines of army corps, and the first real army formation, the Eleventh Army Brigade, came into existence in April 1992. That summer, Russian military authorities transferred the bulk of conventional weapons from Georgian-based Soviet caches to the new Georgian Ministry of Defense. In the same year, the Border Guard was established, and the National Guard was renamed the “Rapid Reaction Corps” and placed under the Defense Ministry. The Interior Ministry was left with control of the interior troops. In 1993, the government set about dealing with the Mkhedrioni by attempting to revive the idea of an independent Rescue Corps into which some of the Mkhedrioni would be integrated, whereas others were to be brought into the armed forces.

In reality, however, both the National Guard and the Mkhedrioni retained their independence. Ioseliani, who became a member of Parliament and deputy chairman of the National Council for Security and Defense¹⁴ in the fall of 1992, remained the unchallenged commander of the Mkhedrioni. Ghia Kharkharashvili, who gradually replaced Kitovani as the National Guard’s commander, became the only person whom the guardsmen would obey. In May 1993, Kharkharashvili took Kitovani’s place as minister of defense when Shevardnadze moved against the latter. Kharkharashvili did take an interest in integrating the armed forces. New regulations announced in May 1993 did not refer to the Rapid Reaction Corps or the National Guard; battalions from these forces were integrated into the Eleventh Army Brigade; and the formation of the First and the Second Army Corps accelerated. The Mkhedrioni, however, remained separate from this process.

During the conflict in Abkhazia from late 1992 into 1993, little actual progress occurred toward altering the composition and command structure of the Georgian armed forces. Battalions in reality comprised not more than a few dozen men. In some cases, the men themselves elected their commanders. Most of these men could hardly tell to which corps or any other umbrella formation they belonged. Some units even consisted of so-called brotherhoods, drawn from various Tbilisi street

¹⁴ It changed its name into National Security Council in 1995, with the adoption of the new constitution.

gangs. Sometimes they had a formal title, sometimes not. Soldiers as well as junior officers would come and go from the front line whenever they chose. In some instances, they would shift from one unit to another. The defense minister himself occasionally acted as a battalion commander. Despite the fact that the National Guard had been dropped from the May 1993 regulations, one of the senior commanders of the guard has recalled that it never ceased to exist.¹⁵ In October 1993, Shevardnadze ordered its formal re-establishment.

The military commanders were actually warlords who were indifferent to civilian leadership. Parliamentary control over the military was nonexistent or on paper only. As a minister of defense, Kitovani dared on several occasions to challenge Shevardnadze on defense matters, suggesting that the head of the state should be responsible only for foreign policy. At one press conference, Kitovani declared that neither Shevardnadze nor the Parliament, but rather the “people” and the army, should decide who the defense minister should be.

In addition to semi-autonomous units, there were armed groups that were openly opposed to Shevardnadze and loyal to the ousted President Gamsakhurdia. On various occasions, they managed to seize control over parts of western Georgia, effectively cutting off communications between Tbilisi and its forces deployed in Abkhazia. Over the same period, Ajaran leader Aslan Abashidze had set about creating his own militia units.

But Shevardnadze, unlike Gamsakhurdia, was able to maintain shaky control over the complex and fractured political and military environment in Georgia. His main tool was his personal influence, since almost all actors believed that only he was able to deliver international support. He also applied the old method of divide and rule, never going after all the warlord challengers at one time. On occasion, Shevardnadze even tried to reach an understanding with Gamsakhurdia’s supporters. But gradually, he managed to get rid of Kitovani, Ioseliani, and other lesser known leaders of armed groups. He made good use of foreign assistance and the kind of international support that Gamsakhurdia never had to achieve this objective and to consolidate his power in the process.

The period from 1994 to 1995 appeared to be decisive for the consolidation of Shevardnadze’s personal position. It constituted a fifth stage

¹⁵ Major Koba Liklikadze, former head of the press center of the Georgian Ministry of Defense, interview with the author, September 27, 1999.

in the history of the creation of Georgia's armed forces. After the Georgian defeat in Abkhazia in September 1993, Shevardnadze agreed to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in October and legalized the presence of the Russian troops on Georgian soil. He made this move in order to obtain Russian support against Gamsakhurdia's supporters, who had used the defeat in Abkhazia to establish control in parts of western Georgia. Georgia's key ministries—the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Security, and Ministry of Defense—were placed under the command of people favored by Moscow. This policy facilitated the elimination of various semi-legal armed units and military leaders whose nationalist excesses and anarchic behavior threatened central authority.

The new security minister, General Igor Giorgadze, emerged as a particularly strong figure, and consequently became an object of Shevardnadze's suspicions. Giorgadze was allegedly heavily involved in illegal arms and cigarette smuggling through his Russian connections. Russian security and military leaders trusted him far more than they trusted Shevardnadze, who was seen as responsible for the destruction of the Soviet empire.

The conflict between Shevardnadze and Giorgadze came into the open in 1995. At the time, Georgia was already recovering from armed turmoil. Georgians looked forward to peace and the prospect of economic improvement, particularly as the West appeared to be developing an interest in the country. As it turned out, Giorgadze lacked the capacity to challenge Shevardnadze politically or through the use of force. After years of warlord domination, the Georgian population would not accept a ruler in uniform. Giorgadze did not command an overwhelming military force either. His Special Assault Brigade built with Russian help in 1994 could not have prevailed against the collective strength of the other so-called power agencies,¹⁶ whose leaders had their own ambitions. As in the past, Shevardnadze had been continuing his policy of multiplying armed agencies and balancing one against the other. In 1995, these policies had fully paid off. These various agencies were becoming more insti-

¹⁶ "Power agencies" is the literary translation of the Russian expression *silovye struktury*. This expression is used in a number of post-Soviet countries and refers to the army, the police, security forces, border guards, and some other forces that have never been properly and completely separated. For more on this topic, see the English-language journal *Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies*, <http://www.pipss.org/>.

tutionalized and disciplined than they had been during the civil and ethnic conflicts of 1992–1993. Under these circumstances, Moscow was unable to back any new coup—it would have been clearly unacceptable to the Georgian public and to the Western community. For Russia, the better part of wisdom was to maintain some degree of cooperation with Shevardnadze himself.

