The Clarity Trap

An essay by Paul Bell

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Whatever strategic ambiguity is, it’s been around for an awfully long time.

We were strolling through Trastevere in Rome of an evening last September when I spotted an English bookshop, something I can never resist in a foreign city. We went in and after a few minutes of idle browsing, my fingers fell on First Man in Rome, the first of Australian author Colleen McCullough’s Masters of Rome, a seven-volume series of historical novels of the last seventy years of the Republic. I had not heard of the series and had no great expectations; the cover looked a little Jackie Collins, but I applied my standard test. Flip to page 69 and if it holds the attention, buy it. I bought it. And have lived, utterly gripped, in ancient Rome, enthralled by McCullough’s portraits of power, for eight months.
The period is incredibly volatile; until reading McCullough, I had no idea how much so. Rome’s aristocratic senatorial class is struggling to retain its grip on Rome in the face of a series of populist challenges to the power of the Senate that originate within the elite, as aristo demagogues exploit the grievances of the knightly merchant and plebeian classes in order to wrest power for themselves. It starts with the Gracchi brothers and proceeds through the likes of Saturninus and Catilina, whose conspiracy is famously blown by Cicero in the Senate. All meet violent deaths.

By 52 BC Rome has passed through the First Triumvirate of Pompey, Julius Caesar, and Crassus. Pompey is in Rome, and fancies himself the empire’s new First Man. Caesar is in the west with his legions, halfway through his decade of subduing Further Gaul. And Crassus is dead, his eastern armies annihilated in Mesopotamia by the Parthians. Now it is the turn of Publius Clodius, an upstart and sybarite whose chequered career has already landed him in hot water at least twice—once when taken hostage by Bedouins he offended and who circumcised him, a shame to a true Roman man, and again when, during the festival of Bona Dea, which only women might attend, he entered the House of the Vestals dressed as a woman and was unmasked. A rigged jury acquitted him of sacrilege and now he is back, playing the populist, running a Roman mob-for-hire, and campaigning for election as urban praetor. The post will enable him to expand the voting power of the plebeian electorate, and overturn senatorial power for good.

The Senate’s traditionalists are in a ferment over this threat: Clodius must be stopped. Caesar is watching from Gaul. Himself a child of the Suburra, the teeming rough-and-ready plebeian neighbourhood where his mother had owned a large apartment block, Caesar is possessed of his own plebeian sympathies—the Romans love him—and he has been quietly cultivating Clodius. But he retains the governing instincts of a high-born aristocrat, and this is a bridge too far. He writes to Pompey, urging him to prevent Clodius pushing ahead with his plan.
Pompey is being courted by the traditionalists. One of their number is Milo, whose ambition to be consul may be stalled if Clodius succeeds. Milo calls on Pompey to sound him out: would his chances for the consulship improve if Clodius were out of the way? McCullough imagines the exchange:

Milo: What if he didn’t stand for election as praetor?


Milo: A pestilence on Rome! Would it be better for me?

Pompey: It couldn’t help but be a great deal better for you, Milo, now could it?

Milo: Could that be construed as a promise, Magnus?

Pompey: You might be pardoned for thinking so.

Pompey’s response is shrewdly fashioned. Of the various definitions of strategic ambiguity, it meets at least one—that of Scott Adams, creator of the dystopian workplace cartoon satire *Dilbert* (cancelled earlier this year after he was accused of racism). Adams is also author of *Win Bigly*, on Donald Trump’s presidential victory in 2016. He calls strategic ambiguity ‘a choice of words that allows people to read into them whatever they would prefer’—and in Trump’s case, enjoining those who turned up at the Capitol on 6 January 2021 to ‘fight like hell’, it seemed to work. But what did that mean? What did Trump expect of them? To shout outside, or storm inside and trash the joint? Or are we left to infer, and pronounce on, his intent from the consequences? We’ll never know what Trump intended. Might he have become sufficiently maddened by defeat to imagine insurrection might actually succeed? If so, it is something he can never admit.

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1 Dialogue extracted from *Caesar* by Colleen McCullough, 1998.
Pompey’s ambiguity is at least more *strategic*, more deliberate, more thought through. He wants Clodius eliminated; he just doesn’t want his own hand in it. Instead, he employs an ambiguity that enables Milo to infer his support; he avoids specifically promising it, but he means Milo to think he has it. And if the thing goes pear-shaped, he has plausible deniability. This being literature, *we* know what Pompey means and what he wants. But Milo hears what he *wants* to hear; the inference is psychological—we might call it confirmation bias.

