

Western-backed protests erupt in the country of Georgia

Andrea Peters
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Protests erupted this past week in Tbilisi, the capital city of the country Georgia, over efforts by the ruling party to once again push through a “foreign agents” law. The measure, which is opposed by layers within the elite and urban upper middle class oriented towards the NATO powers, would require organizations that receive more than 20 percent of their funding from overseas to register as foreign agents. Opponents refer to it as the “Russian law,” based on the fact that it shares features with a policy implemented by Moscow in 2022.

Demonstrators, whose numbers have been generally described as being “in the thousands” but as high as 20,000, took to the streets outside the parliament on multiple days this week. They waved EU, Ukrainian and Georgian flags, held aloft signs that read “No to Russia. Yes to Europe”, and yelled “Slaves!”, “Russians!” and “Traitors!” At Monday’s protest, they cheered opposition politician Aleko Elisashvili, who appeared before them after punching in the face the leader of the political party that supports the law and starting a brawl on the floor of the parliament.

The police have responded with force, rushing protesters, jamming communications and firing tear gas. As of the latest reports, 14 people have been arrested. The Ministry of Internal Affairs declared the protests to be “illegal actions” and threatened to “administer special measures defined by law” to stop them.

Rebuffing demands that efforts to pass the bill be halted, lawmakers in the Georgian Dream (GD) party, which holds the parliamentary majority, approved the measure on Wednesday. It still has to go through another reading and be signed off by the president. Salome Zourabichvili said that she will veto the measure, which she described as “a Russian strategy of destabilization.” However, GD has enough votes to overturn that decision. This is their second attempt to pass the bill, after Western-backed protests in March 2023 caused them to retreat.

The passage of the foreign agents law has unleashed denunciations from the United States and the European Union, to which Georgia is seeking ascension. Describing it as a “very concerning development,” EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and enlargement commissioner Oliver Varhelyi warned in a diplomatic statement on Wednesday that “final adoption of this legislation would negatively impact Georgia’s progress on

its EU path.”

They said in a joint statement, “This law is not in line with EU core norms and values.” US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller expressed similar sentiments on Thursday, declaring that the US is “gravely disappointed” by the “Kremlin-inspired” law.

The US and NATO are confronting a debacle in their war against Russia in Ukraine, to which they are responding through escalation across multiple fronts—in the Middle East, where Iran is being attacked by Washington’s proxy Israel, and in the Far East, where tensions with China are being whipped up. This lends an explosive character to the developments in Tbilisi, as the Caucasus emerge as another zone of conflict in what is emerging as the opening stages of World War III.

The Russia press is warning of the prospect of civil war in their southwestern neighbor, and the Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin declared Thursday that the Western reaction to the foreign agents law indicates “that there are decisions by Washington and Brussels to overthrow the current Georgian government and money has already been allocated for this.”

Georgia, bordered by the Black Sea to its west, Russia to its north, Turkey and Armenia to its south, and Azerbaijan to its east, is of major geostrategic significance. The country sits along an important trade route linking the Caspian to the Black Seas, making it important to the movement of energy resources and goods from Asia to global markets. It can also serve as a staging ground for interference in and attacks on Russia’s Muslim-majority North Caucasus. The country is in striking distance of Iran. The Georgian port of Batumi is just 445 miles as the crow flies from Moscow’s naval base on Crimea.

NATO, which on its website describes Georgia as “one of [its] closest partners,” views the south Caucasus nation as essential to its larger plans. During a March visit, NATO head Jens Stoltenberg applauded Tbilisi’s role in the alliance’s war against Russia in Ukraine and pointed to its deepening ties with Georgia in the areas of “crisis management, cyber security, military engineering and secure communications.”

For decades, the NATO powers have been working to draw the tiny nation, with a population of just over 3.7 million, into its orbit and keep it there. Last year marked the 20th

anniversary of the country's anti-Russian "Rose revolution," which, orchestrated by the US, saw a pro-Western government come to power under the cover of a movement for "democracy."

