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From Kursk to 'Yalta 2.0': Joris van Bladel on Russia's Military Flaws, Strengths, and Trump's Unpredictable Influence

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Ukraine's endurance is a strategic victory in itself, even if Kursk is lost, - says Dr. Joris van Bladel, a military strategist, senior fellow at the Egmont Institute, and author of the newly released book 'The Land of Great Sacrifice: How Russia Defies Western Logic.'

Van Bladel dissects the latest developments in the Ukraine war in an interview with RFE/RL's Georgian Service. He explores the fall of Kursk, the enduring flaws and strengths of Russia's military mentality, and the unpredictable role of US President Donald Trump in shaping the next phase of the conflict — or, as Van Bladel warns, in potentially — and perhaps unintentionally — handing the Kremlin a new "Yalta."

Continued on page 4



Dr. Joris van Bladel. Source: hln.be

GALT & TAGGART										
Prepared for Georgia Today Business by										
As of 18-Mar-2025										
Markets					Markets					
BONDS	Price	w/w	m/m	STOCKS	Price	w/w	m/m			
GEORGIA 04/26	95.56 (YTM 7.26%)	+0.0%	+0.5%	Lion Finance Group (BIGED LN)	GBP 57.80	+11.2%	+9.1%			
GBAIL 04/28	98.37 (YTM 8.15%)	+0.3%	+0.4%	Georgia Capital (GCEG LN)	GBP 15.50	+7.3%	+25.0%			
GBGGG 9/12 PERP	98.89 (YTM 9.54%)	+0.2%	+0.7%	TBC Bank Group (TBCCG LN)	GBP 45.00	+9.9%	+11.7%			
SILNET 01/27	101.49 (YTM 7.50%)	+0.2%	+0.4%							
TBC 8.894 PERP	97.21 (YTM 11.54%)	+0.0%	+0.6%							
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	101.07 (YTM 9.79%)	+0.0%	+1.1%							
					COMMODITIES	Price	w/w	m/m		
					Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	70.56	+2.4%	-2.0%		
					Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	3 034.73	+4.1%	+3.4%		
INDICES										
	Price	w/w	m/m	CURRENCIES	Price	w/w	m/m			
SP 500	5 614.66	+0.8%	-8.4%	USD / GEL	2,7832	+0.1%	-1.1%			
FTSE 250	20 097.77	+1.7%	-3.8%	EUR / GEL	3,0460	+0.4%	+3.6%			
DOW JONES 30	41 581.31	+0.4%	-6.7%	GBP / GEL	3,6187	+0.5%	+1.9%			
Russell 2000	2 049.94	+1.3%	-10.5%	EUR / USD	1,0945	+0.2%	+4.8%			
FTSE 100	8 705.23	+2.5%	-0.7%	GBP / USD	1,3001	+0.4%	+3.1%			



March 7 protest in Tbilisi. Photo by Ezz Gaber

Investigation Underway into Potentially Unlawful Dismissals of Public Sector Employees in Georgia

BY TEAM GT

In recent months, Georgia has witnessed a significant wave of dismissals within its public sector, prompting concerns about potential political motivations and infringements on freedom of expression. The Public Defender's Office has labeled these actions as "unacceptable and illegal," emphasizing that public servants should not face termination for expressing their civic views.

Since late December 2024, numerous civil servants from various state institutions—including the National Agency for Public Registry, the Public Service Hall, Parliament, Government Administration, and Tbilisi City Hall—have reported abrupt contract terminations. Many attribute these dismissals to their active participation in protests advocating for Georgia's European integration and their vocal criticism of the government's deviation from this path.

Beka Liliashvili, a member of the opposition party 'Gakharia for Georgia,' has accused the ruling Georgian Dream party of orchestrating these dismissals as a form of political repression. He claims that the party has expelled approximately

150 individuals from the Ministry of Defense, alleging that these actions are part of a broader strategy to populate state institutions with party loyalists.

"Professionals have been left unemployed just because they dared to support freedom and the European course! After the change of government, all unlawfully dismissed public servants must be reinstated fairly! The political repression must end! The public service should serve the people, not the oligarchy," Liliashvili wrote.

In response to these developments, the Public Defender's Office has initiated investigations into eight cases of alleged labor discrimination, affecting 15 individuals.

"Since December 2024, based on information from public sources, the Public Defender's Office has proactively reached out to 41 dismissed individuals, providing them with detailed information about legal procedures and how to file a complaint with the office. Notably, some of the dismissed employees plan to appeal to the court, while others have already contacted the Public Defender's Office," the Public Defender's Office stated, going on to underscore that any personnel decisions within public institutions must align with constitutional labor rights and uphold the principle of equality.

Georgia Wins Rugby Europe Championship 2025



Photo: Georgian Rugby.

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The Georgian National Rugby team won the Rugby Europe Championship 2025 title, defeating Spain 46-28 in the final at Mikheil Meskhi

Stadium in Tbilisi on March 16.

This victory yet again marked Georgia's dominance in European rugby outside the Six Nations, keeping its No. 11 world ranking (74.69 points). Spain, ranked 17th (67.34 points), put up a strong fight, but fell short in the end. Both teams, along with Portugal and Romania, have qualified for the 2027 Rugby World Cup in Australia.

Georgian PM Kobakhidze: US Ambassador Candidate Selected, Reset of US-Georgia Relations Hinges on 'Deep State' Defeat



Georgian PM Irakli Kobakhidze. Source: FB

BY TEAM GT

In an interview with the First Channel this week, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze revealed that his government has already selected a candidate for the role of ambassador to the U.S., with the process of finalizing the appointment underway. Although the name of the candidate has yet to be disclosed, Kobakhidze confirmed that details will be shared with the public soon. "We have selected a candidate for the ambassador to the U.S. The process has already begun, and we hope it will be completed shortly," he stated.

In the same conversation, Kobakhidze underscored that the restoration of Georgia's strategic partnership with the United States remains a key foreign policy goal. He emphasized the importance of beginning this relationship "from a clean slate"

and creating a concrete roadmap that outlines priorities for both countries. "Restoring the strategic partnership with the United States from a clean slate is one of our top foreign policy priorities," he said, adding that both sides have expressed interest in resetting the relationship and aligning their views on various issues.

Kobakhidze explained that recent meetings, such as the one between Foreign Minister Maka Bochorishvili and U.S. Ambassador Robin Dunnigan, were part of efforts to strengthen this partnership. However, he clarified that the content of those closed-door discussions, particularly the focus on a possible reset of relations, should not be fully disclosed at this stage. "We have made several public statements about our desire to fully reset relations and start with a concrete roadmap," he noted.

Despite the optimistic tone, Kobakhidze also pointed out the challenges that lie ahead, particularly the influence of

what he described as the "Deep State" in the U.S. He indicated that any significant shift in U.S.-Georgia relations would depend on how decisively this entrenched establishment is confronted. "Everything will largely depend on how decisively the 'Deep State' is ultimately defeated in the U.S.," Kobakhidze remarked. "If it is fully or fundamentally defeated, then nothing can hinder the reset of Georgian-American relations."

The Prime Minister also emphasized that any reset of relations should be based on mutual interests, acknowledging that while the U.S. is a global superpower, Georgia must maintain its sovereignty and approach all international relationships from that standpoint. He expressed hope that, with shared values and a renewed focus on mutual benefit, the relationship could thrive. "If fairness prevails, then nothing can stand in the way of a qualitative renewal of relations and the restoration of a strategic partnership," Kobakhidze concluded.

Turkey Detains Istanbul's Mayor, a Key Rival of President Erdogan

BY ANA DUMBADZE

In a significant escalation of political tensions, Turkish authorities have detained Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, a prominent opposition figure and key rival to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The arrest, carried out on March 19, has sparked widespread protests and raised concerns about the state of democracy in Turkey.

DETAILS OF THE ARREST

Early on March 19, police conducted dawn raids across Istanbul, targeting Imamoglu and over 100 others, including close aides and district mayors from the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). The charges against Imamoglu encompass allegations of corruption, extortion, bribery, money laundering, and purported links to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey.

Notably, just a day prior to his arrest, Istanbul University annulled Imamoglu's degree, citing irregularities. This move effectively disqualified him from running in the upcoming presidential elections, where he was anticipated to be a leading candidate against Erdogan.