After an attempted assassination of Shevardnadze in August 1995, an event that was never well investigated, the Georgian president accused Giorgadze and Ioseliani, the military figures most dangerous to his personal power, of complicity. The police disarmed and disbanded the Mkhedrioni, which left Ioseliani increasingly isolated. In September 1995, Giorgadze fled from a Russian military base in Georgia to Moscow, giving credence to accusations of his personal involvement in the assassination attempt (and that of Russia as well). At the same time, Giorgadze's flight and the jailing of Ioseliani opened the way for further defense and security reform. Shevardnadze could now move the construction of the army in a direction of his choosing. No other politician or military chief around him had the power or influence to defy his will.

The period from 1995 to the spring of 1998 may be considered a sixth stage in the army-building process. Until spring 1998, Vardiko Nadibaidze, a Russian general of Georgian origin who formerly served as a deputy commander of Russian troops based in Georgia, led the Georgian armed forces. When he was appointed in 1994, the Georgian Army supposedly had approximately fifty detachments of different size and mission totaling 49,000 men.¹⁷ But conscription at that time¹⁸ occurred only occasionally and on a very small scale, meaning the army and National Guard units were mostly made up of volunteers. Many enlisted officers and soldiers rarely showed up in their units. Out of the 49,000 troops said to be under Georgian command, only a few thousand were present in their barracks at any one time.

Under Nadibaidze, the size of the army was reduced and the conscription system made more orderly. Many of the unprofessional officers left the army, which was now commanded increasingly by older generals with years of Soviet military experience. In 1996, the new system

¹⁷ *Sarke*, October 18, 1995.

¹⁸ Conscription was governed by the Law on Defense and Universal Compulsory Military Service adopted in 1992. In practice, however, the legislation had little force.

assumed a more or less complete form. The army corps system had been abolished, because it was considered an unnecessary bureaucratic layer between brigades and the high command. The armed forces under the Ministry of Defense, now numbering 30,000 men, was divided into seven motor-rifle brigades, a mixed naval brigade, air defense and air force units, and several separate battalions. The National Guard remained a department of the Defense Ministry and maintained its status as one of the infantry brigades.¹⁹

The Ministry of Defense forces, however, were not the government's only military resources. In 1994, the Border Guard was separated from the Ministry of Defense. In the same year, Shevardnadze organized the Special State Protection Service. In 1995, the Special Assault Brigade of the Security Ministry was transferred to the Ministry of Interior. In total, according to the annual legislative account of military forces in 1997, these combined structures were estimated to include 42,000 men and officers.

The law specifying the size of the military was not the only new legislation. The constitution adopted in 1995 affected military reform, particularly civilian control over the armed forces. Under the new constitution, Georgia moved toward a presidential system, in which the president was to be the supreme commander of all military forces. After the 1995 parliamentary and presidential elections, the government introduced new laws on defense and compulsory military service, state secrets, parliamentary oversight, and a general administrative code. All of this laid the groundwork for not only civilian, but also democratic control over the military. For example, the Group of Trust created in 1998 consisted of three members of Parliament who were charged with monitoring all secret military and security programs.

A seventh stage in the recent history of Georgia's armed forces started in 1998. As former Minister of Security Djemal Gakhokidze noted, it was then that the Georgian government unambiguously chose a Western orientation for Georgian security and foreign policies.²⁰ In the same year, the Council of Europe decided to accept Georgia's bid for membership, and Western oil companies, as well as the U.S. and Turkish governments,

¹⁹ Staff members of the parliamentary Committee on Defense and Security, interviews with the author, October 1996.

²⁰ *Akhali Taoba*, October 19, 1999.

finally agreed to build a large oil pipeline through Georgian territory. Encouraged by the increased Western interest in Georgia, and realizing that cooperation with Russia was not bringing the breakaway territories back, President Shevardnadze decided to withdraw from the CIS Collective Security Treaty in order to pressure Moscow on the issue of military bases and to affirm Georgia's desire to join NATO.

Despite the doubts later raised about the level of commitment to this new orientation, the shift did force Georgia to confront the need to adapt its military posture to Western standards. In April 1998, Nadibaidze was dismissed as minister of defense. Davit Tevzadze, a former commander of a paramilitary unit, replaced him. During the same period, Revaz Adamia, chairman of the parliamentary Committee on Defense and Security, convinced the president to create the International Security Advisory Board (ISAB), a conscious imitation of similar institutions in the Baltic countries. In 1999, the ISAB produced a set of recommendations that included the reduction of the armed forces, the elimination of parallel structures, the need for a formal national security concept and a White Paper on defense, and the appointment of a civilian minister of defense. Simultaneously, U.S. experts began helping the Georgian Defense Ministry set up the Defense Resource Management Office and draft a defense budget meeting Western standards. But the government failed to implement these reforms.

The global war on terror launched by the United States after September 11, 2001, has had an interesting side effect on the Georgian armed forces. In consultation with reform-minded Georgian military and political leaders, the United States launched the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP). As a result, by the end of 2003, the Georgian Army had acquired four professional battalions trained for anti-terrorist and counterinsurgency warfare. It was the last, and probably one of the most tangible, of the Shevardnadze government's inconsistent steps toward military reform.

