

USAID cuts send pro-US opposition in country of Georgia into crisis

Andrea Peters
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The Trump administration's decision to gut the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and axe foreign aid has sent the anti-government opposition in the south Caucasus country of Georgia into crisis. American funding has long played a central role in sustaining the large network of non-profit and civil society organizations seeking to drive out the current ruling authorities for failing to adopt a decisively anti-Russian line.

For months, forces opposed to the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party have been protesting in the country's capital city, Tbilisi. Their central demand has been the nullification of last October's parliamentary elections, which delivered a majority to GD. Insisting that the vote was rigged, a claim for which no proof has been provided, they demand that the parliamentary vote be re-run so as to get the outcome they wish. These demonstrations followed on the heels of last spring's anti-government protests, which centered around the GD government's passage of a "foreign agents law."

In the various waves of demonstrations, virulently anti-Russian, pro-EU, pro-US and pro-Ukrainian slogans have predominated. Crude banners directed against Putin have come alongside calls for "democracy," "human rights" and the "European way"—the stock in trade of right-wing forces hoping to ingratiate themselves with the imperialist powers and vacuum up a few bits, however measly, from what falls off the table of the big players in the capitalist system.

The EU's and Washington's full backing for Israel's war of extermination against the Palestinians has not caused Georgia's opposition to skip a beat. And social and economic issues that impact the vast majority of the population have never found a place in this allegedly popular movement. In recent weeks, hundreds of Georgian miners have been staging protests in the capital against layoffs and unpaid wages. They have not, however, rallied behind the anti-government opposition.

The Trump administration's attack on the post-war order is unmooring the pro-US and pro-EU layers in Georgia and across the post-Soviet sphere. Regardless of whether or not the White House successfully cuts a deal with the Putin government over the Ukraine war, Trump's willingness to abandon Kiev and pursue such an agreement over the opposition of the EU powers signals the torching of the US' longstanding alliance with Europe and the foreign policy that had long-cemented these ties—a ferociously anti-Russian line covered over with hollow babble about "defending freedom."

For decades, the US has been meddling in Georgia and all the former Soviet countries with the express purpose of bringing to power governments that are avowedly hostile to Moscow. An entire social layer has been cultivated on this basis, and it is now at sea.

The axing of American imperialism's soft power money through the

shutting down of USAID has "left many of Georgia's civil society actors reeling," notes a March 10 article on the website Civil.ge, a pro-opposition news outlet. "Most programs that supported civil society engagement with governance are now shuttered," it adds, resulting in the loss of about 2,000 jobs.

In an admission of the close relationship between Western funding and those on Georgia's streets demanding that the government give up power, the author laments that "the fines they get almost daily from the police for closing traffic will feel much more painful to them."

The volumes of money in question are not small, particularly for a country with a population of just 3.7 million and an annual GDP only slightly over \$30 billion. According to a March 8 article on the website GEOPolitics titled, "As USAID Dies, Many of Georgia's 'Vibrant' CSOs Face Extinction," the size of US expenditures relative to the number of people in the country is so large that Georgia "has been one of the largest per capita recipients of US Assistance." Between 2012 and 2023 American overseas development money spent on the tiny south Caucasus nation amounted to \$1.92 billion.

USAID, next to the US State Department, is the primary administrator of these monies, according to the official website ForeignAssistance.gov. Not a single dime is spent on poverty or human welfare.

Of all the money delivered in 2023—\$149,075,515—just two grants totaling \$22,161 are identified as having to do with "Health," and the explicit purpose of one of them is listed as "redacted." A few hundred thousand dollars are dedicated to supporting things like English classes, teacher training and environmental protection. There was, however, \$4500 allotted to something having to do with the racist, gender-obsessed post modernist sociologist bell hooks (who for some reason also rejects basic English grammar and does not capitalize the first letter of either of her names). One program having to do with "gender-based violence" had a balance of -\$50.

The top recipient of US State Department money is the "Foreign Military Financing Program," which got \$35,000,000, followed by USAID's "Promoting Rule of Law in Georgia." It received \$8,990,900. What then comes is a laundry list of imperialist "soft power" operations dressed up with words like "self governance," "information integrity" and "civic education." For instance, the USAID Civic Education Program, which received \$2,700,000 in 2023, is described as follows: "The purpose of the USAID Civic Education Program is to use civic education to prepare the next generation of Georgians to be civically engaged and know and exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities." Translated into plain speech, this means funding anti-government movements.

The Georgian website GEOPolitics, which is run by the Gnomon Wise Research Institute (another outfit funded by US and European sources), explains that even when US money has been allotted to initiatives to be undertaken by the Georgian government itself, the non-governmental “civil society” community is at the center of these efforts. Washington uses employees from USAID-sponsored Georgian NGOs to implement the policies dictated to the Georgian government.

