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Turning a New Page in Georgia's History

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Abstract
After the demise of the USSR, Georgia has become geopolitically a key state in the Southern Tier region, which connected the landlocked, but rich with mineral resources region with the West by gas and oil pipelines. Georgia has become one of the places, where the interests of powerful states collide. Therefore, Georgia had to find means of securing its independence and territorial integrity and reluctantly became a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Russia took advantage of NATO's disunity and tried to foil Georgia's path to membership. The Russo-Georgian War shocked international community but it also challenged American power and the naïveté of the western world. With outsourcing the diplomatic lead in Russo-Georgian War to the European Union, the United States wanted to show Russia how the EU and other parts of the world were united against Russia's attack on a sovereign country. The true reason of Russo – Georgian war, was to claim nineteen-century-old style Russian sphere of influence in the Southern Tier region, the region which is a natural conjuncture of the eastern and western parts of Eurasia, thus geostrategically vital for the EU itself. Without independent Southern Tier region the EU will be depended on the Empire, under whose control these regions fall.

Keywords: *Russo-Georgian war; Georgia; independence and territorial integrity; NATO membership*

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Georgia's aspiration to become a member of western alliances is caused by the direct danger coming from the northern neighbor. Since 1991 Georgia has been trying to find the means to secure its real independence and territorial integrity. Therefore, the majority of Georgia's population voted for membership of NATO, which is the guarantee of its security. Georgia has been looking for this end for nearly two decades, but without much success as Russia's goal is to keep its own sphere of influence in the Caucasus as well as Central Asia. The loss of Georgia for Russia means that it will lose the territory that links with pipelines Caspian oil reserves with the EU. Consequently, the reason of Russia's yarning to regain the territories of the Southern Tier region is to have the leverage of dictating its own terms on West Europe, which is largely depended on the Caspian gas and oil reserves. Accordingly, Georgia became vital for geostrategic reasons, making Russia desperate to preserve either its influence over the whole country or seize some parts of the independent state under pretended reasons in order to cut the linkage which bypasses its territory, leaving Russia without a leverage to influence the same West. Because the stakes are very high, it will be much preferable for the United States not to isolate itself from the region. With its isolation, the United States will give Russia the very means to control the whole Eastern Hemisphere, for which Russia is trying its best to achieve. According to the development of the events of the twenty-first century, there is no doubt that Georgia has become the main bridgehead in the Caucasus and Central Asia. To define the real reason of Russo-Georgian War, I have implored and analyzed the viewpoints of western, Russian and Georgian politicians and scholars of this domain.

After the Rose Revolution American money, advisors, and friends poured into Georgia to assist in the attempt to remake the country. Georgia became a major beneficiary of U.S. aid and economic assistance programs. Georgia needed American support to materialize its goal to come close to Europe, which was and is in American interest as well. Moreover, it is in the interest of the EU to maintain the Southern Tier region alongside with the Middle East independent from Moscow, as a crucial linking place of the eastern and western parts of the mega continent.

During the Clinton administration, when the first round of NATO enlargement and the NATO-Russian Founding Act took place in 1997, few politicians would consider Georgia and Ukraine as serious candidates for

NATO membership. Ronald Asmus (2010) wrote that then American politicians' "…vision … was focused solely on Central and Eastern Europe from the Baltic to the western edge of the Black Sea and building a new partnership with Moscow" (p. 15). But the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003 and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 changed this attitude towards these countries. Western think tanks acknowledged that they needed to respond to these democratic breakthroughs. Mircea Geoana, foreign minister of Romania, made "an impassioned plea that enlargement not stop at the western edge of the Black Sea with Romania and Bulgaria but be extended across the sea to countries like Georgia and Ukraine" (Asmus, 2009, p. 16). After the Rose Revolution the President of Georgia "set on a crash course to turn Georgia from a semi-failed state into a reform tiger that could become the catalyst for creating a democratic pro-Western corridor in the Southern Caucasus between an unstable Russia to the north and a radicalizing wider Middle East to the south. It was a breathtaking vision and one Moscow despised" (Asmus, 2010, p. 57). Furthermore, the development of these resources and the export routes to deliver them to the outside world, bypassing Russia, would go a long way in determining whether a small state like Georgia could secure its sovereignty and independence (Cornell, S. Georgetown Journal of International Affairs 10, no. 1, Winter 2009: 131-139).