Charlie Munger, deputy chairman of the US investment behemoth Berkshire Hathaway, has a different construct for strategic ambiguity: he calls it a lever for influence, best used ‘when you want someone to more easily imagine your favored outcome’.² Milo imagines what Pompey prefers, hears a promise of cover, and two days later he and his men kill Clodius on the road to Capua. Pompey is out of the city at the time.

The Rand Corporation’s Raymond Kuo, writing on US policy on China and Taiwan, offers up this rather more engineered definition:

> Political science considers strategic ambiguity a form of pivotal deterrence, where one state prevents two others from going to war against each other. [...] The pivot can swing its decisive power against whichever country is upsetting the status quo. Because it doesn’t commit to any particular course of action, both adversaries are unsure about the U.S. reaction and therefore avoid escalation.³

As definitions go, Kuo’s two powers and a pivot are doubtless closer to the preoccupations of a journal focused on military and security-related strategic communications, but the very term *strategic ambiguity* is itself ambiguous, with different meanings in different contexts, geopolitical, organisational, sociological, or otherwise.

I tend to think of it simply as ‘how not to get trapped in clarity’—specifics and details, promises that commit, choices that exclude other options. All politics involves competing interests, and often the need to keep those in balance, or harmonise them for the sake of unity, demands strategic ambiguity. It’s a game of broad churches, big tents, playing both ends off against the middle, leaving all options on the table, keeping things open-ended and your rivals guessing, and not making promises you might be held to. This is how politicians survive against each other, and how the public loses trust in politicians. And yet it’s how we’ve designed—and rigged—the systems we govern by. In which clarity is just storing up trouble for the future.

Two small countries come to mind in which too much clarity might be extremely dangerous.

First to Northern Ireland, for which trade across its new post-Brexit border with the Republic of Ireland, a member of the European Union, has been the most vexatious of the many issues the British government has had to deal with since leaving the EU. For the British and Irish governments, the EU, and the parties at Stormont (Northern Ireland’s devolved assembly), complex, vital, and divergent interests have been at play.

Technical negotiations having recommenced in late 2022, all the meta-issues, though not on the table, are in the room. Preserving the peace achieved by the 1998 Good Friday Agreement between Northern Ireland’s Catholic nationalists and Protestant unionists after thirty years of sectarian violence in the province. The unification of Ireland, and all the ebb and flow of public sentiment in the province as sectarian demographics and allegiances shift. The fate of unionism within the United Kingdom, with Scottish nationalists closely monitoring any outcome’s implications for their own ambitions (now in a shambles for other reasons). The UK’s future relations with the EU.
On the one hand, the open borders established by the Good Friday Agreement must remain open. On the other hand, the ruling Conservative Party’s more fanatical Brexiteers and the Democratic Unionist Party, Northern Ireland’s leading Protestant party, are both insisting Northern Ireland not be treated differently from the rest of the UK, and that European law not continue to prevail in any form in any part of the UK; they have to be either satisfied or cornered.

Since 2021 the issue has been bogged down in deeper agendas on all sides. At Stormont, for more than a year, the DUP, newly a minority in the assembly, has been unwilling to serve under a Catholic Sinn Féin premiership. Using their dissatisfaction with the political implications of the then-existing border arrangements as a pretext for boycotting Stormont, they disabled the legislative assembly and forced Ulster to be ruled directly from London. At Westminster, the Tories remain locked in internal strife over Brexit, which a majority of British voters has already come to regret as a hugely damaging mistake. The buccaneering hard Brexiteers in the Tory parliamentary caucus, dismayed by the resignation of Boris Johnson, their disgraced standard-bearer, as prime minister, hope to restore him to office by destabilising his successor-but-one (we scuttle past the unedifying Truss episode), Rishi Sunak. Their chosen weapon is to threaten rebellion against Sunak’s plan to resolve the deadlock over Northern Ireland on the grounds that it will compromise UK sovereignty.