Tbilisi failed to establish full control over the armed forces stationed on its territory. Apart from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, whose armed forces are not under the control of Georgian authorities, the leadership in Ajara continued to build its own combat units until spring 2004. At the time of the Rose Revolution, Ajaran leader Aslan Abashidze's military reportedly had roughly twenty tanks and armored vehicles, as well as helicopters and coastal cutters. He also controlled special units, whose total number can be estimated at 500 to 1,000 men. Shevardnadze was never

able to check Abashidze's activities or his collaboration with Russian commanders stationed at the military base in Batumi. Furthermore, Tbilisi failed to reach an agreement with Moscow about the remaining two Russian bases that were supposed to be closed according to the agreement between both countries at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Summit in Istanbul in November 1999. In the beginning of 2004, between 3,000 and 6,000 Russian troops were still based at the Batumi and Akhalkalaki bases. Guerilla and criminal groups in the western part of the country (adjacent to the Abkhazian conflict zone) and in the Pankisi Gorge constituted a third group of militarized forces outside the control of the Georgian government. In 2002, under both U.S. and Russian pressure, Georgian law enforcement agencies finally undertook a special operation in the gorge. Chechen armed units reportedly left the gorge to avoid engaging Georgian forces.²¹

As a summary judgment, one can say that after 1994, Shevardnadze's regime had made progress in keeping men with guns off the streets. In addition, the Georgian armed forces acquired greater discipline. But it failed, particularly during the years leading up to the Rose Revolution, to implement the necessary reforms. It did not manage to build an effective defense establishment or to introduce a genuine system of democratic civilian control and oversight. Georgia became increasingly perceived as a weak, if not failing, state.

The following two sections will focus on two important challenges for military reform that the Shevardnadze administration failed to address adequately. The first is civilian control over the military and the second the development of a defense and security strategy.

CIVILIAN CONTROL OVER THE MILITARY

"I understand what the police is for," Shevardnadze once told one of his advisors, "and how they conduct their daily business. But these military [officials], what are they thinking while in their barracks?"²² This remark revealed Shevardnadze's deep suspicion toward the military and his neg-

²¹ On the question of Russian bases in Georgia and the conflict with Russia concerning Chechen troops in the Pankisi Gorge, see the contributions of Jaba Devdariani and Oksana Antonenko in this volume.

²² A former high-ranking Georgian public servant made these remarks in a confidential interview with the author, February 2003.

lect of the question of democratic civil–military relations. Civilian control over the military in Georgia by 1995 remained, to use Samuel Huntington’s term, “subjective.”²³ The actual line of political and legal subordination of the armed forces was not clear. Different parts of the government as well as different political factions competed to control and guide the military, and they did so in ways that exploited the military for their own political or personal advantage. The ambiguity over the ultimate power in defense matters stemmed largely from the 1995 Constitution. According to this document, the Parliament was responsible for defining the main directions of internal and foreign policy, while the president was charged with guiding these policies.²⁴ In the Georgian language, the meaning of “defining” and “guiding” cannot easily be distinguished, and this ambiguity allowed personality, charisma, and personal influence to prevail over institutional frameworks. Or, to take another example, Article 98 of the Georgian Constitution mandated that the structure of the armed forces be defined by the president, but that its size be set by the Parliament. As a result, if the president and the Parliament disagreed over the composition of the army, there was no easy resolution. Nor did it make sense that the president was supposed to structure the forces, but with no assurance that the Parliament would supply the men and arms that would be needed.

Moreover, in some instances, legislation passed by the Parliament contradicted the Georgian Constitution. Article 78 of the constitution, for example, prohibited any merger of the armed forces, security forces, and police. But the 1997 Law on Defense made Ministry of Interior troops part of the “military forces.” Similarly, according to the Law on Interior Troops, their commander was responsible for coordinating the actions of local police during an emergency situation.²⁵ The issue of state secrecy also illustrated a contradiction in Georgia’s laws. The relatively liberal General Administrative Code only allowed the classification of information touching on operational plans, actual operations, and their

²³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil–Military Relations* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), pp. 162–192.

Huntington is referring to situations when different political bodies have parallel oversight roles, leaving an opening for the military to insert itself into the political bargaining.

²⁴ Constitution of Georgia, articles 48, 69.

²⁵ Law on Interior Troops, April 30, 1998.

participants. But the list of state secrets accompanying the law under the same name prohibited the disclosure of information on the development and organization of the armed forces and on the creation of armed detachments, as well as on the quantity of troops, weapons, and their distribution among military units.²⁶

The list of contradictions goes further. If implemented, some laws would have created gridlock between the president and the Parliament, while others would have left very little room for transparency and democratic accountability. Informed parliamentary debates on defense spending would have been made impossible by the laws on state secrecy. In fact, however, such debates, however unprofessional, did take place, albeit with restricted information. Deputies did not have details on specific items in the budget, let alone on the unreported income the military earned and spent off the state budget. Symptomatically, the chairman of the Defense and Security Committee, who also headed the parliamentary Group of Trust that was cleared for access to top state secrets, complained in March 2000 that he was denied adequate information on the Ministry of Defense's finances.²⁷

In each of these respects, the law was violated. Politicians, journalists, and nongovernmental organization (NGO) representatives had no trouble visiting military units and asking about numbers and structure, since few officers observed the restricted secrets list. On the other hand, the Ministry of Defense ignored its legal obligation to provide the Group of Trust with accurate budget information on appropriation and spending. Thus, the Defense Ministry sold unused property, earning extra-budgetary funds, but neither the sums involved nor a detailed breakdown of their expenditure were supplied to the Parliament. The root of the problem, of course, was the corruption widely present in the Defense Ministry and elsewhere in Shevardnadze's government. Shevardnadze, however, could only have had a general idea of the scale of the problem. Sometimes the Chamber of Control, which was responsible for auditing budgetary outflows, would check Defense Ministry spending and report the improper use of hundreds of thousands dollars. In 1999, for example, the ministry met only 66 percent of required salary payments, while overspending on

²⁶ *Sakartvelos Respublika*, February 4, 1997.