Being located on a very important place, where the interests of powerful countries diverge, membership of the western alliance was paramount for a small country, which dares not to let the former "big brother" choose what to do instead of a "small brother." Asmus (2010) gave his opinion about the proponents of NATO enlargement, (Proponents insisted that embracing these countries [Georgia and Ukraine] around the wider Black Sea was not only a moral imperative in the wake of their democratic revolutions, but that enlargement could strategically help lock in stability in Eurasia and around the Black Sea. The importance of a southern energy corridor bringing oil and gas from the Caspian Sea and Central Asia to the West was an additional rationale for this next round of outreach. Such a move… could shore up the southern flank of the Euro-Atlantic community against the wider Middle East to the south. While Moscow would not welcome the move, supporting democratic breakthroughs on Russian's borders, would arguably eventually enhance

Russia's own long-term prospects for more democracy (p. 116).)

This is an opinion of a Westerner, who deliberates for the good of mankind, though aware of the fact that it is not easy to achieve this goal, because Russia is against to all the issues raised here: Russia wants to be the master of not only the region around the Black Sea but the whole Eurasia with a southern energy supplying corridor and without any democratic breakthroughs either on its own or the surrounding territories. Moreover, the Kremlin sees law-governed, prosperous, and stable neighbors as a problem, not a benefit. Georgian President's aim to anchor Georgia in the Euro-Atlantic economic and security structures that had served other countries so well presented a profound ideological challenge to Russia (Lucas, 2009, p. 141).

Those who advocated giving MAP to Georgia saw the importance in sending a message to Russia to back off and leave a small, but democratic country on its southern border. Also giving MAP to Georgia, without taking into account whether the country completed its reforms, would not have been something unusual as the Alliance had done that with Albania nine years before. This issue was of political significance. Nonetheless, some NATO member countries were not able to discern the importance of bringing Georgia into the alliance and beef up the entire Southern Tier region for their own benefit – as Georgia is the westernmost point in the southern energy corridor bringing oil and gas from the Caspian and Central Asia to the West. With rejecting to give MAP to Georgia and Ukraine, the Alliance showed that it was not ready to be committed to this issue. Though one cannot be sure that all the states of the EU see the whole picture now, like Monday morning quarterbacks, but if they did and tried to think bigger, it would be hard but possible to spin back not only Georgia's fate but their own too, or in other words not to give a leverage to only one country to dominate them. Unlike some Europeans, Georgia and Ukraine became a central part of President Bush's freedom agenda, which was embraced by members from Central and Eastern Europe along with the United Kingdom, Canada and Denmark. President Bush was a strong supporter of Georgia and believed that a friend and ally had to stand by a fledgling democracy as a matter of principle and did not share some of his diplomats' view, who after the November 2007 crackdown in Georgia, wanted MAP was off the table. Contrary to them, President Bush, who saw that these

countries were taking even more risks to join NATO in face of Russian opposition, was determined to get MAP for Georgia and Ukraine and to use all of America's diplomatic clout in order to achieve his objective. Before going to Bucharest President Bush declared (2008), (MAP is not membership. It is a process that will enable NATO members to be comfortable with their country eventually joining. I believe NATO benefits with a Georgian membership. I believe Georgia benefits from being a part of NATO. And I told the president (Saakashvili) it's a message I'll be taking to Bucharest soon.) (See the Reference List (1))