PUBLIC REACTION AND PROTESTS

The arrest has ignited significant public



Supporters of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu hold a poster of him reading "CHP will make it, Turkey will win" as they demonstrate outside the city townhall, in Istanbul, Turkey on Wednesday. Kemal Aslan/AFP/Getty Images

outrage. Protesters have taken to the streets of Istanbul, clashing with police forces. Authorities have responded by imposing a four-day ban on public demonstrations in the city, blocking major roads, and restricting access to social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram.

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

The political upheaval has had immediate economic repercussions. The Turkish lira plummeted to a record low, losing up to 14.5% of its value against the US dollar. The Borsa Istanbul 100 Index also experienced a sharp decline of 8.72%. In response, the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey reportedly intervened by selling nearly \$10 billion in foreign

currency reserves to stabilize the market.

GOVERNMENT'S STANCE

President Erdogan's administration maintains that the judiciary operates independently and that the charges against Imamoglu are based on legitimate legal grounds. However, critics argue that this move is a politically motivated attempt to sideline a formidable opponent ahead of the elections.

As Turkey approaches a critical election period, the detention of Imamoglu is likely to intensify debates about the country's democratic trajectory and its relations with Western allies. The situation remains fluid, with potential implications for both domestic politics and international relations.



Presidents Zelensky and Trump. Source: pbs.org

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had a “very good” and “frank” phone conversation lasting just over an hour, during which they discussed the next steps in a US-led initiative to halt Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Zelenskyy reiterated Ukraine’s request for additional air defense systems, with Trump agreeing to collaborate on securing available resources, particularly from European allies.

As part of the ongoing diplomatic efforts, Ukraine has formally committed to a limited suspension of strikes on energy and infrastructure, with further negotiations expected to potentially extend the pause to the Black Sea and, ultimately, work toward a full ceasefire. Zelenskyy reaffirmed Ukraine’s openness to an unconditional ceasefire, stating that the country remains committed to pursuing steps to achieve peace.

Meanwhile, Trump suggested that US ownership of Ukraine’s electrical grid and nuclear power plants “could be highly beneficial” and serve as the “best protection” for Ukraine’s critical infrastructure.

The leaders also addressed several key concerns, including the security situation in Russia’s Kursk region and humanitarian issues, such as the fate of abducted children and prisoners of war.

Further discussions are expected to take place in Saudi Arabia “in the coming days,” with the primary focus believed to be negotiations between the US and Russia.

The White House Press Secretary confirmed that US intelligence sharing regarding Ukraine’s defense will continue but declined to comment on minor discrepancies between the US and Russian summaries of Trump’s recent call with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

TRUMP HALTS PROGRAM TO TRACK ABDUCTED UKRAINIAN CHILDREN

Democratic US lawmakers are to urge President Donald Trump’s administration to reinstate a program that monitors the abduction of thousands of Ukrainian children by Russia and to impose sanctions on those responsible for this human rights violation.

Lawmakers say as the Republican president’s administration cuts a broad range of US government programs and most foreign aid, it has also terminated a government-funded initiative run by Yale University’s Humanitarian Research

Ukraine Latest: Trump and Zelensky's High-Stakes Call on Ceasefire Talks and Security Concerns

Lab (Yale HRL), which tracked the mass deportation of children from Ukraine.

That decision meant researchers have lost access to a trove of information, including satellite imagery and other data, about some 30,000 children taken from Ukraine.

Trump’s termination of the program was first reported in The Washington Post. It became public the same day that Trump had spoken by telephone to Russian President Vladimir Putin, in which Russia stopped short of agreeing to a 30-day cessation of hostilities.

A person familiar with the tracking program said the cancellation of the State Department contract with Yale HRL has resulted in the deletion of \$26 million of war crimes evidence, a move which would help protect Putin.

Ukraine has called the abductions of tens of thousands of its children taken to Russia or Russian-occupied territory without the consent of family or guardians a war crime that meets the UN treaty definition of genocide.

THESE ARE THE KEY DEVELOPMENTS ON DAY 1, 120 OF RUSSIA’S WAR ON UKRAINE:

In the Sumy Region, Ukraine, Russian drone strikes damaged two hospitals in northeastern Ukraine’s Sumy region. In a separate attack on a residential building, a 29-year-old man was killed, and three others were injured, regional authorities reported.

In the Kyiv region, Governor Mykola Kalashnyk confirmed that Kremlin drones damaged multiple houses near the Ukrainian capital, leaving a 60-year-old man injured.

Ukraine’s state railway company, Ukrzaliznytsia, reported that Russian forces targeted its power system twice in the city of Dnipro. The first strike occurred just hours after Russian President Vladimir Putin pledged a 30-day halt on energy infrastructure attacks. A second

strike injured four people.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, condemned Russia’s continued strikes, stating, “Russia is attacking civilian infrastructure and people right now.”

Russia claimed its defense units thwarted a Ukrainian drone attack on its energy infrastructure, shooting down seven of its own drones following a ceasefire agreement reached in a call between US President Donald Trump and President Putin.

Kyiv’s military reported downing 72 of the 145 Russian drones launched overnight. Additionally, 56 drones were reportedly “lost” due to electronic warfare.

President Zelenskyy stated that 40 drones were launched at Ukraine just hours after Trump and Putin’s call. Since the first round of ceasefire talks in Saudi Arabia, Moscow has reportedly fired over 1,300 guided bombs, eight missiles, and about 66 long-range drones on Kyiv.

Russia’s Ministry of Defense reported destroying 57 Ukrainian drones overnight, with 35 shot down over the Kursk region. A drone attack in Russia’s Krasnodar region sparked a small fire at an oil depot in the village of Kavkazskaya.

The Kremlin accused Kyiv of attempting to “derail” the limited ceasefire by launching a “deliberate” attack on the Russian oil depot.

A Russian soldier was killed, and four others were injured due to Ukrainian shelling in Belgorod’s Krasnoyarskiy district, according to regional Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov.

A Moscow court sentenced five Ukrainian soldiers to up to 17 years in prison on “terrorism” charges related to Kyiv’s incursion into Russia’s Kursk region.

CEASEFIRE AND DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS

President Trump and President Zelenskyy discussed Trump’s recent conversation

with Putin. The White House confirmed that Zelenskyy agreed to a partial ceasefire and requested additional air defense support, which Trump pledged to help secure from European allies.

Washington announced that it has moved beyond its previously negotiated rare minerals deal with Ukraine and is now fully focused on brokering a peace agreement between Kyiv and Moscow. Trump suggested that the US take control of Ukraine’s power plants to ensure their security, according to the White House.

The Ukrainian president accused Putin of rejecting a full ceasefire proposal despite public claims to the contrary. He urged the international community to counter Moscow’s continued aggression.


Following calls with French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Zelenskyy reaffirmed confidence in European support, stating, “We are in constant communication. I am confident that there will be no betrayal from our partners.”

Trump’s Middle East special envoy, Steve Witkoff, told Fox News that a US delegation, led by National Security Adviser Mike Waltz and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, will meet with Russian officials in Saudi Arabia over the weekend to continue negotiations. The talks are expected to focus on energy and infrastructure security.

MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS


The German government is set to release \$3.3 billion in additional military assistance to Ukraine, after outgoing Chancellor Olaf Scholz had previously blocked the funding, according to Reuters.




Russia and Ukraine completed a prisoner swap brokered by the United Arab Emirates. Moscow returned 175 Ukrainian prisoners of war, along with 22 severely wounded personnel, while Kyiv handed over 175 Russian soldiers.




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The name of the restaurant Xeme speaks for itself, as it means the arctic fork-tailed gull.



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From Kursk to 'Yalta 2.0': Joris van Bladel on Russia's Military Flaws, Strengths, and Trump's Unpredictable Influence

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LET'S START WITH A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE FRONT LINES. WHAT HAVE WE SEEN TRANSPIRE IN KURSK? SEVEN MONTHS THE UKRAINIANS HELD IT, AND THEN LOST IT IN 10 DAYS. WHAT HAPPENED?

The Kursk offensive once again demonstrated that the self-proclaimed second army in the world is barely capable of defending its own borders, paradoxically. In this case, it was largely because they were too focused on the Donbas front and unwilling to lift the pressure there, although eventually they still had to commit some forces from that theater. Nevertheless, we have to admit that the introduction of the North Koreans played a pivotal role: they were able to fill the gaps, and Russia started slowly but surely regaining the region.