²⁷ Defense and Security Committee of the Georgian Parliament seminar on civil-military relations, March 21, 2000.

business trips by 42 percent.²⁸ No one was sanctioned, because defense officials blamed the treasury for failing to provide funds for exercises and business trips abroad in a timely fashion. Or they simply complained that the treasury failed to transfer allotted monies to the Defense Ministry, forcing it to reorient available funds for other, more urgent purposes.

Unauthorized defense expenditures, however, were only one aspect of the financial problems in the defense sector. Even after Georgia's defeat in Abkhazia in 1993, the war economy, with its criminal dimension, largely survived. Guerrillas and criminals in the zones of conflict continued to extort and smuggle, often with the help of law enforcement authorities. After 1995, the regular troops had less chance to participate in such activities, but they found other illegal means of earning money. During government hearings in September 2001, the secretary of the Anti-corruption Policy Coordination Council stated that all "power structures" had become heavily involved in various forms of corruption and the creation of patronage systems based on it.²⁹ For once, Shevardnadze felt compelled to address the issue of widespread corruption throughout the government and the elite's sense of untouchability.

Yet action did not go much beyond the level of declarations. The highest officials within the Ministry of Defense continued to cut illegal deals with commercial firms responsible for supplying the army. During Nadibaidze's period as defense minister (1994–1998), it was common for the army to sign supply contracts with organizations where relatives of key generals were employed. Defense officials sought funding for ammunition and arms already in their inventory. Nor was the Ministry of Finance clean. For any significant budgetary appropriation to the Ministry of Defense, Finance Ministry officials expected and received kickbacks.³⁰

Davit Tevzadze, who was appointed minister of defense in spring 1998, attempted at the outset to follow Western advice in attacking corruption, but without great success. During Tevzadze's tenure from 1998 through 2003, the earlier practices continued. The Ministry of Defense continued to purchase ammunition from Russian military bases without

²⁸ *Saqartvelos kontrolis palatis angarishi 1999 wlis saxelmtsipo biujetis shesrulebis shesaxe* (Tbilisi: unpublished version from the Parliamentary Research Department, 2000), pp 44–45.

²⁹ *Sakartvelos Respublika*, September 6, 2001.

³⁰ Georgian Ministry of Defense officials, confidential interviews with the author, 1998–2004.

documentation or transparency. The transactions may have saved money, but there was no control over cash flows. On more than one occasion, Georgian officers were caught reselling weapons illegally. The old practice of officers letting conscripts return home in exchange for bribes persisted. Military units continued to count so-called dead souls in justifying funding requests for food and clothing. Nikoloz Janjgava, a commander of ground forces who was appointed in spring 2001 and dismissed soon afterwards, later declared that instead of the 20,000 troops registered by the Ministry of Defense, fewer than 10,000 existed in reality.³¹ At times, officers and soldiers worked as bodyguards in nightclubs as one way of meeting needs when they were not paid for months on end. As one of Tevzadze's colleagues explained after the minister's dismissal in 2004, black cashboxes were needed to feed soldiers.³²

Corruption of this sort grew worse because of the mishandling of the general state budget. In 2000, the Ministry of Defense was originally budgeted to receive 42 million lari (\$21 million), but within months an already inadequate budget allocation was slashed. Under these financial pressures, Western efforts to assist with security sector reform in Georgia did not have much of a chance. As one foreign expert put it, since budgetary parameters were constantly changing, it was unclear what missions the government meant the army to undertake, making future defense planning impossible.³³

Shevardnadze himself offered only window dressing in the struggle against corruption. Personal loyalty to the president remained the criterion by which punishments and rewards were doled out to both uniformed and civilian functionaries. Loyalty networks based on corruption, however, inevitably fell short, not least because they could not incorporate all officers. Toward the end of his rule, Shevardnadze suddenly faced the problem of troop loyalty. In May 2001, a National Guard battalion revolted over poor service conditions and was joined by a group of criminals and former servicemen. Encircled by loyal units, the rebels soon relented, but only after intensive negotiations that involved the president. None of them, however, was punished, apparently because Shevardnadze

³¹ Colonel Nikoloz Janjgava, interview with the author, June 2001.

³² Ministry of Defense official, confidential interview with the author, February 2004.

³³ An official of the German armed forces, interview with the author, August 2000.

calculated that given rising public frustration over the absence of socio-economic progress, he needed to treat men-in-arms gingerly.

Many of the essential details in military and security policy were defined by executive order, undermining the Parliament's ability to play its role in helping to shape the country's national security posture. Only the president reserved the right to make changes in the annual budget. Parliament's choice was to agree to his proposed figures or reject the draft budget completely. The Parliament offered only weak resistance, as Shevardnadze could always count on the support of a majority of its members. But even if the Parliament would have mounted a challenge, it could not have reversed the president's course. By Georgian law, in the case of a deadlock between the executive and the legislative branches, the government could use the figures from the previous year's budget. This formally undermined the Parliament's budgetary oversight over the defense sector, the principal tool of parliamentary control in any democracy.

Parliament's weakness was especially evident during the adoption of the 2002 budget.³⁴ In this instance, the Ministry of Defense had attempted to write a proper program budget with separately identified figures for specific large structural components. For the first time, the official defense portion of the draft budget was divided into three parts in accordance with NATO standards: personnel, readiness, and investments. Despite these improvements, the draft budget failed to address key questions: What was the rationale for distributing funding? What would likely be the financial effect of the proposed downsizing of the army? The Defense Committee of the Parliament supported the draft, viewing it as a step forward in the budgeting process. The Ministry of Defense, however, had failed to coordinate its budget proposal with the Ministry of Finance, which wanted to reduce the Defense Ministry's request from 71 to 38 million lari. The Parliament hesitated to accept the smaller figure, and the Ministry of Defense refused to recalculate its request. Ultimately, in January 2002 the Parliament did adopt a state budget with cuts in defense, but it did so without further review. Neither the Ministry of Finance nor the Ministry of Defense provided an explanation for how the funding should be allocated to meet NATO budgetary standards. Once again, the Parliament had passed up an opportunity to strengthen a key mechanism of civilian control over the military.