The American leader's first impression of the Russian president Putin is well-known: "I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy and we had a very good dialogue. I was able to get a sense of his soul" (Press Conference by President Bush and President Putin at the Ljubljana Summit, June 16, 2001.) But since that first impression about the Russian president, the U.S.-Russian relationship had deteriorated and during his second term Bush had no illusions about Russian president's growing authoritarianism and stiff foreign policy and besides he also knew very well about Russian opposition to NATO enlargement. Ronald Asmus (2010) gave his clear vision of American president's attitude toward the shift of Russian policy: "…he (President Bush) … was committed to using his personal relationship with the Russian leader to avoid a fallback into a new cold war. Washington's motto was to cooperate with Russia where it could but to push back against Russian positions where it had too" (p.127).Though it was a different Russia from the one during Clinton's presidency, President Bush continued the same strategy of the Clinton era: cooperating with Russia on one track but pushing forward on NATO enlargement on a second, parallel track, refusing to back down in his support for Georgia. When President Bush (2008) met with NATO Secretary General in Bucharest, he declared, "[MAP for] Ukraine and Georgia is a very difficult issue for some nations here. It's not for me. I think these nations are qualified nations to apply for Membership Application. … [and Russia] ought to welcome NATO because NATO is a group of nations dedicated to peace." (See the Reference List (2))

Nonetheless, one of the leading members of the EU (France) was trying to balance the U.S. against Russia, which was desperate to regain its

past omnipotence as well as authority. Another member, namely Germany, had already been encircled by other members of the alliance, thus after securing its eastern border, it was not interested in further diluting the Alliance, and like France, tried to be closer to Russia as a counterweight to the United States. Furthermore, when German Chancellor Angela Merkel noted that countries with unresolved territorial conflicts could not join NATO, she confused cause and effect. On the basis of this principle, which would have applied equally to West Germany at the time of its NATO accession, the summit denied both Georgia and Ukraine a Membership Action Plan, expressed Illarionov (Illarionov, in Cornel, 2009, p.68) his concern. Soon Putin declared that, "The emergence of a powerful bloc at our borders will be seen as a direct threat to Russian security" (Andrian Bloomfield and James Kirkup, Daily Telegraph, April 7, 2008), which was the point but the West missed that point. Also the Western leaders did not take into account that as long as the resolution of these conflicts was – officially or unofficially – prerequisite to Georgia's membership in the Alliance, Russia was not going to allow the conflicts to be resolved. When Germany and France vetoed MAP, they virtually waved the Russian tanks into Georgia and perpetuated indefinitely the conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, precisely concluded Smith (Asmus, 2009, p, 126). I would like to point out here that this egregious mistake, in my opinion, was done by the leaders of the EU to somehow counterbalance the United States, which supported Georgia's aspirations to NATO and to achieve this goal these leaders chose to stand on Russia's side. The Russian leader was very pleased that Europeans stood up to the Americans, denying MAP to Georgia and Ukraine: "It showed that NATO was truly a democratic organization where the United States did not always get its way," declared president Putin (cited in Asmus, 2010, p.135). After the Bucharest Communiqué was published, a jubilant Russian president issued a statement: "We will provide effective assistance to South Ossetia and Abkhazia in return for NATO's decision" (Novaya Gazeta, April 27, 2008). Furthermore, the Head of the Russian Military Staff, for his part added: "We will do everything [necessary] to prevent Georgia from joining NATO" (Illarionov, in Cornel, 2009, p. 68), while Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lavrov, reiterated that Russia "would do its utmost not to allow Georgia and Ukraine into NATO" (RIA Novosti, April 8, 2008). Despite of