On becoming prime minister, Sunak immediately changed the tone of the UK’s discussions with Brussels. These improved atmospherics meet the Munger definition of strategic ambiguity; it becomes easier for the EU to imagine Sunak’s preferred outcome—not something Johnson’s ministers, who routinely sneer at the phrase ‘our European friends’, could either hope or wish to accomplish. Smoke signals from Downing Street and Brussels suggest progress. The detail is under wraps—Sunak will not be trapped by clarity, at least not before the deal takes on the appearance of a fait accompli—but a deal will be done.
For the DUP the game is up. They are now in a delicate position. They cannot afford a U-turn for fear of alienating their diehard unionist base. They know, too, that their historic mission as the naysayers of Ulster is wearing thin among the wider electorate as government in the province slows to a crawl. They may want to say no, but nor do they wish to be the spoilers—or even worse the deciders if the Tory rebellion is big enough. Instead, they opt to ‘study’ Sunak’s bill—giving them time to watch the Tories, keep their base on side, and avoid wider public opprobrium. And when it becomes clear the rebellion would be insignificant, they can safely vote no because it will make no difference to the outcome. The bill makes safe passage through the Commons, the DUP vote no, and they have maintained their opposition to the bitter end. Win-win. For the moment …

The deal itself, the so-called Windsor Framework, is riddled with ambiguity. Its dispute resolution mechanism is complex, reflecting the delicacy of Northern Ireland’s sectarian politics and of not upending the Good Friday Agreement. Tucked into the small print is an ultimate recourse to the European Court of Justice, a remote possibility, itself dependent on cross-party consensus at Stormont, but nonetheless present—but nonetheless a red line for the Brexit crusaders. But when push comes to shove, the histrionics of sovereignty are smothered by technicalities, a veil drawn across the face of the dark god, and Northern Ireland, of whose voters only 16.9 per cent oppose the deal⁴ while the rest are heartily sick of the whole business, moves on.

For the Unionists now, unfortunately, Rishi Sunak has shot their fox, robbing them of their pretext for disabling devolved government in the province. They can no longer escape the choice of whether to return to Stormont as juniors to Sinn Féin in the executive, or to continue to immobilise government out of minority pique. They’d prefer the whole thing had fallen apart in Westminster.

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Brexit itself was deliberately shrouded in ambiguity. It was all about ‘taking back control’, but of what kind? In what way? With what consequences? To what end? For its fanatics and fixers, it was a means to power. Its politicians had either failed to win power in the past, or had lost it and wanted it back. Its moneymen were wealthy financiers and manufacturing entrepreneurs who believed a buccaneering Britain would prosper once unshackled from the interferences of EU membership. Control was about deregulation and rerouting the economy towards a less bridled capitalism. To their dupes, it was simply a chance to strike back at a distant elitist government overly preoccupied with minorities, stifled by ‘experts’, and out of touch with the ‘real’ England. For that (older) part of the public which felt ‘left behind’ by modern Britain, it was about more money for healthcare, not being ‘swamped’ by ‘Turkish immigrants’, and poking ‘those London types’ in the eye with a sharp stick. For them all, Britain would become as it had been when its imperium, its navy, its trade had made their kind, and their small, crowded island, masters of the universe.

Meaning such different things to such very different people, Brexit had to be sold with complete confidence in the face of massive uncertainty, through a choice of words—take back control—that enabled people, per Scott Adams, to read into them what they wanted to believe: immigration would go down, the economy would boom with all that extra cash it was saving, Britain would be led by that charming rogue, Boris, and it would wash that busybody Brussels right out of its hair.

Now at last, two years after leaving the EU, there is certainty. The veil of ambiguity has been torn aside. The meaning is clear: immigration is up, the economy is down, those who led Brexit are out, and the only question is whether Britain will ever get back in. Strategic ambiguity, it seems, can also be catastrophically misleading. Clarity, in this instance, would have served Britain better.

And so, inevitably, to Georgia.
Some months ago I was at dinner at Verico, the Wine Factory, a cluster of posh bars and terraced restaurants in what was once a grand old Tbilisi residence above the main road through Vera. To my left was a government official I soon learned worked in the Ministry of Finance. His English was embarrassingly excellent relative to my hundred words of Georgian—hello, thank you, how much? oh my God, goodbye—so we could converse. And though his country’s politics and democratic misadventures have become a fascination to me, I thought better than to venture into that territory with a public servant of whose allegiances and sensibilities I knew nothing. Even so, he got there on his own.