Today, the Kursk offensive has more or less run its course. What effect that will have on the overall course of the war, we'll see in the longer perspective.

This also leads us to the fundamental question: what was the strategic intent of this incursion? It was a very difficult endeavor to sustain, especially given Ukraine's limited resources, especially its manpower shortages. The chief goal – to divert large numbers of Russian forces from Donbas to Kursk – clearly didn't work out in the end, to an extent due to the arrival of the aforementioned North Koreans.

This takes us back to the realization that kinetic warfare is still very much here. Technology can replace many aspects of war, but here we saw that the superior numbers in manpower and firepower had their say. The conventional warfare element is still essential to this war.

BY RELINQUISHING KURSK, UKRAINE LOSES WHAT MANY THOUGHT WOULD BE A USEFUL BARGAINING CHIP IN THE UPCOMING NEGOTIATIONS. IF ZELENSKY HAD ONE CARD IN HAND, TO USE PRESIDENT TRUMP'S CHOICE OF WORDING, THAT WAS KURSK. AND NOW IT'S GONE.

Yes. The Russians would never agree to start negotiations, be it ceasefire talks or something on a larger scale, with Kursk in Ukrainian hands. They had to get it back. That was always the strategy. They are grinding forward, very slowly, at huge costs, but they are making progress. And I don't think it is going all according to the Russian military playbook: they would have preferred a sweeping offensive breakthrough, I'm sure, but that's not the case here.

What needs to be pointed out, and what is frankly amazing, is how the Ukrainian



Russia is utterly confused by the incoherence, erratic approach of the United States. There is no plan, there is no policy, there is no strategy



Dr. Joris van Bladel. Photo by Kris Van Exel

army, despite its many shortages, have held the line. This is a strategic victory in itself, that they have made Russians unable to achieve any strategic breakthrough over such a long period.

HOW LONG DO YOU THINK THEY CAN KEEP DOING IT?

Impossible to say, obviously, but I don't see their front line crumbling in any immediate future. But then we also have that disruptive element of Mr. Trump coming into all these dynamics. Nobody other than him, neither Ukrainians nor Russians, is actually willing to go into peace negotiations, or even ceasefire talks, based on the realities on the front. The ceasefire is being imposed by the Trump administration, under the narrative of making peace and to demonstrate that he has an impact on global affairs. It's purely transactional. And we have seen already what Putin is doing: he is very vague in his responses. The only thing he is not vague about is that Russia won't accept an imposed deal. They want to be the ones dictating terms, and Ukraine is not the main focus; it's part of the larger Russian effort to reshape the existing architecture in world politics. They want to be considered as a major great power in the world, equal to the US and China.

MANY HAVE DUBBED THIS AS YALTA 2.0. CAN THEY GET IT?

We know, objectively, that Russia is not a great power. Not even close. Their claim to being a great power rests on them possessing a pile of nuclear weapons. That's the only aspect where they can assume that title with any authority. And with that in mind, it's very strange to see how Washington seems to be willingly giving Russia a seat at the great powers' table. I'm sure Putin and his regime would never have expected such large concessions and privileges, especially when they have made none in return.

The entire world is watching how a

regime that has done what Russia did in Ukraine is rapidly reintroduced and given back its former status on the international scene. I fear Washington is greatly underestimating the skill and grit of the Kremlin diplomatic corps. I fear it's not Donald Trump that is making a deal with the Kremlin—the Kremlin is playing Trump. Russia is using its well-honed negotiation tactics to manipulate him, extracting maximum advantage while disregarding any so-called agreements the moment they no longer serve its interests.

And to circle back to your initial question, this new Yalta— they will only get it if President Trump allows it to happen. Which leads us back to that disruptive, unpredictable element. It's quite telling that if you look at the Russian reactions to the Riyadh and Jeddah talks, they are utterly confused by the incoherence, the erratic approach of the United States. There is no plan, there is no policy, there is no strategy. It's all very erratic.

One side effect of it all is that we've seen Europe mobilizing, taking defense and security more seriously. But I doubt whether that effect was intentional. Take, for example, President Trump's claim that Ukrainian forces are encircled in Kursk: Trump's claim is based on a Russian setup he impulsively picked up without verification. It reflects his habitual reliance on spontaneous, unverified assertions rather than a well-considered strategy. The Ukrainian denials underscore the disconnect between Trump's rhetoric and battlefield realities.

LET'S TURN TO THE RUSSIAN MILITARY MENTALITY - A SUBJECT YOU EXPLORED IN DEPTH IN YOUR LATEST BOOK - AND ITS ROLE THESE THREE YEARS. WHAT OLD TRUTHS HAVE BEEN REAFFIRMED AND WHAT NEW THINGS HAVE WE LEARNED?

We have once again seen that a lot of the elements in Russian military culture and

mentality haven't changed at all. A big chunk of its organizational culture has stayed the same. And if it is changing, it is doing so very, very slowly.

We can go back to the Second World War, the Chechen wars, and so on and see the same kind of behavior that we see now in Donbas. From 2009 onward, the Russian armed forces underwent a period of modernizing and reforming, but the mindset stayed the same. It is inefficient, it is toxic, that brutality we see time and time again.

WHAT ROLE HAS THAT PLAYED IN THE WAR - HAS IT BEEN A HELP TO RUSSIA?

It's a bit of a paradox: on the one hand, we have seen that mentality being exposed in Ukraine, with all its inefficiencies. We've seen the initial debacle, we've seen the poorly organized assaults and so on. We've seen shortcomings in their logistical lines, their intelligence. On the other hand, we have seen that Russians are able to adapt, and there is an aspect that we may be underestimating in the West, and this is their willingness to fight on, the sheer tolerance to pain and abuse. From a purely military point of view, we've seen some unbelievable acts of, let's call it "military bravery," in the Russian military. We see VDV forces asking for their own positions to be hit. That's tantamount to suicide, and it's to protect their own mission.

THEY KEEP FIGHTING WHERE OTHERS WOULD FOLD. WESTERN FORCES WOULD HAVE PERHAPS GIVEN UP IF THE LOSSES WERE THIS STAGGERING.

That we don't know. We can never evaluate a military organization without combat. But based on how our Western societies have developed, the Western military culture, there is a huge difference between the two mentalities, each developing in the logic of their societies. And if there is ever a kinetic conflict,



There is an aspect to the Russians that we may be underestimating in the West: the willingness to fight on, the sheer tolerance to pain and abuse

one thing I would counsel to never underestimate is the tenacity of the Russians.

IS THAT CONFLICT ON THE CARDS? FORMER COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES OF UKRAINE, GEN. ZALUZHNY, CLAIMS WE ARE ALREADY IN THE MIDST OF WORLD WAR III. DO YOU AGREE?

No. I think it's overstated. I understand why he would say that: it's a matter of strategic communication, first and foremost. It also depends on what we define as war: if it's hybrid warfare, then we, the West, NATO, Europe, are already at war with Russia, and we have no idea about it. We see hybrid war efforts carried out by Russia daily. So when I say we are at war, it's not in a kinetic war, as we define it traditionally. We are at war, because there are many, many other means by which Russia is trying to damage us, but we aren't in World War III yet.

The Current Global Rebus: Notes for the Post-January 20 Period. Part 1

ANALYSIS BY VICTOR KIPIANI,
GEOCASE CHAIRMAN

Today, there is much talk of the end of the international order based on liberalism, and its replacement by a new system of relations that is still in the process of formation. It is not by chance that I have used the term 'system of relations' instead of 'new order', because how orderly the emerging system will be is still a question. Even before Donald Trump's second presidency, I used the term 'disorderly order' because the war in Ukraine and the period leading up to it lacked the stability and predictability that characterizes real order. And after the oath of office taken by the US President on January 20, the 'disorderly order' has deepened even further. And this manifests itself, above all, in the fundamental undermining, if not the final destruction, of the foundations of the liberal rules-based international system.

Of particular note is the fact that such fluctuations will continue and are likely to take a form that cannot currently be accurately imagined. This process has many characteristics and many other manifestations. In this article, however, I will talk about only one - and by all accounts the most important - phenomenon of the Trump presidency. What we witnessed as a result of the oath of office on January 20, the radical transformation of the liberal international order, clearly indicates the crossing of the Rubicon and, consequently, the refusal to adhere consistently to the global rules of general consensus. The question here is also whether such a refusal is final or, at best, has a long-term effect. Beyond the talk, we see more concrete policies from individual countries or leaders, perhaps indicating the final chapter of the international order based on liberalism. This is sort of epilogue instead of prologue...