these comments, the strongest western European states yielded to Russia's will, stating that they agreed that Georgia should become NATO member but did not agree on timing, Georgia did not give up its people's wish to go west thus inflicting its neighbor's appalling outrage. The Russo—Georgian War was a shock to international community, which challenged American power and the naïveté of the western world. But why was this war a shock for them? In my opinion, the leaders of the western European states' had decided themselves not to notice those ominous clouds gathering above a small and unprotected country; therefore, soon thereafter they faced a game change. President Putin ordered the Russian government and Russian regional authorities to establish direct relations with governments in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali. This specific type of relationship which he proposed was virtually identical to that which existed between Moscow and the federal territories within Russia proper. Vladimir Socor wrote in Eurasia Daily Monitor (74, April 18, 2008) that Georgia considered that Putin's order amounted to Russia's full annexation of the two Georgian regions, which was a precise evaluation of the fact. Only then the EU, OSCE, NATO, U.S. France, and Germany condemned Putin's order and urged him to retract it (BBC News, April 24, 2008), though without any result. Even though no one wants to see another cold war with Russia, Russian-Georgian relations may turn out to be a cancer threatening to the whole world's peace and not only to one small state. Even the new president of Russia, Medvedev, sees himself as a leader of a martial nation. He denounced Georgia and the West in almost equal measure. Russia, he said, was not frightened of a "New Cold War." Indeed, it does not seem frightened of a hot one, issuing stern threats to NATO not to build up a naval presence in the Black Sea. The wake-up call to the West could hardly have been louder, concluded Edward Lucas (Lucas, 2009, p. 149).

Despite having been aware of Russia's nature of ever expanding at its neighbors' expenses and its strategy of creeping annexation, the West had turned a blind eye to Georgia and gave Russia a free hand to pursue its goal and as a wolf in sheep's clothing, Russia doubled up its mission of encroachment with its the so called "peacekeepers." The Georgian President (May 14, 2008) declared about Russia's expansion of its the so-called peacekeeping contingent and its deployment of Railroad Troops the following: (This is a very rough, outrageous and unprecedented attempt to

revise the entire world order, which was established after the break-up of Communism. This is a problem first of all for Georgia . . . But this is also a problem for France and Europe; this is a huge problem for the United States and other countries as well, including Russia itself.) (See the Reference List (3))

Russian peacekeeping arrangements were a farce which was bought or with other words accepted by the West, while they were well aware that those "peacekeepers" had already "become the extended arm of Russian neo-imperial policy" (Asmus, 2010, p. 221). The U.S. circumscribed itself only with calling on Russia to revoke its provocative actions in Abkhazia and expressed support for Tbilisi's plea for an increased international presence in the coastal region (Johanna Papjianevski, in Cornel, 2010, p. 148). It is hard not to agree with the following deliberation, (Had the international community mounted a peacekeeping effort in Georgia comparable in scope to what was done in the Balkans, or had they been willing to push for truly peacekeeping forces on the ground, this war might never have happened. This represents a failure on the part of the international community… After the war the European Union was able to quickly deploy several hundred officers to patrol and monitor the ceasefire. Had it deployed the same monitors the previous spring – as the Georgian government had urgently requested – the course of history could have been different.) (Asmus, 2010, p. 12)

Georgia had for years pleaded with the international community to abolish Russia's peculiar monopoly as the sole international "peacekeeper" in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgia pointed to attempts by Russia to aggravate, rather than defuse tensions in the conflict zones. Thus, Georgia had good reason to believe it would in due course be the object of Russian military action, and had tried unsuccessfully to engage the international community to prevent it (Papjanevski, 2009, p. 158). The Russian military analyst, Pavel Felgenhauer (Novaya Gazeta, August 18, 2008), said that the whole thing had been planned by Russia from the start. Georgians' warning had been brushed off as a case of "jitter" which seems that the analytical system had collapsed and the White House was taken by surprise. Asmus (2010) recognized and admitted the mistakes of the West, unfortunately rather late for Georgia, and concluded, (One factor was the recognition of Kosovo's independence despite Moscow's warnings that it

would respond by taking steps to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Another was NATO's handling of Georgia and Ukraine at the Bucharest summit in the spring of 2008. These provided Moscow with a double pretext to act against Georgia. In both cases the West had no plan to shield Tbilisi from the consequences of its policies.) (p. 13)

Chief of the Russian General Staff, Baluyevsky, portended Moscow's reaction a few months before Kosovo declared independence, (If we cross the Rubicon and Kosovo gains independent status tomorrow, frankly speaking, I expect this independence to echo in other regions as well, including those close to Russia's borders. You perfectly understand what I mean – I mean Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transdniestria (Russia Today, December 27, 2007).