In March 2022, a month after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the EU had sped up the application process for Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. Ukraine and Moldova were awarded it three months later. Georgia failed: the EU said it recognised its ‘European perspective’ but further reforms were needed, especially to the justice system and the role of oligarchic power in the machinery of the state, and promised to review progress.

My dinner companion and his colleagues were baffled and disappointed, he told me. They’d been slaving away for more than a year to provide information that shows Georgia meets the EU’s requirements for candidate status. It’s arduous stuff, detailed, painstaking work. Yet every week their work was being sabotaged by yet another verbal barrage aimed by their political masters, the ruling Georgian Dream party’s ministers and senior spokesmen, at the EU’s diplomats or the US ambassador. They feared it would all go for nothing because the government was surely going to say something that finally so offended the EU that all prospect of Georgia winning candidacy status would be obliterated.

And indeed, in late March, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili might have thought he’d put that ball in the back of the net. Commenting on Norway’s award of a human rights prize to former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili (confined to a clinic 10 km north of Tbilisi’s city centre and literally wasting away), Garibashvili compared it to some other country awarding a prize to Anders Breivik, the Norwegian mass
killer. A more grotesque and grossly offensive comparison, from a high official to a friendly foreign state which annually spends $15–20m on aid to his country, is hard to imagine.

Europe has accustomed itself to such slurs. Since March 2022, in any given week since the candidacy process began, the Georgian government has both declared its commitment to the candidacy process and accused the EU of, inter alia, presiding over a culture of moral corruption, not understanding Georgia’s culture, trying to stuff ‘European values’ (a phrase dipped in venom) down its throat, offending its national dignity, impugning its sovereignty, and—a particular favourite—conniving with the ‘radical opposition’ to open up a second front against Russia by dragging Georgia into the war. In any other country, someone hearing the same people juxtapose such completely opposing notions in consecutive breaths, and with such studied indifference to perceptions of themselves, would be forgiven for thinking they had been sucked into a parallel universe. But in the closed shop of Georgian politics and media, there are no consequences for such behaviour—which, inside the ruling Georgian Dream, is doubtless also what passes for strategic ambiguity.

The EU has thickened its skin. It knows Georgia’s people are overwhelmingly in favour of membership. Poll after poll echoes that ringing declaration by then prime minister Zurab Zhvania to the Council of Europe in 1999: ‘I am Georgian, therefore I am European.’ Increasingly the EU draws a pointed distinction between the Georgian people and their government. MEP Viola von Cramon, a doughty champion for Georgia’s aspirations, told the European Parliament on 14 March: ‘The people of Georgia deserve to be in the EU, even if their current government does not.’ Von Cramon is not the Commission, but …

Less than a fortnight later, sources in Brussels were suggesting to Radio Free Europe that the EU was inclined to grant candidate status to Georgia

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‘if Tbilisi does not take further steps in the coming months that will distance the country from the European Union’.7

The Georgian government had already taken a hard run at that too.

In early March, three weeks before the ‘Breivik’ slur, it rammed through parliament new legislation it claimed was based on US law, requiring organisations that received more than 20 per cent of their funding from abroad to register as ‘foreign agents’, a.k.a. spies and traitors in the service of Georgia’s ‘radical, extremist opposition’ and their foreign backers. The public and civil society were incensed. The law, they said, was straight out of the Russia playbook. After vigorous protest from the EU and Western embassies, and two days of demonstrations outside parliament which riot police ended each night with teargas and batons, the law was withdrawn. Monday in committee, Tuesday in the assembly, enactment on Wednesday, reversal on Thursday, repeal on Friday. Five days from flash to bang. The government spun this film-stunt U-turn as the public’s failure to properly understand the law and blamed ‘propaganda’ by the ‘radical opposition’.