The halt of the flood of foreign aid money has left the country’s opposition demoralized. “After a hundred days of nonstop street protest, the winter of Georgian discontent fails to bear fruit,” observed Jaba Devdariani on the news outlet Civil.ge early last month. According to him, activists are walking away from the protests and even, it seems, leaving Georgia, a fact that reveals something about the socio-economic position of layers within the core of the anti-government opposition, as the vast majority of people do not have the money to decamp from their native land because they are politically depressed.

The ruling Georgian Dream party has praised the cuts to USAID and Trump’s attacks on the “deep state.” It is moving forward with attempts to tighten the political screws and further consolidate power by passing legislation banning opposition parties, placing further limits on the media, increasing fines and detention times for protesters and introducing treason into the country’s criminal code.

The government has also revised its “foreign agents law” to make it identical to the US 1938 Foreign Agents Registration Act. The closeness of the two laws has created something of a problem for the opposition because it reveals the fact that the anti-democratic measures of the Georgian government are entirely in keeping with the policies of the American state. They have dealt with the issue by claiming that Georgia’s version is much worse than that of the US.

Politically, the central issue is that Trump’s policies, domestic and foreign, have caused the mask to fall off. The “American way”—the peace, prosperity, and human rights promised to the former Soviet masses after the Stalinist bureaucrats dissolved the USSR and restored capitalism—has come to naught.

It is and will become ever more difficult to appeal to popular frustrations over the Georgian government’s policies on the basis of the claim that there is some sort of global, democratic spirit floating in the ether, calling out for the Georgian people. The world’s oldest democracy is crushing dissent, kidnapping and detaining critics and deporting immigrants guilty of no crime to El Salvador’s most brutal prison. All of this is rubber-stamped by the Supreme Court and unopposed by the Democrats.

Despite the blow that it has experienced, Georgia’s opposition is not done seeking the support of their American benefactor. The country’s leading oppositionist, former Georgian president and former French diplomat Salome Zurbishvili, was invited to attend Donald Trump’s inauguration in January. On the sidelines of the event, she met with now Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Zurbishvili was overcome with praise for the would-be dictator in the White House at an event sponsored by the Atlantic Council on January 21, the same day that Trump was issuing decrees gutting civil rights and preparing the mass firing of federal workers.

“I think that the America that he [Donald Trump] is describing, and the foreign policy of America that he is describing as of a strong America... America that is effective and active in action—that is the America that Georgia certainly needs,” Zurbishvili said.

In Washington, the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, just

approved the MEGOBARI Act with bipartisan support. The bill asserts American support for “democracy” in Georgia and targets the current government in Tbilisi.

Speaking on March 10 to Civil.ge, Tamara Chergoleishvili of the newly-formed Federalists, a “staunchly pro-US party” according to Civil.ge, berated oppositionists for “panicking” and counseled patience in the search for a new arrangement with the White House.

Politically, there is nothing holding back the Georgian opposition from allying itself with Donald Trump. Their commitment to democratic principles runs none too deep. Writing on March 24 in Civil.ge, Nina Gabritchidze opined that it was time for the opposition to give up its demand for the re-running of the last parliamentary elections, as it should not be under any obligation to recognize the result should it go against them.

“So, does the call for a new election imply that a vote—fair or not—can legitimize oppression? Should it be decided by a simple majority whether one still deserves to be treated as a human being? Should you quietly accept it if 51% of the voters decide—willingly or under pressure—to sacrifice your entire existence for a vague populist agenda?”

In short, based on the *a priori* assertion that voters’ will cannot find reflection in the balloting, there is no need for elections at all.

The immediate fate of the south Caucasus country, and the region as whole, in the present, rapidly shifting geopolitical situation remains to be seen. Will the Georgian opposition be completely cast aside by the White House as part of its scheming? Will the European powers pick up those who have been tossed overboard? Will Washington, having disciplined its Georgian subordinates, pivot and place them once again on the dole? Or will it simply mow them down in the drive to war against China and everyone else?

For all the talk on both sides of the political equation in Georgia about securing the country’s “freedom,” “interests” and “independence,” no such thing is possible in the world imperialist order, much less under the present circumstances. The dissolution of the USSR, of which Georgia was a part, by the Stalinists in 1991 opened up this country and the entire post-Soviet sphere to the predations of the leading capitalist powers. Georgia has been preyed upon ever since, an object of endless machinations and scheming by the US and Europe.

Only a united struggle of the global working class against capitalism will resolve on a progressive basis the fate of Georgia and the planet.



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