

Press Releases: Joint Statement of the U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission Defense and Security Cooperation Working Group

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

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The Security and Defense Working Group of the U.S.–Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission met on September 8, 2017, in Washington, DC. The Working Group noted the historic events leading up to this meeting that have enhanced Georgia’s ability to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The 2017 NATO-Georgia Commission meeting in Brussels on February 16, chaired by Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, emphasized NATO’s strong commitment to Georgia’s security and territorial integrity, and helped Georgia improve its defense capabilities as it advances on its path toward NATO membership. In 2017, the United States and Georgia signed a General Security of Information Agreement, creating the basis for future exchanges and ushering in a new era of practical cooperation. The United States will continue to work with Georgian leadership to improve Georgia’s military readiness and resilience within the framework of the Memorandum on Deepening the Defense and Security Partnership. The sides will also continue to build on the success of Exercises NOBLE PARTNER 17 and AGILE SPIRIT 17, which increased the scope of cooperation and improved interoperability.

The sides exchanged perspectives on the regional security situation and reviewed updates to national strategy documents in response to emerging challenges. Georgia reviewed its National Military Strategy update and the implementation of its Strategic Defense Review. The United States briefed the National Defense Strategy and the new South Asia policy, announced by President Trump on August 21. The sides underscored the importance of a durable and strategic approach to defense and security cooperation that increases the security of each country and strengthens regional stability and global security.

The sides reviewed the Noble Partner 2017 exercise, which was the largest multi-national military exercise ever held in Georgia, and which included troop contributions from Georgia, Armenia, Germany, Slovenia, Turkey,

Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The exercise further enhanced Georgia's readiness and interoperability with the NATO Response Force (NRF) by improving its ability to conduct multinational mission command and control; and provided an opportunity to measure transportation, sustainment, and training infrastructure to support a multinational operational scenario.

During his July 31-August 1 visit to Georgia, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence stated that the United States stands by the 2008 NATO Bucharest statement, and strongly supports Georgia's aspirations to become a member of NATO. The Vice President also noted that Georgia, a key strategic partner, already exceeds NATO's goal of spending two percent of gross domestic product on defense.

Each side confirmed its commitment to the full implementation of the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package, which advances Georgian preparation for NATO membership; and affirmed the additional cooperation activities discussed in Brussels to prepare Georgia for membership. The sides expressed commitment to strengthening Black Sea security cooperation, and recognized Georgia's role as a special partner in the region.

The United States expressed appreciation for Georgia's significant contributions to NATO's mission in Afghanistan. The sides honored the significant sacrifices of fallen and wounded Georgians and Americans, notably Sergeant Mdinari Bebiashvili who was killed in Afghanistan in August.

The parties discussed prioritization of Georgia's defense budget and U.S. assistance to help fill critical capability gaps, and strike a balance between global deployments and territorial defense. The United States acknowledged Georgia's role as a strategic partner in the region, and as a steadfast partner promoting stability and security around the globe.

The sides discussed the security environment in the occupied territories of Georgia. The Georgian side updated the working group participants on the threats and challenges on the ground. The United States stressed unwavering support for Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. The sides reiterated calls for Russia to withdraw its forces from Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali regions, in accordance with the 2008 ceasefire agreement. The United States expressed strong concern about ongoing so-called "borderization" and closure of crossing points. The United States also reiterated its support for bringing the perpetrator of the May 2016 killing of Georgian citizen Giga Otkhozoria to justice.

The parties discussed the breadth and depth of the U.S.-Georgia defense and security partnership; and agreed that bilateral defense cooperation will help enhance the readiness and self-defense capabilities of the Georgian Armed Forces. The sides committed to deepening cooperation in the areas of defense readiness; counterterrorism; border and maritime security; defense and security institutional reform, with the aim to jointly analyze gaps in current security system and adapt to elevating hybrid threats and challenges; information sharing; counter-narcotics; law enforcement; civil emergency and

crisis management, to achieve the shared goal of increasing Georgia's resilience.

The parties welcomed the arrival of a Drug Enforcement Administration Country Attaché in 2016, a key milestone in deepening our counter-narcotics cooperation. Both sides are committed to preventing, detecting and combating the transnational flow of narcotics through Georgia.

The parties agreed that Georgia's best security asset is its continued pursuit of democratic and economic reforms. The sides noted Georgia's progress in this regard, particularly highlighting the remarkable progress in defense reforms, which has been exceptional over the past year. The United States expressed its continued support for Georgia in this effort. The United States also emphasized the importance of apolitical law enforcement and security agencies, as well as the importance of checks and balances, to a strong democracy. The sides underscored Georgia's remarkable reform progress in its 26 years since regaining independence; and look forward to continuing the close partnership that has developed between the United States and Georgia.

Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Kevin O'Keefe and Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Laura Cooper co-chaired the U.S. side, joined by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs James Walsh, Acting Deputy Counterterrorism Coordinator Raffi Gregorian, and representatives from across the U.S. government. First Deputy Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani and First Deputy Defense Minister Lela Chikovani co-chaired the Georgian side, leading a broad interagency delegation, including the Secretary of the National Security Council of Georgia, David Rakviashvili, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Shalva Khutsishvili, and the First Deputy Chairman of the Defense and Security Committee of the Georgian Parliament, Irakli Beraia.

The U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission remains the primary mechanism for organizing and prioritizing the broad and deepening cooperation between Georgia and the United States. The Commission includes four bilateral working groups on priority areas identified in the Charter on Strategic Partnership: democracy; defense and security; economic, trade, and energy; and people-to-people and cultural exchanges. For more information, please visit <https://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/gg/usgeorgiacommission/>.

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