



Georgia's Relations with Israel and the US

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: In 1992, shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, both the US and Israel established diplomatic relations with Georgia, which had been freed from the grip of the Soviet bloc and was setting out as an independent state. Between then and now, relations between the states have tightened in all areas: diplomacy, security, and trade.

Georgia's relations with Israel have grown ever warmer since the establishment of diplomatic relations on June 1, 1992. The strength of the relationship was visible on August 10, 2008, when the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs [published](#) this unambiguous announcement regarding the Russian aggression toward Georgia: "Israel is following with great concern the developments in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and hopes the violence will end. Israel recognizes the territorial integrity of Georgia and calls for a peaceful solution."

On August 15 of that year, a [demonstration of support](#) for Georgia was held in Tel Aviv at which Israelis formed a human chain and demanded that their government increase its support for Georgia. Similarly, on November 20, 2012, during the Pillar of Defense IDF operation in the Gaza Strip, there was a large demonstration in support of Israel in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi. In addition, Georgian television [broadcast sympathetic news reports](#) about Israel and distributed publicity brochures on Israel's behalf in some schools.

For their part, the Americans, like Georgia's other Western allies, condemned Russia's penetration into Georgia's sovereign territory and blatant intervention in its domestic affairs. While avoiding direct military action, Washington used military aircraft and naval forces to assist Georgia and signal the Russians about the direction of their support.

When the hostilities ended, the US [transferred](#) about \$1 billion to Georgia to help it repair the damage caused during the fight. And on January 9, 2009, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Georgian minister of foreign affairs Grigol Vashadze [signed a strategic partnership](#), a non-binding document that outlined areas of cooperation, reiterated Washington's unreserved support for Georgia's territorial integrity, and expressed American support for Georgia's candidacy for NATO membership.

As Georgia, which shares a northern border with Russia, is located not far from Iran, it is geographically strategic for both Israel and the US, which partly explains its support from those countries. The relatively close land access affords both states an opportunity for more effective spying and, should it become necessary, attack. In addition to the practical advantages afforded to Israel and the US by Georgia's proximity to Iran, they also need as many regional allies as possible in the event that they become involved in hostilities (like, for example, the killing by the US of Iranian Quds Chief Qassem Soleimani earlier this year). The US and Israel have a similar relationship with Azerbaijan, which shares a long border with Iran.

The cooperation among the Georgia-US-Israel triangle is based on common values like reverence for democracy and individualism. A further connection that is unique to Israel and Georgia is that both are on the Asian continent but largely affiliate with Europe.

Until 2005, Israel provided extensive security assistance to Georgia, which included the improvement of the MiG 25 aircraft, sales of ammunition and small arms, and the provision of military experts to assist in the training of troops on how to use the procurements. In February 2005, however, Russian pressure on Israel compelled it to [restrict](#) military relations with Georgia to the sale of military equipment that is not for attack purposes.

In June 2013, a large delegation from Georgia arrived in Israel, including PM Bidzina Ivanishvili and defense minister Irakli Alasania, with the intention of [renewing](#) arms deals with Israel and acquiring defensive weapons such as drones and anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles. Apparently, that deal did not come to fruition.

Regarding its relationship with the US, Georgia [sent](#) the third-largest force (2,000 soldiers) into the Second Iraq War to fight alongside US forces. Moreover, it was the biggest contributor per person to the mission led by the US in Afghanistan, where it sent about 1,600 troops.

The US assists Georgia militarily through vocational training, but according to SIPRI data, it has sold almost no weapons to Georgia. From the establishment

of diplomatic relations through the end of 2018, arms sales between the parties totaled [\\$25 million](#). This could be for the same reason Israel stopped selling arms to Georgia: Washington might have decided it was not in the domestic interest to provoke Moscow.

In 1996, the Israel-Georgia Chamber of Commerce was [established](#) to support the growth of trade between the parties. Two years later, the US Chamber of Commerce was [established](#) in Georgia for the same purpose. However, neither the US nor Israel is one of Georgia's [leading trading partners](#). In 2017, Russia was its largest export target with a share of 13% and Turkey had its largest import share, estimated at 17%. China followed with 9.4%.

The great distance from the US and lack of access to large seaports beyond the Poti port in the eastern Black Sea makes US-Georgia trade difficult. It is thus understandable that the Georgians choose to trade with Russia and other neighboring countries, though they may do so with reservations. Trade with China, which goes over land and forms part of Chinese president Xi Jinping's BRI Initiative, makes it possible for Georgia to diversify its economy outside nearby countries. In 2017, Iran began to [increase](#) its trading ties with Georgia, but for the time being, that development has not damaged Georgia's relationship with Israel.

Tourism, an important income sector for Georgia, has increased dramatically in the past two decades, from fewer than 400,000 tourist entrances in 2000 to nearly 6.5 million in 2017. Before the 2020 onset of the coronavirus crisis, which affected tourism globally, Georgia's [proximity and attractiveness](#) made it one of Israel's most preferred travel destinations. In 2017 alone, over 115,000 Israelis [visited](#) Georgia.

Georgia's relations with the US and Israel are likely to continue to be strong in view of their common values and challenges. Russia may continue to threaten Georgia's independence and integrity, as it did in 2008. The US, which is facing down China in some areas and Russia in others, will continue to support Georgia as a means of restraining Russia and limiting its geographical expansion and area of influence.

Israel's relationship with Russia is complicated by its presence in Syria on the regime's behalf and relations with Iran. Warm though its relations with Georgia may be, Israel has no choice but to monitor its behavior toward that country and make sure it does not cross a line and upset Moscow. With that said, the US is Israel's closest friend, especially under the current administration, and that relationship strengthens the ties between Israel and Georgia. Recent developments in Iran make the connection even closer.

A decade ago, Georgia was still trying to stand on its feet in a complex and disputed region. It is now a nation that knows how to take full advantage of its benefits, recognizes its shortcomings, and increases stability in the region through alliances with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey. Those regional alliances strengthen its longstanding relations with the US and Israel and support its ongoing development into a significant regional power.

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