BRIEFLY ON THE (NOT TOO DISTANT) HISTORY

The rules-based order is not just a 'trademark' of modern times. Its analogues can be found in various periods of human history, be it the era of Ancient Rome, the operation of the Westphalian system of 1648, or the rules of behavior between countries resulting from the Congress of Vienna of 1815.

Against this highly incomplete list of historical parallels, the modern version of the rules-based order in the United States dates back to the presidency of Woodrow Wilson. The defeat of Germany in World War I, the collapse of the three empires (Russian, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian) and the creation of the League of Nations marked the introduction to a rules-based international order. It also related to the initial outline of the 'World of Free Nations,' which later manifested itself after the end of the Second World War, and later, immediately after the end of the so-called 'Cold War,' formed as we know it.

It should be noted that all three of the above-mentioned milestone phenomena presupposed the functioning of the 'free world' in reality according to the Anglo-Saxon typology, which in essence was to be based on the recognition of a free market, representative and democratic government, the rule of law and human rights and freedoms. It is important to say, however, that these principles did not represent an unconditional limitation on the 'free world's' relations with the rest of the world outside. Moreover, situational interaction or relatively systematic co-operation with non-democratic regimes, stemming from an ever-changing understanding of the 'national interests', was explained by the inevitable need to defeat a much greater 'evil'.

Anyway, 'Wilsonianism' more or less survived the test of various historical storms - and in the context of its evolution, the EU is considered the most successful project - until the second decade of the 2000s. Here, several powerful factors stood in the way of its effectiveness and prospects, among which I would emphasize the following:

- (1) Coordinated resistance from China-Russia-Iran & Co, which was and remains driven primarily by the inviolability of domestic political regimes;
- (2) The disproportionate (and not just monetary) costs of US/Western involvement in conflicts or wars outside its geopolitical borders in one form or another;
- (3) Technological innovation and the accompanying information warfare, which, along with its many benefits, has also created a major challenge. This problem is manifested in the use of informa-



President Trump. Source: BBC

tion technology in a propaganda campaign that is anti-democratic and promotes authoritarianism, populism and radicalism. As a result, technological progress has led to a tenfold increase in domestic extremism as a side effect;

(4) The growing role of the Global South and middleweight countries (also known as regional 'superpowers') in international relations. This role is now, among other tasks, aimed at asserting their own state identity and greater autonomy.

AT THE ORIGIN OF THE FORMATION OF THE 'TRUMP DOCTRINE'?

It is probably too early to talk about Trump's doctrinal approach. Neither the post-inauguration inertia of the election campaign, nor this short period since January 20, nor the asystemic, non-classical handwriting of Trump (as well as of some members of his administration), which is prone to an extremely 'chaotic current', will help to outline clear contours.

Yet the 'vision' offered a month after his assuming the presidency does provide a basis for certain observations. It also serves as something of a guide to this formation's relationship with the White House.

Even during the election campaign, Trump honestly stated his desire to fundamentally change the existing 'order' in the world. This was his desire during his first presidency, too, although he was not given the opportunity to do so. Many reasons will be given for this, but the main one is the huge difference between the world then and the world now. In this respect, the ongoing war in Ukraine represents a clear watershed.

Trump 2.0, along with motivation, is now supposed to have proper knowledge and a plan of action. For this stage, the fundamental contours of the plan are as follows:

- (1) Instead of Trump's isolationist policy is global nationalism. In this case, the explanation of 'nationalism' should again be sought in the declared line of 'America First,' where the idea of national interest is super-dominant and super-determining. And as far as 'globalism' is concerned, we should expect a 'nationalist' expression of US national interests anywhere in the world, regardless of geographical distance or conjuncture.
- (2) A more pragmatic understanding of the national interest will condition a stricter selectivity test for direct or indirect intervention in military conflicts. In other words, the United States does not commit its political, military, or financial resources a priori/unconditionally to any conflict simply because a rule of international law is violated there. The test mentioned above should serve precisely to clearly identify US national interests and the corresponding political and economic gains.
- At the same time, it is equally noteworthy that the White House is no longer - at least for the

consideration has to do with the current administration's rejection (presumably!) of 'social engineering' - that is, changing political regimes in various countries. Although in this case too, this approach is still subject to critical evaluation. For example, the open support for a certain political force in a certain country, especially during elections, by Trump's cronies, or even their attitude towards the president of Ukraine indicates selectivity with regard to 'social engineering'. The point is that support for political regime change can be explained not only by the undemocratic nature of the regime, but also by other so-called 'apolitical' considerations (including in relation to formal allies). Separate statements from January 20 this year also point to a peculiar, new understanding of 'social engineering'.

(4) The growing role of the commercial component in foreign policy decisions, which can directly and overtly transform into commercial mercantilism. Last month provided more than enough material to illustrate this, whether it was the US tariff confrontation with the European Union or its neighbors, control of the Panama Canal, or the Ukraine mineral deal in exchange for 'peace'.

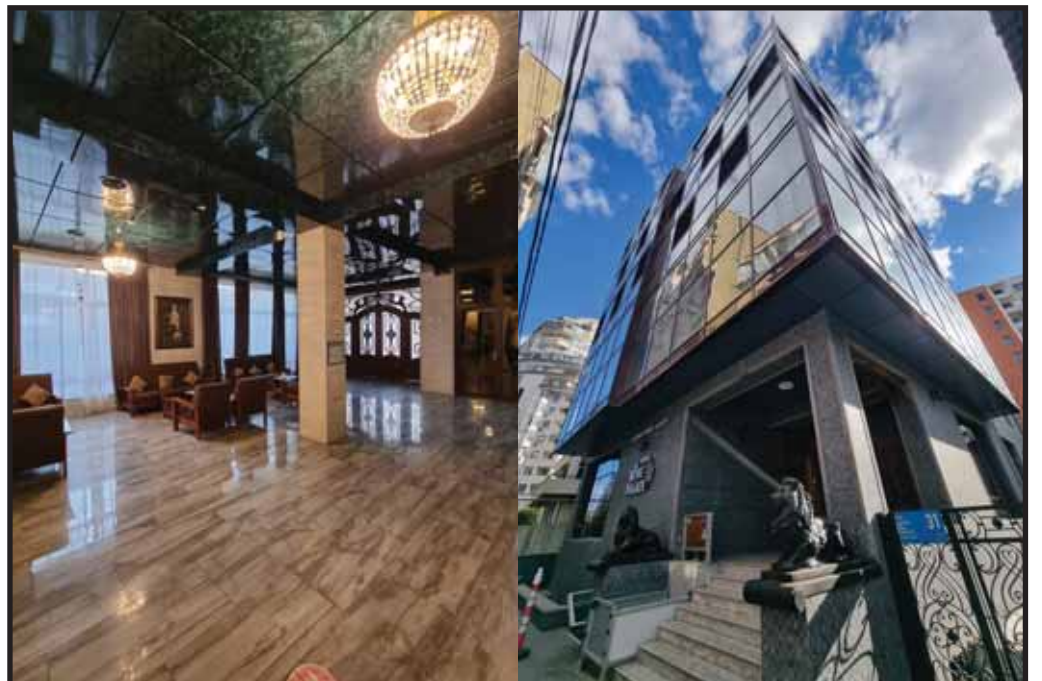
Mutual benefit in international relations has been, is and will remain a constant feature of foreign policy. However, today we are witnessing an attempt to move from delicate mutual benefit to open commercialization, when one or another support for an ally, partner or any other country actually becomes the equivalent of a 'paid service'. I do not think it is necessary to clarify specifically what consequences such an approach - if it were to become globally widespread as a 'pop culture' - could have on the stability and predictability of the system of international relations.

With all of these principles firmly put into practice, the Trump administration will deliver a 'guilty verdict' on the liberal international system - if not indefinitely, at least for an extended period of time.

To be continued in next week's GT.

moment - making statements about supporting democracy over autocracy, or even the importance of freedom and territorial integrity.