Unfortunately, the West did not grasp the seriousness of the developing situation at its South-Eastern border. Georgia's intention to be close to the West, to its institutions and particularly, seeking the ways toward joining NATO and successful embarkation upon a westward path, made its two regions big and serious issues for itself. They were never the issue for Russia, though. Russia used and is still using Abkhazia and South Ossetia as pawns. "As soon as Georgia gets some kind of prospect from Washington of NATO membership, the next day the process of real secession of these two territories from Georgia will begin" (Civil Georgia, March 11, 2008), said one of the Russian officials. But the West could not perceive the profound impact of these words upon Georgia and permitted itself the delusion that it could dally in Georgia without safeguarding its own and Georgia's geopolitical interests, evaluated Smith (Asmus, 2009, p. 125) the situation precisely.

When, at the Bucharest Summit, American President George W. Bush said that "the Cold War is over. Russia is not our enemy" (Michele Kelemen, April 2, 2008) he betrayed incomprehension of Putin's intentions, concluded Kelemen.

The issue of NATO membership for Georgia is very important, because had it been a NATO member, the Russian attack on Georgia would have been viewed as an attack on all NATO members. In my opinion, Russia preferred to see the support of the West to Kosovo's independence as if sacrificing Georgia in return, where Russia would have a free hand. But

the point here is that the West showed no commitment to the core principles of the Charter of Paris – where the right to territorial integrity, sovereignty, equal security, and to choose one's own alliance affiliation – are stipulated. We can deduce from this that these principles were not supposed to be conditioned upon a president's personality or the effectiveness of a country's internal reforms.

Strobe Talbott, the chief architect of the Clinton administration's policy toward Russia, wrote, (The George W. Bush administration championed Georgia's Western orientation and its eligibility for NATO. At the same time, the administration tried to induce Russia toward more responsible international behavior. Georgia was the most salient and precarious test case of the United States' ability to continue expanding a democratic peace in Europe while developing a genuine, multifaceted partnership with Russia.) (Talbott in Asmus, 2010, pp. vii-viii)

Seventy-nine percent of the Georgian people expressed their willingness to join NATO in January, 2008. They had the right to feel secure and had far more reasons to worry about being attacked by Russia. Everybody knew that and by that time Russia had already changed its relations toward western institutions and turned its back to the West and all documents signed by Russians that all countries had the right to choose their own alliances, meant nothing to Moscow. Asmus (2010) explained Russia's aim, "Moscow's goal was to kill any chance of NATO ever expanding to Georgia or anywhere else along its borders and to dissuade other neighboring countries from getting too close to the West" (p.5).

Inadequate European reaction and the lame-duck administration of George W. Bush sowed tragic seeds and gave green light to Russian intrusion in Georgia. Asmus (2010) construed that, "…Bucharest … showed how divided the Alliance was and how U.S. influence was on the wane. It was the first time in memory that a U.S. president had been rebuffed in such an open manner on a key issue at a NATO summit." (p. 136). Russia took advantage of NATO's disunity and tried to foil Georgia's path to membership. Asmus defined that, "The only deterrent to Russia would have been a unified and powerful signal of NATO commitment that enlargement was indeed inevitable and that trying to stop it would have real consequences" (p. 139). President Putin was very cynical when he

"shared" his view with President Bush, "We [Russians] have been trying to help them, to help Georgia restore territorial integrity" and added that Moscow had no intention of recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia (cited in Asmus, 2010, p. 136). Putin had been longing for a long time during his presidency to punish Georgia and President Saakashvili for his yearning to join western alliances, as one of the obstacles to revive the former Soviet Union, because for Putin the most tragic event of the twentieth century was the demise of the Soviet Union. President Putin only after becoming Prime Minister of the country, since he did not want to carry the burden of the decision and at the same time, staining his reputation, used the chance and retaliated, annexed parts of Georgia as a prelude for their eventual annexation to Russia. But his calculation does not make any sense because it is obvious for the whole world whose determination was to teach the West a lesson. The Russian attack on Georgia during August 2008 was correctly predicted by the Kavkaz-Center (July 5, 2008), "Putin took the political decision to wage war against Georgia even before Medvedev's election as Russian president. Intensive preparations for the war have been under way already several months."