³⁴ In Georgia, the fiscal year coincides with the calendar year.

Moreover, parliamentary oversight over defense, security, and interior was weak. The constitution and parliamentary regulations guaranteed the accountability of the ministers of defense, security, and interior to the Parliament, but did not establish parliamentary oversight over autonomous armed agencies, such as the Special State Protection Service and the Border Guards. Their heads were appointed and dismissed by the president without legislative consent. Furthermore, there was no legal provision for a vote of no-confidence against the president or any minister. A high-ranking public servant could in theory be impeached for violating the constitution or committing a felony, but the consent of the Supreme Court was needed to bring charges.

Nor could Parliament exercise control over the National Security Council (NSC). According to the relevant legislation of 1996, the council was defined as an “advisory” body to the president on security issues. As such, it was free from parliamentary accountability. In reality, the council, and particularly its staff, exceeded its advisory function and played an influential role in coordinating various military and paramilitary agencies as well as personnel policy. Under Shevardnadze, defense and security policies were decided by an inner circle close to the president; the president substituted high-level fiat for interagency cooperation; and not only Parliament, but even ministries grew less relevant in setting and implementing national security policy.

In autumn 2001, the Parliament amended the Law on Defense to require the General Staff under the Ministry of Defense to coordinate all armed agencies during emergency and martial situations, as had often been recommended by foreign experts. The amendment, however, said nothing about the scope and procedures of such a coordination; nor did it address the relation of the General Staff to the autonomous armed agencies in times of peace. In January 2002, the minister of defense still openly complained of a lack of coordination among the various agencies, noting that it occurred only on an ad hoc basis during a crisis and without any kind of preliminary planning or legal clarification of responsibilities. Shevardnadze and officials in the National Security Council, however, appeared in no hurry to remedy this situation.³⁵

³⁵ As one of the foreign experts said in spring 2000, “It seems the National Security Council is not quite ready to consolidate its military structures. This is regrettable.” Confidential interview with the author, spring 2000.

IN SEARCH OF A NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

In order to succeed, military reform must be based on well-articulated national interests and a strategy by which they are to be pursued. All of this, in turn, requires a well-developed policy planning process. Shevardnadze never openly opposed the development of a national security concept, but failed to deliver. As early as 1996, he had ordered the creation of a state commission to develop such a concept. In 1997, Parliament adopted a resolution on military doctrine, based on a document written largely by the minister of defense and modified by the parliamentary Committee on Defense and Security. But this document did not generate the kind of basic strategic thinking required for effective military reform. The 1997 military doctrine adopted by Parliament simply repeated language from the Russian military doctrine issued four years earlier. It touted the need to cooperate with all states, but did not define Georgia's national interests or the threats the country faced. Almost nothing was said about strategic partners, and it avoided the contentious issue of the Russian military presence. The document objected loosely to the militarization of neighboring territories, but was unspecific. Because it borrowed almost literally from Russian documents, one might have thought the reference to militarization was in regard to NATO enlargement. If so, it seemed to contradict Georgia's growing cooperation with NATO in the Partnership for Peace Program. Regrettably, the Parliament paid little attention to this document, and it had little chance of serving as a strategic guideline for military reform.

In 1999, the National Security Council acknowledged that it was a priority to follow the recommendations of the ISAB and formulate a national security concept. During the period from 1996 to 1999, a number of drafts had appeared. Some of them had been worked out under the state commission's auspices; others were written within the walls of Parliament or in government agencies. Together they offered an insight into the security discourse in Georgia. Most emphasized the problems of state-building, the challenge of separatism, the interference of external players in domestic affairs, corruption, social inequality, the risk of regional conflict, Georgia's military inferiority, and possible ecological catastrophes. Some of these draft documents invoked the prevalence of ethnic identity over citizenship in the broader public's attitudes, the low prestige of law enforcement agencies, and the violation of human rights by representatives of those agencies. Many of them emphasized the need

to protect human rights, to achieve civilian control over the military, to foster political pluralism, and to strengthen local self-government. They also urged the peaceful solution of Georgia's frozen ethnic conflicts.

Most of these projects, however, were marred by eclecticism, contradictory statements, broad generalizations, and the avoidance of sensitive issues. Some drafts stressed the importance of human rights and integration into the democratic community of nations, but one could also find warnings about the dangers of globalization and individualism. Other projects referred to "the social responsibility of the family." Most of the projects added education and culture to the security mix, but had little to say about Russia's military presence or its interference in Georgia's domestic affairs, even though these latter issues dominated public discussion.

In summer 1999, after the National Security Council accepted the ISAB's recommendations, the state commission prepared a new draft document. This one had several advantages. Georgia's preferred strategic orientation was made clearer: Georgia, it affirmed, intended to join the key institutions of Euro-Atlantic community. In this spirit, to the extent education figured in security calculations, the document indicated that the country's educational system should promote values relevant to Georgia's Western-oriented aspirations. Still, the new draft also suffered from vague, but troubling, generalizations, like the reference to the "necessity to build a social and political system appropriate to cultural peculiarities." While covering as broad a spectrum of public life as possible, this document failed to elaborate the concrete threats confronting the country, although its authors recognized the need to do so. As with previous efforts in Georgia, and unlike comparable documents in Europe and the United States, it made no effort to lay out systematically either threats to national interests or a strategy for addressing them.

It was becoming increasingly obvious that Georgia needed a basic document articulating a national security concept, not least if the country hoped to deepen its cooperation with the West. The ISAB, together with various international expert groups, regularly urged the government to develop such a document, but Shevardnadze's regime was slow to act. The absence of a strategic concept not only impeded the development of a coherent security policy, but hampered the development of civil-military relations along democratic lines and the coordination among various security agencies. By 2000, high-ranking military leaders—like Minister of Defense Tevzadze and the head of the Border Guard, General Valeri

Chkeidze—were openly underscoring how much the absence of strategic guidelines was undermining the things they wished to accomplish.