Mikheil Saakashvili governed the country from 2004-2012, during which time he implemented neoliberal reforms that devastated the working class, and provoked a war with Russia in 2008. Having become the object of immense popular hatred, he fled Georgia in 2014 after facing charges related to corruption, the murder of a political opponent and the torture and rape of prisoners. Saakashvili, who was then made the governor of Odessa oblast by the far-right Ukrainian government, is now back in Georgia sitting in a prison cell.

His rule provoked a backlash within the population and led to the coming to power of the Georgian Dream party, which seeks to balance between NATO and Russia. Georgian Dream has generally blamed NATO for the war in Ukraine and warned of the dangers of a repeat of the Ukraine scenario in Georgia, at the same time that it has pursued closer political, military, and economic ties with the US and Europe.

In an expression of this desperate political maneuvering, on Wednesday Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze defended the foreign agents law by declaring that it is "aimed at protecting Georgia from Ukrainization" and "strengthening sovereignty and ensuring stable development of the country, which is a prerequisite for Georgia's integration into the European Union." On Saturday, he indicated that GD would retract the law if the country was admitted to the EU.

In addition to seeking membership in both NATO and the EU, Georgia is tied by billions of dollars of debt to European and global lenders. Through the financing of institutes, non-profits, research networks, programs that promote international collaboration, Washington and its allies are involved in what they call building the country's "civil society." In reality, it is nothing but meddling in a foreign state with the aim of bringing to power more subservient layers.

The Georgia Fair Labor Platform (GFLP), for instance, which describes itself as "an informal alliance of independent trade unions, civil society organizations and activists working to improve labor conditions for workers in Georgia," was founded by Human Rights Watch and George Soros' Open Society Foundation, a global NGO with close ties to the American state. On its website, the GFLP notes that one of its main contributors, a derivative of the Open Society Foundation, is involved in the implementation of the EU ascension agreement.

In September of last year, the State Security Services announced that it had uncovered a plot by former Georgian military elites, allied with the Ukrainian government and active in that country, to seize power. In short, they determined that the US, via its CIA operatives and proxies in Kiev, was working to bring down the Georgian government.

Notably, the State Security Services description of what was being prepared bears a resemblance to what is currently

happening in Georgia. They said the conspirators hoped to take advantage of a situation in which the EU would issue a negative appraisal of Georgia's readiness to join its ranks. This would then "create a fertile ground for civil unrest and further riots through both information networks at their disposal, as well as by artificially labeling the government as 'pro-Russian.'"

That the "foreign agents law" is anti-democratic and reactionary is indisputable. The "foreign agent" that poses the greatest threat to the Georgian ruling elite, as well those of Russia and America (the latter of which also has such laws), is the international working class. Measures that today are directed against agencies funded by Washington and Brussels will tomorrow be used against mass organizations of workers fighting to bring their class to power around the world. In a country like Georgia, where ordinary people have deep cultural ties and a shared history of struggle with the masses of the former Soviet Union, those on top no doubt have a particular awareness of what it can mean when those on the bottom raise their heads.

But there is nothing progressive or democratically minded about the pro-EU protests in Tbilisi this week. The EU is helping orchestrate Israel's genocide in Gaza, while cracking down on domestic opposition to the mass slaughter. In Ukraine, the EU is backing fascists and a government that is sending millions into killing fields, rounding up draft dodgers and pressing the sick and disabled into service. The social layer drawn to the protests in Tbilisi's center—which is filled with expensive cafes, fancy shops, and right-wing graffiti—is generally well-educated, well-to-do (or aim to be) and have (or hope to get) a place in one of the foreign corporations, NGOs or other Western-backed institutions operating in Georgia.

It is notable that in a country in which the median wage is estimated to be between \$350 and \$390 a month, the minimum wage is \$7.50 a month, 11.9 percent of male workers and 24.6 percent of female workers earn less than \$131 a month; the bottom 50 percent of the population possess just 4.4 percent of personal wealth and receive 14.5 percent of all pre-tax national income, not a single slogan chanted by the crowds on Tbilisi's streets this week had to do with inequality, poverty or social misery.

To the extent that ascension to the EU has, or rather had, broader support in the population—a claim that Western powers constantly make on the basis of polls they have conducted—it is because people have illusions that the majority of working Georgians will achieve the living standards they think, falsely, exist for a majority of those in the EU.



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