Illarionov, Putin's former advisor, wrote that throughout the summer, there were numerous proposals for bilateral and multilateral negotiations to seek a peaceful settlement of the conflicts. Among such proposals were those by Georgia (throughout July until August 7), by the U.S. (on July 8), by Germany (on July 14, again on July 18, July 25, July 30, and on July 31) by the EU (on July 19 and on July 22-24), and by the OSCE and Finland (on July 25, and on July 30). The Russian, South Ossetian, and Abkhaz leaders, however, brushed them all aside (Illarionov, in Cornel, 2009, p. 71). The war against Georgia was incredibly close and the army in the North Caucasus wanted a war (Anatoly Baranov).

After Kosovo proclaimed its independence and Western states hurried to recognize this new event, the outgoing Russian President's view on the disputed territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia was, as he had told the Georgian President that (. . . in this regard we shall respond not to you, but to the West – America and NATO, and in connection to Kosovo. You should not worry, it should not bother you. What we do will not be directed against you but will be our response to them). (Illarionov, in Cornel, 2009, p. 67)

Thus it was Putin's response to the West, managing to kill two birds with one stone or in other words: showing the West what Russia could do and at the same time punishing Georgia for its legitimate aspiration to join the western Alliances for its own security reasons.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said in February 2008 that, "Kosovo cannot be seen as a precedent for any other situation in the world today" (Civil Georgia, February 19, 2008). The West simply declared that Kosovo was no precedent for Abkhazia and South Ossetia – incidentally, a logical assertion – and moved on, elucidated David Smith (in Cornel, 2009, p.125).

Professor of Russian National Security Studies at the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College in Pennsylvania, Stephen Blank (in Cornel, 2009), criticized the lack of foresightedness of American foreign policy towards the regional conflicts in Georgia, which opened the path to Russian armed intervention, (…throughout this time, Washington advanced no plan to resolve the stalemates in the disputed provinces, did not publicly warn Moscow about the consequences, and was unable to organize a coherent western response to Russian pressures, all failures that Moscow exploited to the hilt. . . . The West was preoccupied elsewhere and did not take the area seriously enough.) (pp. 118-121)

What the West either could not or did not want to perceive, explained Asmus (2010) but Georgia had no doubts about was that "Moscow was trying to de facto annex these two disputed enclaves [Abkhazia and South Ossetia] bit by bit in slow motion – testing to see if the West would protest and daring Tbilisi would try to stop them" (p.25). Perevoskina M. wrote about one Russian Diplomat's comment, "The MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) recommended that the [Russian] President should recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia under two circumstances: if Georgia seriously undertakes to join NATO and in the case of war" (Nezavisimaya Gazeta,April 14, 2008). Deputy Head of the Russian Duma's committee on CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) affairs declared that recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia should not be postponed, since "The window of opportunity opened by the recognition of Kosovo will not last forever" (Georgian Daily, April 14, 2008). The Russian State Duma, in a closed session, discussed a report

prepared by the Russia secret services and MFA on a strategy for achieving the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Perevozkina, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, July 17, 2008). After establishing its "peacekeepers" in these regions, Russia attained its leverage and used these breakaway regions as pawns in an important game. Russia was truly testing how far it could press the Bush administration and crossed the red line in front of the whole world and dismembered the country. When President Bush did not respond to President Putin's stark and threatening language about Georgia, it might have been a sign of "green light" (see the Reference List (4)). But I think the West was sure that Russia would not dare to wage war with a sovereign state in the twenty-first century. They were wrong. Nonetheless, Russia accepted the challenge and showed everyone that it could fight for once lost influence in the region. Russia has passed the test well or it thinks that it has.