Georgia’s entire history has been the struggle between identity and geography in the shaping of its destiny. After centuries of fending off the Persians and the Ottomans, Georgia’s last king, Erekle, put his realm under Russian protection in 1783 and that, barring a plucky bid for independence in 1918–21, was the end of Georgian sovereignty for ten generations. In 1991 Georgia declared its independence from the Soviet Union, nine months before the latter was formally dissolved. Since independence, the orientation of Georgia’s governments has veered between what might be called its ‘true north’, its Europeanness and related sense of destiny, and its ‘magnetic north’, its historical relationship with Russia’s economy, culture, politics, and power. The needle has moved four times: away from Russia under its first post-independence leader, Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1991–92); then, after a turbulent interregnum, back towards Russia under former Soviet foreign minister Eduard

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Shevardnadze (1995–2003); decidedly towards the United States and Europe under Mikheil Saakashvili (2003–12); and, since then, back towards Russia under Georgian Dream and its Oz-like oligarch and founder, Bidzina Ivanishvili. With the advent of Kartuli Otsneba, a.k.a. Georgian Dream, and with the resurgence of Russia’s imperialist imperative under ‘Tsar Vladimir’, the Georgian people have experienced just how hard Russia, and its own government, intend to make it for them to break from Russia’s orbit, confirm their identity as Europeans, and formally achieve admission to the community of Europe.

A complex dance is now in progress involving four (and arguably five) actors, each with its own agenda and peculiar capabilities, each aware that the limits of action are soft and uncertain, each with its own history of failures and sense of risk.

Actor no. 1 is the people of Georgia: its citizens, voters, ethnic and civic minorities, shop assistants, hardscrabble farmers, intelligentsia, teachers and trashmen, entrepreneurs, professionals. Georgians are freedom-loving individualists, stronger on rights than responsibilities, strong in opinion and weaker on tolerance, less trusting of authority yet in search of strong leadership, for whom law and the state are more restrictive in nature than protective. They have cherished the European ideal ever since Georgian nationalism began its revival under the legendary Ilia Chavchavadze in the 1860s, but not because they are natural liberal democrats. Europe rather, means access, progress, material economic support, escape. Georgia’s citizens are political rather than institutional players, and it remains an open question whether their European aspirations can be sufficiently mobilised to force the issue with actor no. 2, their government.

Georgian Dream is that part of the political elite that is in power. It includes demagogues and hacks, carpetbaggers and timeservers, the monied and the connected. Like its predecessors, it is constitutionally mandated to ‘take all measures within the scope of their competences to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the European Union and
In the meantime, joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.\textsuperscript{8} On the other hand, joining the EU means signing up to a degree of democracy that is plainly incompatible with what it takes for Georgian Dream to retain power. It means undoing the executive’s capture of the judiciary and removing the hand of Bidzina Ivanishvili from other instruments of state and economic control. Ivanishvili’s links to Russia are well documented; he made his fortune there and maintains close and confidential ties with Moscow. He is a client of Moscow, and Georgian Dream is his client in turn. Moreover—and in all fairness—any Georgian government would be well aware of the extent to which the country is exposed to Russian economic and military pressure. To protect its power, Georgian Dream must protect its patron and bend to Russia. As my dinner companion remarked, ‘Tbilisi receives directives from Moscow.’

Only strategic ambiguity, or what passes for it in the ruling party, could sustain this high-wire act. Georgian Dream must assure the Georgian people that it is doing everything it can to progress Georgia’s case for EU candidacy, and simultaneously try to stall the process and make any failure look like Brussels’s fault.

This has been going on since 2021 when the EU and US (actors no. 3 and 4 respectively) tried and failed to resolve an impasse between the government and opposition parties over claimed electoral fraud. It got worse after the EU, seeking to provide an additional geopolitical counterweight to Russia’s adventurism, put Georgian Dream on the spot over accession.

Ambiguity appears to be a more recent strategic evolution for the EU and US. For years, they have been trying to nudge Georgia away from its authoritarian drift and back towards the liberal democratic path. At first, they relied on material support, praise and encouragement, good faith, and, from time to time, robust but benign criticism. With Georgian Dream’s backsliding, that morphed to exasperated exhortations, forthright condemnations, and angry denials of the government’s increasingly

\textsuperscript{8} Article 78, Constitution of Georgia, 1995.
extravagant accusations. Then came this past March’s debacle over the Foreign Agents Registration Act—and it felt like a tipping point. Georgia’s passive-aggressive government could no longer be allowed to assume it could control the pace and direction of accession in defiance of national sentiment.

Thus the Brussels leak in March that the EU might offer candidate status to Georgia—over the head of its government! That whispered ambiguity begins to cut the ground from beneath the government’s feet: if candidacy is granted, it must be able to credibly claim to voters that this is its achievement; that it secured terms more favourable to, and respectful of, Georgia than might otherwise have been the case. This may put pressure on Georgian Dream now, to tone down its anti-Western rhetoric and negotiate in better faith.