At this point, the ISAB grew tired of waiting and drafted its own document in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. When publicly issued, it was entitled, “Georgia and the World: Vision and Strategy for the Future.”³⁶ In the document, the authors were more explicit about Georgia’s intention to join NATO and to deepen cooperation with the EU. They also stressed the importance of the closure of Russian bases and expressed skepticism over the effectiveness of the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). For the first time, a draft strategic concept gave concrete attention to defense missions, suggesting that the armed forces should be better integrated in order to constitute a deterrent force capable of defeating an attack by modest-sized forces, controlling small-scale cross-border infiltrations, coping with terrorist attacks, helping the authorities to restore law and order in extreme situations, providing humanitarian and disaster relief, and participating in international peacekeeping missions.

Although a document of this kind cannot be expected to explore the details of defense policy, this effort had something of the character of a wish list. It touched only superficially on threat assessment. Even if a document enlisting the assistance of foreign experts was unlikely to articulate Georgia’s precise concerns about neighbors, any realistic security concept needed to deal more directly and thoroughly with the security challenges facing the country. However, the principal deficiency of the “Vision and Strategy for the Future” had more to do with its status than its content. It was not discussed in many of the relevant governmental agencies before its publication; its contents were not widely publicized in Georgia; and no leader, including the president, bothered to mention the document in a public announcement or speech. In fact, key figures within the government refused to embrace the document as the country’s national security concept, noting that the National Security Council was still preparing such a document.

In 2002, the Ministry of Defense produced a White Paper³⁷ of its own, although with a relatively modest purpose. Written in response to

³⁶ The document was made available on the NATO website, <http://www.nato.int/pfp/ge/d001010.htm>.

³⁷ Unpublished document.

ISAB exhortation, it simply summarized the organization of the armed forces, emphasized civilian supremacy in military matters, underscored the importance of cooperating with NATO, and expressed a wish to make the army stronger. It attempted to say something about the armed forces' missions, but without a precise picture of the security challenges facing the country or the articulation of a broader strategy, this effort did not go far. Given the unresolved disagreement between the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Finance on defense spending, there was little the White Paper could contribute here. Nor did it comment on the problem of coordinating with other armed agencies. Basically it was a document written without serious consultation with other governmental institutions. The rumor was that it had been written by one or two mid-level Defense Ministry functionaries, largely without the involvement of key departments in the ministry itself.

By the middle of 2003, the National Security Council had prepared its own draft. Some ideas from the earlier ISAB text made their way into the new paper, but it differed in other respects, and the differences were not always for the better. The NSC document³⁸ covered too many themes, many of them inappropriate for a national security concept. For example, the authors laid stress on the need to develop the "traditional fields" of industry and agriculture. The text was vague about the concrete missions of the military. It did underscore Georgia's intention to join NATO, but the chapters devoted to foreign relations, and especially Georgia's role on the regional level, provided no real assessment of the challenges the country faced or how they might be addressed. The concept paper was surprisingly undiplomatic on the subject of relations with Russia. In addition, democratization and human rights issues were ignored. Instead, the document noted the chance the Georgian nation had to build a state corresponding to its spiritual preferences and cultural distinctiveness. It then laid out a series of ambitious goals without considering their feasibility. For example, it declared that the share of the shadow economy in GDP was to be cut by 15 to 20 percent, but gave no idea of how this might be achieved or whether it would significantly affect the defense budget. In the end, the NSC paper did not clearly identify the country's security priorities, provide a coherent risk analysis, or set out an appropriate range of strategic options. The chapter on

³⁸ Unpublished document.

“Risks to Georgia’s Security” drew no distinction between risks, threats, and challenges.

This was the last national security project developed by Shevardnadze’s government. Like the others that came before, it was never adopted. By the time it appeared, Shevardnadze’s regime was already in deep crisis. In his defense and security policies, Shevardnadze vacillated between the various contending forces, focusing not on policy concepts but simply on his personal political survival. By the end of his rule, he had grown ambivalent toward the United States and the EU. He found it ever more difficult to tolerate harsh criticism from a burgeoning democratic opposition, especially because U.S. and other Western leaders appeared increasingly to identify with his critics. By late 2002, Georgian anger over Russia’s reluctance to withdraw its military bases appeared to soften. At the ministerial meeting of the OSCE in Lisbon in December 2002, the Georgian delegation seemed inclined toward further compromises with Russia concerning the dates of their closure. According to a high-ranking OSCE official, a lack of transparency and consistency weakened the Georgian position on the disputed bases.³⁹ This shift of policies happened at a time when some major Western companies who had heavily invested in Georgia were reducing their activities or were even leaving the country,⁴⁰ and when Russian state-owned firms began to appear in strategic sectors of the Georgian economy.

During the Shevardnadze period, Georgia suffered from a vicious circle: the weakness and disorder in developing and managing the military impeded the formulation of a coherent strategic vision, but the absence of a national security concept delayed and burdened the process of military reform. In Shevardnadze’s last years, defense restructuring fell considerably short of the ISAB’s recommendations. The army was downsized, but there were still 20,000 troops on the state budget—6,000 to 7,000 more than the ISAB had said Georgia could afford. The Special Assault Brigade was integrated into the Interior Ministry, contrary to the ISAB’s urging that this ministry should be relieved of military missions. The Border Guard also retained a military function, despite the ISAB’s recommendation that it be converted into a law enforcement agency.

³⁹ OSCE official, confidential interview with the author, January 2003.

⁴⁰ Such as the American energy company AES that had created the newly privatized electricity company AES-Telasi.