(3) Continuing the previous theses, another con-



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Our Time of Sweeping Changes

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

The time span between 1812, when the Brothers Grimm wrote their famous 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' and 2025, when the remake of the Disney animation of the same title was released, could serve as a perfect measure of ideological distance, reflecting the sweeping changes brought about by our strange times. The content and morals of the latest film production are vastly different from the previous one, and, of course, from the original tale. No doubt the now-late authors, as the sole owners of the copyright, would have sued the creators of the new movie version. But, with the writers long gone, the makers of the new film are free to truncate and stylize the beloved fairy tale at their own brash discretion, fully confident that there is no one left to take them to court. That's one of the 'beauties' of having a new chance to play with old literary gems without suffering any moral or material consequences.

The world is overwhelmed with radicalism, spiritual values are confused, universal ideals have shifted, and what was once taken for granted is now under relentless criticism. Isn't it a crazy, crazy, crazy world? Hardly anyone can claim not to know the poignant story of Snow White, but the newly released film about



Rachel Zegler in Disney's 'Snow White.' Source: DISNEY

this iconic character portrays a fearless princess who takes refuge in the forest, at the house of seven dwarfs, to hide from her jealous, tyrannical stepmother—the evil queen. Eventually, she teams up with the seven dwarfs to liberate her kingdom from the wicked queen, assisted by a new character created for the film: Snow White's love interest and a rebel who wants to challenge the queen's monarchy.

Snow White is portrayed by an American actress of Latin American ethnic origin. When she was severely criticized by white fans of the traditional white Snow White—who voiced their racial discontent—the actress became enraged, declaring loudly that the old image of Snow White is no longer relevant because it is so egregiously dependent on a man. She called for women's liberation from

the old dynamics of male-female relationships, which, in her view, need to be revised. While it's true that change and progress must be embraced, the question arises: Do we, as the new consumers of old literature, have to modify our feelings toward the characters who still reside on the withering pages of great authors? Must we necessarily distort and remake these wonderful old stories, or

should we simply create our own tales, compatible with modern values, ideals, and new behavioral models?

Incidentally, I've already contributed to folklore by translating a few fairy tales from Georgian into English, publishing them over twenty years ago as extracurricular literature for schoolchildren. The book was a success, and no one criticized the stories' moral values, but I am certain that today's progressives—if they happened to come across the book—would find countless moral faults with it, and would likely try to ban it from schools based on cancel-culture principles, ostracizing this 'unacceptable' piece of our traditional culture.

The overly zealous use of newly invented ideological tools like progressivism, cancel culture, wokeism, virtue signaling, critical race theory, and culture wars may well be upending everything that was written before we arrived on this world, including all classic philosophy, literature, folklore, and poetry, which embody the moralistic and ethical norms of past eras. Let us not defy the necessity of heeding new spiritual demands and cultural clichés, but at the same time, let us leave alone those works of fiction that may not align with contemporary interpretations of human life and behavior but are still impactful and valuable in their own way. True, times change, and so do ethics, but the past remains, and it deserves to be analyzed wisely and preserved with care.

BUSINESS

Enhancing the Experience for International Travelers in Georgia



Mastercard BRINGS EXCLUSIVE DISCOUNTS TO TRAVELERS IN GEORGIA

Thanks to Mastercard's recent initiative, visitors to Georgia can now experience luxury and fine dining at lower, more affordable prices. In collaboration with leading hotels and restaurants nationwide, Mastercard offers exclusive discounts to international travelers, making their stay more enjoyable while supporting the local economy. This allows Mastercard

cardholders, whether using locally or internationally, to make instant savings when paying for onsite services at selected hotels and restaurants.

A STEP FORWARD FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

This Mastercard campaign is not simply a nice travel addition, it is a strategic effort to positively contribute to Georgia's tourism industry. Since international tourism plays a crucial role in the country's economic growth, this initiative aims to attract more visitors while ensuring affordable high-end experiences for them. By offering such a direct saving plan, Mastercard encourages

travelers to explore more of Georgia's hospitality.

Naturally, the initiative also benefits local businesses, as participating establishments receive increased customer numbers and engagement, with hotels, restaurants, and other hospitality providers gaining greater exposure, helping to drive revenue and sustain growth in the tourism sector. Mastercard is committed to secure efficient transaction mechanisms, ensuring easy payment experiences.

EXCLUSIVE SAVINGS AT GEORGIA'S BEST HOTELS AND RESTAURANTS

Through this program, travelers can enjoy up to 15% savings at some of Georgia's finest establishments. Participating hotels include:

- Radisson Blu Tbilisi
- Pullman Tbilisi
- Hilton Batumi

For food lovers, renowned restaurants such as Sirajkhana and Weather Report Sky Bar are also offering these exclusive Mastercard discounts.

BUILDING ON A LEGACY OF HOSPITALITY SUPPORT

This latest program adds to Mastercard's ongoing efforts to support Georgia's hospitality and restaurant industry. Previous campaigns have introduced easier payment solutions, personalized offers, and exclusive discounts for international travelers. By continuously expanding these benefits, Mastercard reinforces its commitment to both visitors and local businesses.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR MASTERCARD'S TRAVEL BENEFITS?

Looking ahead, Mastercard plans to expand this initiative by adding more participating hotels and restaurants,

increasing the number of offers, and introducing additional benefits. Future collaborations will further enhance the travel experience, making Georgia an even more attractive destination for international visitors.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE AS A CUSTOMER?

Getting started is easy, no special sign-ups or additional steps are required. Simply using Mastercard at any participating hotel or restaurant is enough to

enjoy the perks of the initiative. To stay updated on new locations and additional offers, travelers can check Mastercard's website and newsletters.

"Our collaboration with local hotels and restaurants is an exciting opportunity to support both international tourists and the local economy. We're thrilled to offer Mastercard holders these exclusive savings, making their visit to Georgia even more rewarding." David Zgudadze, Regional Director of Mastercard, said of the campaign.



Use your Mastercard® to unlock exclusive discounts across Georgia. This offer is applicable only to Mastercard cards issued abroad

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Georgia's Wine Heritage Immortalized: Treasurium Presents Georgia's First Collectible Banknote Commemorating 8,000 Years of Tradition



BY TEAM GT

Since antiquity, great civilizations have immortalized their achievements on coins and banknotes—symbols of heritage, triumph, and cultural milestones. In our time, Treasurium proudly continues this tradition by unveiling Georgia's first collectible banknote, printed in Europe, to celebrate an extraordinary legacy: 8,000 years of uninterrupted winemaking.

Recognized as the Motherland of Wine, Georgia holds the oldest known viticultural heritage in the world. This commemorative note is more than a tribute—it is a statement of history, a testament to the nation's deep-rooted connection to wine, and a legacy for generations to come.

“Created in collaboration with Euro-



pean partners, this landmark collectible cements Georgia's place in the global story of wine, ensuring its unparalleled heritage is honored and remembered forever,” says Mr. Ajami, the initiator of the project and founder of Treasurium.

THE MAKING OF THE LEGACY

This historic project took over six months of meticulous legal work by local and international experts to ensure compliance with European and international regulations. Meanwhile, world-class banknote designers and Georgian artists dedicated countless hours to crafting a design that honors Georgia's 8,000-year winemaking heritage. The result is more than a commemorative note—it's a timeless tribute to history and culture.

THE BIRTH OF THE BANKNOTE: A GEORGIAN-DUTCH COLLABORATION

This historic commemorative banknote was brought to life through a Georgian-Dutch collaboration at Royal Joh. Enschede, one of the world's most prestigious high-security printing facilities. Established in 1703 in the Netherlands, it has produced official currencies for multiple nations, including the Euro. Limited to just 5,000 pieces, this exclusive series ensures exceptional value and collectability.

A HISTORIC LAUNCH: CELEBRATING GEORGIA IN THE HEART OF EUROPE

In a historic moment for Georgia, the project was launched at Château Neercanne in Maastricht, the birthplace of the Euro. Treasurium hosted a Georgian wine tasting in the renowned Marl Cave and wine cellar, where the signatures of the European Union's founders are etched into the walls. This was followed by a lavish Michelin-star dinner in the Château's grand hall, where, in 1992, Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands hosted the

heads of European states after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty.

The venue was carefully chosen for its deep symbolism in European history, now reimagined to celebrate Georgia's winemaking legacy, with only Georgian wine flowing through the evening.