Even though the European Union was not yet strong or coherent enough to stand up to Moscow on its own, the United States outsourced the diplomatic lead in Russo-Georgian War to the representative of the European Union, in this case – France. When politicians in Washington decided to step back and give chance to the European Union to lead negotiations between belligerent countries, they knew that it would have less influence but with this they inferred that Moscow should conclude that the world was rallying against Moscow and its actions, underscoring how out of step Russia was with twenty-first-century Europe. President Bush decided to play a supporting role behind the scenes. According to former American national security advisor Steve Hadley, "The message we wanted to send to the Russians was: This is not the U.S. acting with its friends to penalize you. This is the response of the international system of the twenty-first century saying to you that the rules of the nineteenth century no longer apply" (cited in Asmus, 2010, p. 178). But since the 2008 war the EU's ineptitude has continued, as it allowed Russia to break with impunity the terms of the truce which the EU itself had proudly negotiated with Moscow. President Sarkozy of France seized the EU's lead role in the negotiations, despite warnings by President George W. Bush not to do so. Sarkozy later criticized Bush for not having been more active. Yet when Russia broke the cease-fire agreement, both the French President and the EU sat passively, commented Blank (in Cornel, 2009, p. 112). A loosely

worded ceasefire agreement brokered by the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, ended the fighting – but not the conflict (Lucas, 2009, p. 147). Pavel Felgenhauer (in Cornel, 2009), wrote that the Russo-Georgian War threw Western policy-makers into disarray and created utter uncertainty over what to expect from Russia in the Caucasus or elsewhere. This confusion persists to the present (p.162). Yet the future of Georgia and its place in the world are the causes for all democratic countries, which are waiting to be resolved.

If deeply offended moralists in the Clinton administration believed that Haiti was a test case for an American policy defending human rights and advancing democracy, Russo-Georgian War was a test case not only for the Bush administration but for the West Europeans, as their geopolitical interests have not been taken into account by Russia. But the West should defend its geopolitical interests not against Russia, as Russia perceives it, but for the sake of balancing Eurasia, thus for the whole world's stability. It became even more urgent now as Russia broke "the cardinal rule of post-Cold War European peace – they had overrun a border in Europe by force" (Asmus, 2010, p. 200), which raised a critical question about European future as its security order has been breached.

One who lives in this real world, especially, in a small state, has a limited option to choose his or her county's suitable allies. Common sense and good judgment demand that politicians of a small and weak state, with an 'ominous' empire to its northern border, which cannot get over its belligerency and interventionism, join the American bandwagon but not try to balance against it.

If President Bush could not influence the members of NATO in the Bucharest Summit to support Georgia's aspiration to receive MAP in April 2008, on January 9, 2009, the United States and Georgia signed a bilateral charter on strategic partnership to increase cooperation in defense, trade, energy and other areas. This charter will enable Georgia to advance Georgia's bid for membership in NATO and other western structures. Though this charter is not a mutual treaty, it is a highly-visible sign of American support for a small state, which was dragged into a five-day war with Russia. The agreement provides a road map for cooperation between the two countries across the spectrum of bilateral relations, including U.S.

assistance to Georgia's military to help the country qualify for NATO membership. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice (see the Reference List (5)), at the signing ceremony of the charter declared that the United States supported and would always support Georgia's sovereignty and its integration into the institutions of the Euro-Atlantic.