Shevardnadze appeared unable to break out of this dilemma for three reasons. First, he had built a corrupt network with parallel lines of control in order to manage the political environment. The transparency of a clear national security concept would have endangered this system. Second, his wavering between the West and Russia made it difficult to settle on a security strategy or to coordinate military reform with security policy. On the one hand, he feared Russia's opposition should he turn firmly toward the West. On the other hand, he placed too many hopes on Russia assisting him to restore Georgia's territorial integrity. Third, Shevardnadze did not seriously adhere to democratic values, as demonstrated by his toleration of corruption in politics and the special fiscal, economic, and political privileges that he accorded the Orthodox Church. He seems to have desired integration into Europe for instrumental rather than intrinsic ideological reasons. In late 1999, he stated that the issue of Georgia's orientation toward either the West or Russia was unimportant—what mattered was which side would provide what.⁴¹

Pragmatism of this sort was a recipe for ineffectiveness. Any state, however small or weak, must make clear commitments to its allies and benefactors. Only then can it expect long-lasting and mutually beneficial cooperation. Shevardnadze did not manage to accomplish this with either the West or Russia. In the process, he failed to satisfy the basic needs of the Georgian citizens on whom the country's defense forces would depend. As a result, when the people rose against him in 2003, the military and police establishments that he had nurtured refused to protect him. It was a further consequence of Georgia's distorted and undemocratic civil–military relations. The Army and paramilitary forces by and large did not respect an aging head of the state, much like the rest of society and for many of the same reasons. Because of a corrupt, clientelist, and ineffective command and control system in Georgia's military and security institutions, an unpopular leadership could not rely on unanimous or unambiguous obedience in critical situations. In contrast, opposition leaders might well have been able to strike deals with some of the more energetic and Western-oriented officers. If Shevardnadze had decided to use force, the outcome would have been very unclear and his personal fate might have been much more tragic.

⁴¹ *Evropa*, December 25–31, 1999, pp. 107–128.

MILITARY REFORM AFTER THE ROSE REVOLUTION

The post-Shevardnadze era has only just begun, and it is not easy to judge how far the changes in defense and security policy will go. Some of the new leadership's first declarations and initiatives, however, opened the possibility of positive advances. These opportunities are further bolstered by the new wave of security assistance extended by the United States and the EU.

To begin with what are promising first steps: on several occasions, President Mikheil Saakashvili has stressed that security issues, including refurbishing the army, will be a policy priority, and he has backed his pledge with increased funding. In addition, the new government has created, with the assistance of private and foreign donations, a separate fund intended to raise the salaries of senior public officials, including those in the Ministry of Defense. And the government has begun repairing tanks, armored vehicles, helicopters, and other military hardware that had badly deteriorated by the end of 2003.

Military restructuring, carried out with U.S. and British technical assistance, has received a new impetus. Upon returning from the United States in early 2004, Saakashvili was able to report that the Americans would not only continue previous material and technical assistance, but would help to form a full-size infantry brigade of 5,000 soldiers trained to NATO standards. According to current plans, the Georgian armed forces will consist of four full-sized brigades. As for the defense budget, in 2005 it exceeded 300 million lari, which is almost ten times more than in Shevardnadze's last years.

Two other important changes took place in the Ministry of Defense during the first months of the new regime. In March 2004, Saakashvili approved interim regulations for the ministry that will closely resemble those of NATO countries. The reorganization of the ministry, as well as the delineation of functions between its civilian and military staffs, has been entrusted to Cubic, a private U.S. consulting firm hired by the Pentagon, and to a team from the British Ministry of Defense. Part of the process already includes a restructuring of the National Guard and fully integrating its combat units into the army. The National Guard itself will only consist of training centers for reserve forces.

Saakashvili has also appointed a civilian minister of defense and an unprecedented number of civilians to key leadership posts in the ministry. At the same time, he has retired many of the generals who either resisted reforms or lacked the knowledge and skill to carry them out. Younger

officers and civil servants trained in Western institutions now have a far more prominent role in carrying out military reform.

Moreover, reform has now reached other armed agencies and the government has begun integrating parallel structures. Georgia's State Department of Frontier Protection has been made a part of the Ministry of Interior, laying the groundwork for transforming this agency into a law enforcement structure. The Ministry of Interior's troops are to transfer heavy armament to the Ministry of Defense and turn themselves into something closer to a gendarmerie. Within the Ministry of Interior, a reform agency has been created to carry out this change and others intended to bring policing in Georgia closer to Western standards. Similarly, the Coastal Protection Forces, once a part of the Department of Frontier Protection, and the Defense Ministry's Naval Defense Forces have been instructed to work out plans for their integration.

The last and the most serious structural changes in the security sector have been amendments to the Law on the Structure, Responsibilities, and Rules of Activity of the Government of Georgia adopted by the Parliament in December 2004. They mandated the merger of the Ministry of Security with a reorganized Ministry of Interior into a single Ministry of Police and Public Safety. That process is now underway. An independent foreign intelligence agency, directly subordinated to the president, is also being created.

All of these measures are expected to improve the interoperability of Georgian forces with NATO, while also improving their management and effectiveness. Through integration and downsizing, financial savings are also anticipated. To increase transparency and accountability and to promote sound civil-military relations, negotiations between the government and the NGO community on the establishment of public oversight boards within the law enforcement, security, and defense agencies began in 2004.

Beyond the reform of military and paramilitary forces, Saakashvili has confirmed Georgia's intention to join NATO, which he has said he hopes will take no more than a few years. He has expressed similar sentiments about Georgia's goal to be admitted to the EU. In April 2004, a newly created Georgian interagency team drafted a NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), which has been largely approved by the relevant NATO agencies.⁴² The new post-revolutionary version of the IPAP

⁴² One of the authors of this document, representing the Secretariat of the

explains the logic of the above-mentioned reforms in the military field and requests concrete technical assistance in order to reach NATO standards. At the same time, the IPAP confirms Georgia's commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration, regional cooperation, respect for democracy, human rights, a market economy, and the peaceful resolution of ethnic conflicts. Thus, the IPAP has begun to address a number of issues crucial to a national security concept.