The event brought together top Georgian and Dutch delegations, including the Georgian Ambassador to the Netherlands, the Head of the Mission of Georgia to the European Union, the Deputy Mayor of Maastricht, and representatives from the Georgian National Tourism Administration and the Georgian National Wine Agency. Since the beginning of this year, sales have been open to Georgian collectors and enthusiasts, allowing them to own a piece of this historic commemorative series.

SETTING THE PRICE: A HISTORIC AUCTION AND ACCESSIBLE SALES FOR COLLECTORS

Naturally, the value of these commemorative notes raised much interest. While the face value of 8,000 represents Georgia's 8,000 years of winemaking, their true market value is determined by rarity and demand. To set a precedent, Treasurium proposed to initiate the sale with the auction of the first note in this limited edition series.

Serial number 1991, symbolizing Georgia's reestablishment of independence in 1991, was sold at the Crown Currency Auction House in Amsterdam for a record €3,500 (€4,200 with commissions)—the highest ever achieved for such commemorative notes in the world. This exceptional price exceeded expectations, making it impractical as a base price for the entire series.

To ensure accessibility for Georgian and international collectors, Treasurium decided to offer regular serial numbers from €170 to €1000 depending on the serial number, with special rare numbers to be sold at upcoming auctions.

Carpet Baggers



Carpets at a carpet shop in Old Tbilisi. Photo by Tony Hanmer

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

My wife and I took another couple around the old city of Tbilisi recently. They're old friends of ours (he is English, she Filipina) and first-time visitors to Georgia. We exited the metro at Liberty Square and wandered along and around Leselidze Street.

“You probably do this with visitors a lot,” he mused. “Ever get tired of it?” “Absolutely not,” I said. “I always find new things to see; it never gets old.”

This time, my long lens was noticing the reflections of architectural details in windows, with partial glimpses into the interior at the same time: double or multiple worlds in single frames.

Then we stumbled across one of the carpet shops, which I've been to, and to my mild surprise my wife, the Saver, was soon asking to see some samples. I, the Spender, happily joined in. One after the other was unrolled onto the floor for us, each with its unique provenance and tale, all part of the ritual. Many are bought second hand from house collections across the whole region and from beyond. “Afghanistan... Daghestani prayer rug... kilims... wool... Armenian... Guba... ReWo-

ven, from Marneuli...” and, finally, the toppers, fantastic large knotted Persian silk masterpieces. It looked like we were going to buy something!

After some hemming and hawing, and yes, some haggling too (as is proper form), we came away with a magnificent shimmering multicolor Persian piece, and a Guba one in wool of about 80 years' age, the latter with a plethora of stylized human and animal figures all over it. Hers and his, so to speak. They gave us a certificate for the Guba piece; advised us on care and cleaning; and told us they could have them delivered to our flat on the morrow. With both purses and more importantly hearts rather lightened, we walked on.

Onto the Metekhi bridge, with its broken barrier, now host apparently to THREE car drive-offs into the Mtkvari. (Un)fortunately we didn't get to see Number 4 during our brief stop; though the odds of this had improved dramatically in the last 10 days or so. I did mention the reason for the somewhat strangely placed little chapel half built into the cliff edge, unnecessary with the main old Metekhi church right above it... until you discover that down there, where the newer church is, up to 100,000 local citizens were beheaded, one at a time or more, for refusing to recant Orthodoxy and turn to Islam, in the late 8th century.

The weather now (as I write this) is perfect in the city: not cold at all; I was in short sleeves for the first time this year. Buds and blossoms are emerging,



Carpets at a carpet shop in Old Tbilisi. Photo by Tony Hanmer

and all the tkemali (sour plum) trees are in full white floral glory, with pink cherry blossoms soon to follow. As long as we don't get a late frost to kill all hopes of actual fruit! All too soon Tbilisi (named for “warmth”) will turn to “Tskhelisi” (my newly minted word for “a hot place”). It'll go from green to browns and yellows in the blazing heat of summer, and we will have fled to our cool Svaneti mountains. But for now, rain is promised, a dip back to cooler temperatures, and very pleasant walks await. Get them while you can. 40 degrees is easily possible here in July and August.

We trudged uphill towards Avlabari metro, seeking and eventually finding the Kopala Hotel, which hosts the Terrace Restaurant on its 3rd floor, giving unparalleled views of the whole Old Town, and also feeding you rather well in grand Georgian style. The sight changed from late afternoon to lit-up evening, and dazzled as it did so. Our friends were

impressed by both view and repast, their first taste of Georgian cuisine. We were glad to show it all off; indeed, I always enjoy the city center and making introductions. Now's the time.

Ever hear of a carpet displayed flat on the CEILING? Well, why not? It won't take up wall space that way; and you could never put it on the floor: it's much too important for that. She didn't bat an eyelid when I suggested it, so I might just get away with this unorthodox approach. Pictures will follow if I succeed.

Tony Hanmer has lived in Georgia since 1999, in Svaneti since 2007, and been a weekly writer and photographer for GT since early 2011. He runs the “Svaneti Renaissance” Facebook group, now with over 2000 members, at www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/. He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti

Sabuko's "Autumn Challenge" Concludes with a Celebration of Biodiversity Education

BY TEAM GT

Sabuko, the Georgian partner of BirdLife International, concluded its education program series for schools on March 15, bringing together teachers, students, and young researchers studying biodiversity conservation. The initiative, utilized in the scope of the 'Sabuko for Schools' program, aims to enhance students' understanding of Georgia's wildlife and encourage environmental awareness through interactive activities, research projects, and discussions led by experts.

THE 'SABUKO FOR SCHOOLS' INITIATIVE

Launched three years ago, 'Sabuko for Schools' is an educational program designed to raise awareness about Georgia's wildlife and cultivate environmental appreciation among students. The program achieves this through creating enjoyable activities tailored to engage younger people. The initiative is divided into two main phases: the 'Autumn Challenge' and the 'Spring Challenge.' Each phase spans four months, with the autumn segment running from September to December and the spring segment from February to May. The program culminates in final events held in February and September, respectively, where participants showcase their newfound knowledge and projects.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND PARTICIPATION

Each challenge within the program carries diverse themes and educational resources. This year, the fourth edition brought together 13 teachers from different regions, including Tbilisi, Racha, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Batumi, and Gori. Of these 13, ten schools completed the challenge successfully and eight were represented at the final ceremony, with all participants being recognized for their efforts.

The program's structure is carefully constructed to ensure full engagement.

Team Composition: Participating teachers are required to form teams of students (preferably, those who enjoy natural sciences) who actively engage in the assigned activities and challenges.

Assignments: Schools receive five different assignments covering a wide range of nature-related topics. Examples of tasks for this year included biodiversity, bird migration, and the Persian leopard in Georgia. These assignments encourage critical thinking and research.

Workshops & Webinars: Teachers and selected students attend masterclasses conducted by biodiversity experts, equipping them with the knowledge and tools to educate over 300-400 students.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

The final event held engaging discussions and presentations by a selected group of high school students, and lectures given by prominent researchers specializing in biodiversity and conservation-related fields. Among the key speakers were Lado Shavadze, Biospeleologist, Tinatin Chkhartishvili, Entomologist, Aleksandre Zukakishvili, Ecologist, and Shota Japaridze, Entomologist.

One of the most significant themes

of the event was the conservation of the Persian leopard, a critically endangered species in Georgia. "Today, we summarize what students have learned about this species and emphasize the importance of biodiversity protection," said Education Officer Eka Arsenishvili.

The Persian leopard is not only the largest leopard subspecies, but is also classified as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List. These leopards historically roamed across Georgia, but their numbers plummeted due to habitat loss, poaching, and prey depletion. The last confirmed sighting in Georgia was in 2009 at Vashlovani National Park. However, a notable breakthrough happened in August 2021 when a camera trap captured an image of a Persian leopard in Tusheti Protected Areas, tracing its return to Georgia after nearly 12 years.

Naturally, this discovery has led to heightened conversation efforts to ensure the leopard's continued presence in the region.

THE ROLE OF SABUKO IN BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Sabuko is committed to biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources, and environmental education. As the Georgian partner of BirdLife International, it focuses on several key areas:

Protection of Endangered Species: Sabuko's efforts include research and conservation projects on species such as the Persian leopard.