As all the states in the Southern Tier region are deadlocked, save Georgia, and because energy resources are these states' main asset, they are facing a huge challenge: they have to choose either Russia, which tries to keep the upper hand in the region or to deal directly with the rest of the world. The state of these countries makes Georgia indispensible, which allows their resources to flow to the market. But if Georgia falls under the influence of Russia, which puts much pressure on Georgia to thwart the Caspian pipeline, other states will follow suit immediately, because they will not have any other means to sell their resources for foreseeable future. But the whole region of the Caucasus and Central Asia will benefit from Georgian-American relation, which will enable them to be connected with the rest of the world and not only via Russia. If the relation of Bush's presidency between Georgia and the United States develops further, the states of the Southern Tier region will consolidate their independence, as they will not have to depend only on one route transacting Russia. The independent states of the Southern Tier region, with the backing of the United States, will become a buffer zone between Russia and the southern part of Asia, thus limiting Russia's everlasting desire to encroach on southern states' territories, as it does not know where to stop in searching of its own security. In addition, the United States is the only state, which will be able to face and even confront Russia, if it chooses to do so for the only goal: not to make possible for any country feel that other nearby states are its own 'back yard' or in other words its sphere of influence.

The Southern Tier region is not an appendage of Russia anymore and it should not be regarded as a Russian sphere of influence, even if Russia thinks otherwise. This region has become a new geopolitical entity in its own right, with its important geopolitical linkages with neighboring countries, such as Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and China. For national security, political stability and economical welfare the United States needs to be an important player in the region. Further, the small states of the Caucasus regard the United States as a power which will balance any other big

country and will be a guarantor that no other state will have superiority in the region, which in its turn will minimize the security concerns of these small states. Other bigger states are also concerned about each other and prefer if the United States stays in the region.

The Western states need full and open access to the energy reserves of the area, for which Western policymakers should promote independence and sovereignty of the countries of the region – a tract of land, which Russia is so eagerly trying to seal off. Multiple transit routes for oil transportation have to be supported, which will help the countries of the EU avoid dependence on any other country for their energy supplies on the one hand and on another hand they will become natural means to bring these countries closer to each other.

Even though, the Western Alliances strongly supported reform process in Russia, for the sake of encouraging Russia's broader integration into the world's positive forces, Russia's attack on a sovereign country proved that these endeavors bore unpleasant fruits. Because of the importance of Georgia's independence, President Bush supported Georgia's NATO aspirations, but some leaders of the European states were not able to assess correctly the new challenges. These EU member countries showed their unpreparedness to envision the new challenges, posed by the revived former Communist empire. Russia's attack on Georgia was a showcase for the whole world to watch and draw conclusions.

It is obvious that the Southern Tier region is a luring place for Russia not only of its rich soil but as a buffer zone, after acquiring of which it will be much easier for Russia to march southward towards the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, as maritime laws guarantee absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, the central and southern parts of this huge Eurasian continent should not fall under the control of any local state or states with an interest to grab other states' territories and give them a chance to negotiate the terms among themselves and restore old connections with their communication routes from China and Japan to countries of Western Europe. The access to the region should be free for all large and small countries alike.

But if Georgia, the westernmost state of the Southern Tier region, becomes unable to preserve its independence then other states of this region

will fall like dominos to the northern empire. So the international community needs to remain involved in helping to resolve conflicts in this region. In this increasingly interdependent world, though the impact of local unrest is felt regionally, their repercussions will be felt far beyond their borders. The key role of Georgia is in its crucial location: the only state in the Southern Tier region which has an access to the sea and thus to the world's oceans. Besides it is a crossroad between the Eastern and Western parts of Eurasia. That is the reason why it is vital if no local state has any domination over this state. But concerning the United States it should be otherwise; because this is a remote country with no intention to seize of any states' territories and because the United States is the only state which is able to control the balance among the regional states, it should be regarded as a beneficial force to the whole region.

Thus the disintegration of the Communist empire has created a new set of strategic challenges facing the United States and the European Union. The Caucasus is not Russia's South-East periphery anymore, though it does not want to admit this new condition. Georgia has been transformed into the key strategic venue, alongside with Turkey. This region has become the crossroads of almost every important issue to the United States on the Eurasian continent, including NATO, the Balkans, peace in the Middle East, and most importantly, a transit route for Caspian oil and gas. For the Southern Tier region, there is a need for new thinking on the part of Western policymakers as some of the Western Europeans are reluctant to evaluate the new developing challenges taking place not so far from their borders.

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