At the same time, Saakashvili has declared a crusade against organized crime and corruption, and has followed through with greater vigor than either of his predecessors. The unwillingness to touch high-ranking public officials and organized crime bosses characteristic of the Shevardnadze era has been abandoned by the new leadership. The former chief of the state railway service, Akaki Chkhaidze, has been arrested. So has Giorgi Kenchadze, a former member of Parliament well-known for his contacts with the criminal world. And the authorities have moved against the Aprasidze criminal gang that, from its base in the village of Etseri in Svaneti province, had terrorized the local population and organized criminal activity throughout Georgia.

None of these changes, however, is yet irreversible, and there remain important deficiencies in the security and defense spheres. First, control over the military remains insufficiently democratic and has too much duplication. In February 2004, the new leadership, with near unanimous parliamentary consent, amended the constitution to create the post of prime minister and to allow the president the right to dissolve Parliament when the executive and legislative branches are deadlocked. Some have argued that as a result, the legislative branch has grown weaker in exercising civilian democratic control over the military. At a minimum, even if one disagrees on this score, it is evident that the problems stemming from the blurring of functions among the key political bodies in the security and defense field have not ended. For example, the Parliament now has the right to vote no-confidence in individual ministers or the entire

National Security Council of Georgia, confirmed this in an interview with the author in April 2004. Although the Shevardnadze administration promised to create such a document, his government never delivered. On the eve of the November 2003 revolution, it finally produced the first version of an IPAP, but NATO experts regarded it as window dressing. Source: A representative of the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, interview with the author, December 2003.

cabinet, albeit at the risk of being dissolved. The creation of the prime minister's post appears to have led to dual lines of authority. The principal ministries are supervised by the prime minister, but the president retains the right to dismiss the ministers of defense as well as of police and public safety without the prime minister's consent. At the same time, the president remains the supreme commander of the armed forces and chairs the National Security Council. On extraordinary occasions, he even chairs the cabinet of ministers. This overlap risks recreating the problem of "subjective" civilian control referred to earlier in this chapter.

Moreover, leadership in the Ministry of Defense has been subject to unusual and potentially disturbing volatility. In February 2005, the fourth minister of defense since the Rose Revolution requested all directors of the General Staff, including its chief, to resign. The chief of the General Staff, also the fourth since the revolution, was replaced by Levan Nikoleishvili. Two things about these events are unfortunate. First, they reflect serious leadership instability both in the Ministry of Defense and more generally in political circles. Second, the request of the minister was probably illegal, since he is not entitled to urge the chief of the General Staff to resign. Legally the chief is appointed and dismissed by the president himself. Thus, a mix of revolutionary chaos and quasi-legality persists in Georgian defense policy.

In spring 2005, NATO undertook the first assessment of Georgia's performance under the Individual Partnership Action Plan. As the process remains largely classified, not much is publicly known. The government states that NATO experts are quite impressed with ongoing army restructuring and increased combat capability. However, according to some confidential sources, the experts did question the rationality and planning procedures for procuring military hardware.

Under these circumstances, it is important that the role of the NSC be clearly defined. This process began in 2004, and as a promising first step, the secretary of the National Security Council, Vano Merabishvili, turned to NGOs for advice and to the civilian expert community for help in drawing up a national security concept, but this lasted only so long.⁴³ His successor, Gela Bejuashvili, chose to work without much involvement from civil society or academic circles. Before this work can

⁴³ Representatives of the National Security Council Secretariat, interview with the author, April 2004.

be completed, however, the president, the prime minister, and the leadership of the ruling National Movement-Democrats need to answer the following questions: How is the issue of the Russian military presence in Georgia to be solved? How does the Georgian government plan to resolve the problem of the separated territories? How does the government propose to achieve energy security, deal with extreme poverty, and defeat corruption, organized crime, and the religious as well as ethnic intolerance still plaguing Georgia's social and political life? How are the resources necessary for dealing with these and other security issues to be generated? What missions are to be assigned to the security and defense agencies? Without clarification of Russian–Georgian relations in the field of defense or of the role of the Georgian armed forces in restoring the territorial integrity of the country, and without socioeconomic and cultural modernization and the elimination of favoritism and government corruption, military reform—even under the guidance of the best foreign experts—will remain stillborn. Currently, corrupt networks in the army as well as in the police and other security-related agencies seem to have been seriously damaged, but they have scarcely been eliminated, and any loophole in the reform design will open the way to their revival.⁴⁴

Georgia does not face the threat of large-scale aggression anytime soon. Russian politicians, however frustrated with Georgia's tilt toward NATO, have no reason to contemplate broad military intervention—not when they can employ alternative forms of economic and diplomatic pressure and they have the opportunity to manipulate Georgia's tense internal ethnic relations. Thus, it makes no sense, even if it were possible, for Georgia to try to build a large conventional military force. What the country needs is a light regular force able to control mountainous borders, a naval defense to control the maritime border, and paramilitary forces that can be used against organized criminal groups. A part of these forces can also be trained and used for international peacekeeping missions, an important way for a small country such as Georgia to contribute to international stability and security. For more remote or hypothetical large-scale threats on Georgia's borders, it would make sense to enhance the existing reserve force. Because of the short-term obligatory training

⁴⁴ Representatives of the Georgian Ministry of Defense, interview with the author, April 2004.

that the reserves provide, this would have the additional benefit of aiding nation-building in Georgia's multiethnic setting.

If corruption is curbed and the system of management optimized, Georgia, even with its modest resources, can maintain a professional force of 15,000 to 20,000 soldiers along with a conscript reserve component. All of this, however, brings us back to the challenge of addressing Georgia's fundamental internal problems, including the legacy of distorted civil-military relations left by prior leaderships. If the new leadership is steadfast and effective in dealing with these problems, Georgia can begin to enjoy greater, albeit relative, security based on a more adequate and reliable defense establishment.