Habitat and Landscape Restoration: The organization leads initiatives such as 'Kakheti Steppes: A Balance Between a Living Landscape and a Future Desert,' to restore landscapes where the Persian leopard has been spotted, particularly in the Vashlovani Protected Areas.

Community Engagement: Sabuko works closely with local communities, raising awareness and promoting sustainable conservation practices.

Educational Outreach: Through programs like 'Sabuko for Schools,' the organization ensures the next generation understands the importance of preserving Georgia's biodiversity.

The 'Autumn Challenge' provided students and teachers with incredibly valuable insights into biodiversity conservation. Reflecting on their experiences, participants shared their thoughts:

"We are delighted to have participated in the 'Autumn Challenge,' because it raises awareness among students about the importance of biodiversity conservation," Nino Samkharauli, a mentor and chemistry teacher from Sartichala #1 School, noted.

"The final event was exceptionally well organized, and we are proud to have completed all five assignments successfully. We appreciate the support of Ilia State University for backing such projects," The Sartichala School team said.

With the 'Spring Challenge' set to launch soon, Sabuko remains dedicated to raising awareness regarding environmental awareness and action. The next phase will continue engaging students through interesting assignments, workshops, and collaborative projects.

The 'Autumn Challenge' has once again demonstrated the power of education in shaping future generations of well-informed individuals. By combining academic learning with hands-on activities, Sabuko encourages a sense of responsibility and appreciation for Georgia's biodiversity.



Something Very Dear: The Political, Poetic, and Ghostly Landscapes of Memory in Tbilisi



Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

A ghost lingers in the air at the Tbilisi Photography & Multimedia Museum (TPMM). It is not the kind that fades into the shadows—it is one that speaks, one that demands to be seen. The group exhibition *Something Very Dear*, curated by Ana Gabelaia and presented by the Tbilisi Photo Festival, the Tbilisi Photography & Multimedia Museum, and the Prince Claus Fund, is not a collection of images. It is an act of defiance. A call to remember. A refusal to be silent.

The works of nine women artists from across the world—Turkey, the Middle East, South Asia, North and South Africa—converge in this space, each bearing witness to an environment that is often unjust, violent, and cruel. But rather than focusing on the brutality itself, the exhibition turns our attention to what makes the struggle worthwhile. What is so dear that it must be defended at all costs? What remains sacred in a world that seeks to erase?

In an era of manufactured forgetting, *Something Very Dear* is a counter-attack. It resists the forced amnesia of war, displacement, and repression. Here, photography, video, and sound do not just document reality; they reshape it. The artists refuse to be passive chroniclers of suffering. Instead, they reclaim their own narratives, rewriting the histories that have been stolen from them.

THE FIG TREE THAT REMEMBERED: LARISSA ARAZ AND THE UNFINISHED STORY OF WAR

What happens when history takes root in the body? 'Begin to See through the Darkness' by Larissa Araz emerges from a haunting image: a fig tree growing from the belly of Ahmet Cemal, a Turkish Cypriot killed in 1974 during the war in Cyprus. The fig—his last meal before death—takes root in a cave, transforming his body into both a tomb and a living archive.

Araz's installation unfolds like a forensic investigation, traveling to Limassol in search of this fig tree, which exists in defiance of both nature and history. A cave, accessible only by sea, becomes a repository of missing bodies, a site where soil and identity blur. A coffin-sized photograph of the tree becomes a confrontation with erasure.

This is not merely an exploration of war's aftermath; it is a meditation on the persistence of memory in the landscape itself. The fig tree, growing through the cracks of destruction, refuses to forget. And in its shadow, we are forced to reckon with the ghosts of conflict, still unburied, still waiting to be acknowledged.

WHERE IS HOME WHEN HOME IS HISTORY?

What does it mean to belong when home is a story passed down through generations rather than a physical space? In 'Where is home?' Tahia Farhin Haque traces the aftershocks of the 1947 Partition through the fractured journeys of six sisters scattered across the globe. It is a photographic odyssey shaped by exile, reunion, and the cruel arithmetic of history—six left, one buried.

The series moves between time and geography, between the past and a present where racism and displacement remain constant. The American dream is shattered in Haque's first week in the U.S. when a South Asian student is killed by the police, a system that coldly assesses her as having "limited value." Here, exile is not just about being physically uprooted; it is about existing in spaces that refuse to see you as fully human.

By weaving her own family's history into broader narratives of forced migration, Haque questions the very nature of identity. Can home ever be reclaimed, or is it just a mirage—a memory that dissolves the closer one gets? The photographs, rich with absence, force us to confront a reality that is both deeply personal and disturbingly universal: for many, home is not a place to return to, but a wound that never heals.

THE DISTANCE BETWEEN HAND AND MOUTH: SHAYMA HAMAD'S RITUALS OF GRIEF

Some acts are so primal that they become invisible. Digging and kneading—two gestures that define the human relationship with land and sustenance—are reimagined in Shayma Hamad's 'The Distance of Death from My Hands to My Mouth.' In Palestinian culture, these acts hold deep significance: digging is an act of resistance, kneading a ritual of remembrance.

But what happens when these simple gestures are criminalized? Under Israeli military orders, digging is restricted, and land becomes a site of contested ownership. Meanwhile, kneading, often performed in moments of collective mourning, transforms bread into an

offering for the dead.

Hamad's photographic installation documents a performance in which these acts unfold as quiet, repetitive defiance. Digging is not just about burial; it is about reclaiming a severed connection to the earth. Kneading is not just about nourishment; it is about preserving a culture that is constantly under threat. In the endless cycle of these movements, the past and present collapse into each other, forming a resistance that is both bodily and spiritual.

CUTTING THROUGH EXILE

Exile is often spoken of in grand terms—displacement, migration, the loss of home. But in 'Therefore, I Cut,' Sarah Kontar captures it in the smallest of rituals: the act of cutting hair. In exile, the salon becomes a living room, and the hands of friends become the only trusted ones.

Kontar documents a community of women who have lost everything except each other. Their conversations—whispered memories of war, survival, and love—are as much a form of resistance as any protest. By focusing on haircuts, an act of care rather than destruction, 'Therefore, I Cut' redefines the narrative of exile. It is not just about what is lost, but also about what is rebuilt in its place.

Through these simple, intimate gestures, Kontar reminds us that home is not always a place. Sometimes, it is a pair of hands, a shared memory, a small act of tenderness in an otherwise brutal world.

LISTENING TO WATER'S SILENCE: DUMAMA AND THE OCEAN'S ARCHIVE OF VIOLENCE

Can water remember? And if it does, who listens? Dumama's 'To Be a Voice / To Have a Voice' is an installation of deep listening—a sonic excavation of the ocean's hidden memories. The Atlantic and Indian Oceans, vast and indifferent, hold the echoes of forced migrations, hydrocolonialism, and the severed spiritual connections of Black South Africans.

Under apartheid, water-based spiritual practices were systematically erased, turning the ocean from a site of cleansing into one of alienation. But what if the water itself never forgot? Dumama crafts soundscapes that reconstruct the ocean's memory of Saartjie Baartman's journey—a woman reduced to spectacle, transported across waters as a human artifact. Through submerged frequencies and ghostly echoes, her story is retold in sonic form, resisting the silence imposed by history.

To listen to Dumama's work is to confront an unspoken violence, one that does not merely belong to the past but continues to ripple across time. The water is not just an element; it is an unwilling witness, holding within it the voices of those it has carried, unwillingly or otherwise.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF LOSS

"There is where they tossed his body from the rooftop." Dina Salem's 'Here and There' is not about the past—it is about a present that never stops repeating itself. The Nakba did not end in 1948; it persists in the burning markets, in the homes stolen and renamed, in the brutal continuity of colonial violence. The work is a reckoning with memory and resistance, refusing the linearity of history.

By refusing to historicize Palestinian trauma—because how can one archive something that never ceases?—Salem forces us to confront a rupture that is never allowed to close. Her work does not romanticize suffering; it does not ask for pity. Instead, it asserts: "Only through resistance does the future unfold."

To look at 'Here and There' is to recognize that for Palestine, the past is not a museum—it is an unfolding catastrophe, one that will only end when liberation does.

JASMINE AND THE FRAGILE FREEDOM OF NIGHT: ABEER AREF'S POETIC RESISTANCE

There are freedoms that only exist in shadows. In 'In My Nights, Jasmine Blooms,' Abeer Aref captures the fleeting sense of liberation found in nighttime walks through Amman. Jasmine, which blooms only at night, becomes a symbol of this ephemeral freedom—a contrast to the constraints of her homeland.

