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Forum: Georgia at 35: Lessons of a Generation

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The Anchor Before the Vectors: Georgia's Strategic Choice in a Changing World

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The Anchor Before the Vectors: Georgia's Strategic Choice in a Changing World

Recent debates about Georgia's foreign policy have increasingly focused on pragmatism, transactionalism, strategic balancing, and the possibility of a more "multi-vector" approach to international relations. Much of this discussion, however, begins at the wrong end of the problem.

Before asking how Georgia should navigate a turbulent international environment, we must first answer a more fundamental question: Who are we, where do we belong, and what kind of state do we aspire to be?

Only after answering those questions can we meaningfully discuss the instruments of foreign policy.

For a country of Georgia's size and geopolitical circumstances, strategic orientation and foreign policy are not identical concepts. Strategic orientation defines the destination. Foreign policy determines the route. Confusing one for the other risks turning diplomacy into improvisation and tactics into substitutes for strategy.

This distinction is particularly important in the current debate surrounding "multi-vector" foreign policy.

The concept itself is neither inherently right nor inherently wrong. Every successful state maintains relations with multiple partners and seeks opportunities wherever they exist. The United States engages China while competing with it. India cooperates simultaneously with the West and Russia. Turkey maintains relationships in multiple directions. Pragmatism is a normal instrument of statecraft.

The critical difference is that these countries possess a clear understanding of their strategic identity and long-term objectives. Their diplomacy serves their strategy. Their strategy does not serve their diplomacy.

For Georgia, the sequence must be the same.

First, we must determine who we are.

Second, we must determine where we belong.

Third, we must define our long-term national interests.

Only then can we discuss how best to pursue those interests through diplomacy, trade, security cooperation, and regional engagement.

A nation that lacks a strategic anchor and proclaims itself "multi-vector" risks drifting between competing centres of power. A nation with a clear strategic anchor can engage multiple actors with confidence and self-assurance.

This is particularly true for small states.

Great powers can occasionally afford ambiguity. Small states rarely enjoy that luxury. Great powers create vectors. Small states navigate among them. The principal asset of a small state is often not its power but its credibility, predictability, and strategic clarity.

For that reason, multi-vector diplomacy can be a useful instrument for Georgia, but it cannot become a substitute for strategic orientation.

Indeed, one might argue that a nation without a strategic anchor does not practice multi-vector diplomacy at all; it merely oscillates between vectors.

Georgia's modern history offers a useful guide. The country's Western orientation was never merely a geopolitical preference. It reflected a broader choice about the kind of state Georgia sought to build: a state governed by law rather than arbitrary power, institutions rather than personalities, accountability rather than dependency, and citizens rather than subjects.

That choice did not eliminate the need for pragmatism. Nor did it prevent Georgia from maintaining relations with countries possessing different political systems or strategic interests. But it provided a clear point of reference for managing those relationships.

The challenge facing Georgia today is therefore not whether it should speak with Washington, Brussels, Moscow, Beijing, Ankara, Baku, or Yerevan. It should speak with all of them.

The real question is whether those relationships are being pursued from a clearly understood sense of national purpose.

Only when a nation stands firmly on both feet at home can it act sovereignly abroad. Only when it possesses confidence in its identity, institutions, and strategic direction can it engage multiple partners without repeatedly questioning where it belongs. Only when it possesses confidence in its own identity and direction can it engage multiple partners without constantly renegotiating its strategic orientation.

The debate, therefore, should not begin with vectors. It should begin with the anchor.

Once the anchor is secure, pragmatism becomes a strength rather than a source of uncertainty. Diversification becomes a tool rather than a drift. Multi-vector diplomacy becomes an instrument of statecraft rather than a substitute for strategy.

In an increasingly uncertain world, Georgia's first task is not to choose among vectors. It is to define, preserve, and strengthen the anchor from which those vectors are pursued.



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