Shortly after Brussels moved, the US State Department, after enduring months of abuse directed against its ambassador, began talking about ‘tools’ at its disposal. Such an interesting word, tools. So open-ended, and so striking; one saw it coming. In April the State Department imposed visa bans on four senior judges (and their immediate families), claiming it had evidence against them of corruption. The prime minister was unusually silent; it was left to the party’s leading chest-beaters to respond. They were indignant. They protested their innocence. They accused the US of impugning the dignity of Georgia’s high court and failing to respect Georgia as a state. They demanded the US produce the evidence. They suggested Secretary Antony Blinken had been misled. One went so far as to suggest the US might go as far as murder.

Nonetheless, the measure will have been salutary, sending a shiver through the establishment, many of whom enjoy the luxuries of foreign travel and educating their children in the US and Europe. Who might be next? Was there suddenly to be a price for this diplomatic frottage with Russia? Unless ‘the Dream’ responds more positively to its citizens’ European aspirations, it can no longer be sure its cabinet and parliamentarians won’t suffer the same fate as its house-trained judges.
Russia—actor no. 5, the bogeyman, the butcher, the night terror—glowers in the background, fulminating. Its version of strategic ambiguity is not unlike that employed by Nixon during Vietnam, when he encouraged his officials to quietly foster the notion that he was unpredictable and possibly crazy enough to order a nuclear strike. Russia has already invaded Georgia once, in 2008, and many Georgians have been spooked by the possibility that Putin, with ‘nothing left to lose’, might do it again if provoked. Unlikely as this seems, with Russia’s hands terribly tied in Ukraine, Georgian Dream has done all it can to encourage that fear among the Georgian people, accusing the EU and the US in typically hyperbolic language of trying to push Georgia into opening ‘a second front’ against Russia’s war, and congratulating itself on keeping the country out of it. The capital’s mayor ostentatiously designated Tbilisi the ‘City of Peace’, a notion its inhabitants, crowded out by Russian immigrants, quietly scoffed at.

Meanwhile, Georgian Dream has refused to support Western sanctions against Russia and turned Georgia into a postal address and a highway for sanctions-busting goods destined for Russia (the value of Georgian imports almost doubled from just more than a billion dollars in January 2023 to almost 2 billion in February⁹). And naturally the government takes credit for an economic boom driven by the influx of Russian goods, capital, and skills, and has only made the country more expensive for its own people.

All told, the Russian and Georgian Dream have managed a fairly cosy understanding. It allows Dream to say what it needs to say about Russia either to placate Georgians and the West, or to keep Georgians fearful. It allows Moscow to use Georgia as a bolthole for Russian business and an escape hatch for sanctions-busting. Each avoids the trap of either—or. The problem for both governments is that such ‘ambiguities’ rely heavily on either information blackouts or disinformation to keep them buoyant, and in Georgia, at least, with the West at last beginning to push back, it may get harder to keep the truth from puncturing them.

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⁹ Tradingeconomics.com/National Statistics Office of Georgia.
In sum, these are all the clarities: the Georgian people, the EU, and the US all want Georgia in the EU; the government wants to stay out, it prefers to be more Russia-like, and Russia will be as happy about Georgia joining the EU as it is about Finland joining NATO. This year could deliver more clarity than anyone is comfortable with.

In the end, clarity can be a massive inconvenience, and positively dangerous. Ambiguity has unpredictability built in; this buys time, holds dynamics in suspense, and keeps interests in check. Britain thought it was buying clarity with Brexit but has merely consigned itself to decades of new complexity and uncertainty; it would have done better to continue its arguments inside the tent.

Northern Ireland isn’t a country but is divided about which of two other countries it should belong to. And Georgia has a history of having to survive among empires that surround it and covet it. Within these two polities, power and peace seem to revolve around strategic ambiguity. Perhaps the difference between them is that in Northern Ireland there seems to be an underlying acceptance within the moderate middle of society that strategic ambiguity, a lack of clarity, is a precondition for keeping the peace—for the next twenty years at least. In Georgia there is no middle to speak of; the different contending parties all want clarity and are all pushing for it now, but their ideas of clarity, a solution, a national destiny, are diametrically opposed. The thing about clarity is, you have to be careful what you wish for.