Her black-and-white photographs dissolve into blurred impressions, evoking the uncertainty of memory. The scent of jasmine lingers in the air like a ghost of belonging—just as personal histories, too delicate to hold, slip through the fingers like fog.

Through poetic fragments, Aref constructs an elegy for displacement. Her images and words recall a mother's warmth, a home left behind, a longing that refuses to settle. If freedom is temporary, then so is the jasmine's bloom. But even in its brief existence, it marks the air, leaving an imprint of something once real, once beautiful.

FACELESS IN THE COLLECTIVE: WHEN WOMEN BECOME SYMBOLS

Aceh, Indonesia: a place where a woman's body is not her own, where identity is erased behind mandated veils, where control is woven into the very fabric of daily life. In 'This Is Us,' Riska Munawarah turns the facelessness imposed upon her into a haunting visual protest.

Through archival images and faceless portraits, she documents how clothing became law, how individuality was sacrificed for the collective, and how even within families, silence can be enforced as rigorously as the state's dictates. But in resisting this erasure, Munawarah's work does something powerful: it refuses victimhood. These images do not plead for sympathy; they reclaim agency.

The faceless women in 'This Is Us' are not passive. They are symbols of endurance, of quiet defiance, of a generation caught between cultural heritage and the fight for autonomy. In capturing their restricted world, Munawarah does something remarkable: she makes the invisible visible again.

THE LAWS OF RUINS: MEMORY AS RESISTANCE

What happens when a ruin is forgotten? What does it mean when history is buried beneath the ground, unseen and unclaimed? In 'Laws of Ruins,' Marianne Fahmy brings Alexandria's ancient water cisterns back into view, intertwining them with the revolutionary writings of Arwa Saleh.

Saleh, a leader of Egypt's 1970s student movement, wrote of the movement's failure in the 1990s—her words, like the cisterns, are fragments of an abandoned past. By pairing them together, Fahmy constructs a layered meditation on history, activism, and erasure.

Her work forces us to ask: Is a ruin still a ruin if no one remembers it? Is a revolution truly dead, or does it simply await resurrection? In an era of manufactured forgetting, 'Laws of Ruins' insists that memory itself is an act of defiance.

A QUESTION OF SURVIVAL, A QUESTION OF FUTURE

The exhibition text opens with a provocation: "I wonder: What is so dear to these artists that it drives them to speak up? I wonder the same about myself. I wonder the same about you." It is an invitation. But it is also a challenge.

What is dear enough to you that you would risk everything to defend it? Your home? Your language? The right to exist as yourself, without fear? 'Something Very Dear' is not just about the artists—it is about all of us. It is about what we are willing to fight for, what we are willing to remember, what we refuse to let be taken from us.

In Tbilisi, a city shaped by layers of history and resistance, this exhibition lands with the force of a reckoning. For two months, from March 13 to May 13, the Tbilisi Photography & Multimedia Museum becomes a site of confrontation—a space where stories refuse to die, where memory is sharpened into a weapon, where art is no longer just art, but survival itself.

And so the question lingers: What is dear to you? And how far would you go to hold on to it?



Photo by the author

Between Stillness and Storm: Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra Explores the Extremes of Sound

BY IVAN NECHAEV

On the evening of March 14, the Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra transformed its home auditorium into a realm of profound emotional landscapes, deftly traversing the delicacy of Carl Stamitz, the haunting lyricism of Giya Kancheli, and the stormy grandeur of Johannes Brahms. Under the baton of Kakhi Solomnishvili and featuring violist Elene Gogodze, the evening's program was a study in contrast—juxtaposing lightness and depth, serenity and tension, past and present.

THE VIOLA STEPS INTO THE SPOTLIGHT: CARL STAMITZ'S FORGOTTEN ELEGANCE

Viola concertos are rare creatures in the orchestral repertoire. The instrument, often relegated to a supporting role in symphonies and quartets, seldom gets the chance to take center stage. Yet, Carl Stamitz's Viola Concerto in D major gave the instrument an opportunity to shine—and in the hands of Elene Gogodze, it did just that.

Gogodze brought warmth and precision to a work that is frequently overshadowed by Mozart's violin and clarinet concertos of the same era. The opening Allegro unfolded with a dance-like buoyancy, the soloist's phrasing effortlessly weaving through the orchestra's bright accompaniment. The Andante moderato was where Gogodze's artistry was most striking—the viola's rich, velvety tone shaping each phrase with tenderness. By the time the Rondo arrived, her technical dexterity was on full display, navigating the virtuosic passages with clarity and playfulness.

The orchestra, under Solomnishvili's attentive direction, provided an airy, translucent foundation, allowing the soloist's sound to breathe. The result? A performance that felt like a rediscovery of a nearly forgotten jewel of the Classical era.

THE GHOSTS OF KANCHELI: STILLNESS, SILENCE, AND SUDDEN FURY

If Stamitz's concerto was a conversation



Photo by the author

in polite company, Giya Kancheli's Largo and Allegro was an existential monologue whispered into the void, punctuated by shattering outbursts. The Georgian composer's music defies easy categorization—his works often unfold in suspended time, marked by fragile silences and unexpected detonations of sound.

Solomnishvili led the orchestra with a near-meditative restraint in the Largo, allowing Kancheli's signature stillness to stretch like a held breath. The music barely seemed to exist at times, hanging

in the air like mist. Then, with a sudden shift, the Allegro arrived—violent, dissonant, unapologetic. Strings slashed through the texture, brass blared with brutal force, and percussion erupted in raw, elemental power.

Here was the stark emotional landscape that defines Kancheli's work: beauty and despair, fragility and fury, silence and explosion. The Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra executed these shifts with unrelenting precision, leaving the audience suspended between

tension and release.

BRAHMS' SYMPHONY NO. 1: THE WEIGHT OF A CENTURY, THE TRIUMPH OF A MOMENT

After the intermission, the evening reached its grand culmination with Brahms' Symphony No. 1 in C minor. Often described as Beethoven's "spiritual successor," this symphony took Brahms over two decades to complete, its first movement alone carrying the weight of that struggle. The orchestra's rendition was commanding—Solomnishvili sculpted the opening Un poco sostenuto with brooding intensity, the timpani's ominous heartbeat setting the stage for a colossal journey.

The slow movement (Andante sostenuto) brought a rare moment of respite, where the strings unfolded with aching lyricism and the woodwinds responded with delicate interjections. The Un poco allegretto was a study in contrast—light-footed yet never superficial, a necessary breath before the final storm.

And then, the famous resolution: the triumphant finale that elevates Brahms' symphony from mere struggle to tran-

scendence. The Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra unleashed its full power here, building from the haunting alphorn-like introduction to the jubilant, soaring brass fanfare. It was a catharsis earned through fire—a symphonic ascent that left the audience visibly moved.

A NIGHT OF EXTREMES: FROM DELICACY TO DEVASTATION

The evening's program was striking in its contrasts. Stamitz's Viola Concerto was all elegance and charm, Kancheli's Largo and Allegro veered between near silence and cataclysm, and Brahms' Symphony No. 1 charted the path from darkness to blazing triumph. Through it all, the Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra proved itself to be an ensemble of remarkable sensitivity and power.

Kakhi Solomnishvili conducted with a clear vision, allowing each work's unique identity to shine—graceful in Stamitz, patient and explosive in Kancheli, and deeply expressive in Brahms. Elene Gogodze, meanwhile, brought the underappreciated voice of the viola into the spotlight, reminding us of its poetic capabilities.



Photo by the author

Georgian Literature Showcased at London Book Fair

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The Writers' House of Georgia and Publishing House 'Cezanne' presented two English-language editions of Manana Menabde's books, the fable collection 'And Time Passed' and the autobiographical novel 'Wednesday is a Flying Day' at the London Book Fair, with a national stand

representing Georgia and a diverse cultural program.

The event, hosted at the Literature Translation Center and spanning two days, featured a unique artistic performance by dancers from Mariam Aleksidze's musical group, who performed choreographed pieces set to Menabde's musical compositions. It was a great opportunity for Georgian literary representatives to meet international publishers, distributors, and British publishing associations.



Presentation at the London Book Fair. Source: Ministry of Culture of Georgia



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