

Brief Analysis of the Situation in South Caucasus

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Abstract

Despite its small size and relatively small population, the South Caucasus occupies an important place in international geopolitics. Region is an important link between East and West that makes the world actors to give great attention to developing a strategy towards the region in order to maximize meaning of own presence in this important geo-strategic area. Above mentioned factors could contribute to the integration of the region for more effective joint action on the world scene as a union. However, to date, this bone of contention is a zone of low-intensity conflicts, the so-called "frozen conflicts" that threaten to "unfreeze" at any time. After the collapse of the Soviet Union over its entire territory ethnic conflicts became flare up. Some of them spilled over into the active full-scale wars. This is what happened in the South Caucasus in the regions of South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh. These conflicts still remain a stumbling block to normalization of relations of the Caucasian neighbor countries.

I.

The practice of international life continues to destroy the remnants of illusions associated with the Cold War and the collapse of the bipolar configuration of the world¹. Fukuyama's theory² turned out to be insolvent and the multipolar world living in tolerance for the cultures and customs of each other, respecting the framework of law and morality, and solving ethnic conflict only walking in line of negotiation is just a good, distant fairy tale, an unattainable myth.

¹ P. Tsygankov, "The Theory of International Relations, Moscow, Gardariki, 2006, introduction, p.12.

² F. Fukuyama. The End of History and the Last Man, Translated from English by MB Levine, Published by publishing company publishing "AST ", 2004, the source: <http://www.nietzsche.ru/>

In the words of Carl Schmitt "political actions and motives - is the distinction between friend and foe"³. The foreign policy of major countries is aimed at ensuring their own safety and comfort, regardless of the moral categories. NATO's operation in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan led by the U.S. illustrate the complete distortion of the concepts of inviolability of borders and sovereignty, and the events of Middle Eastern revolutions, and in particular, the bloody events in Libya put bullet in the post Westphalia world system and force, at least, firmly reflect on the UN mission and the reality of human rights.

Following the Prof. P.A. Tsygankov⁴, we must accept that international security and the interests of large states and alliances on a global scale are often ambiguous for the external security of small states of the region. "The bloody clash of clans in Somalia does not pose a threat of extension of the conflict. The bloody clash of tribes in Rwanda has consequences for Uganda, Zaire and Burundi, but no more. The bloody clashes of civilizations in Bosnia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia or in Kashmir can grow into big wars. In the Yugoslavia conflict, Russia provided diplomatic assistance to the Serbs, and Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran and Libya provided financial assistance and arms to the Bosnians not for reasons of ideology, power politics or economic interests, but because of cultural kinship. "Cultural conflict intensifies and becomes more dangerous today than ever before in history" said Vaclav Havel, and Jacques Delors agreed that "future conflicts will be ignited by sparks of national factor rather than economic or ideological". And the most dangerous cultural conflicts are those that occur along the fault lines between civilizations. ", says Samuel Huntington⁵.

Geographical position of the South Caucasus makes it an important strategic link between East and West. Thus, this region plays the role of the arena of conflict of interest of the global rivals. The South Caucasus has always been in the area of traditional geopolitical interests of international actors such as Russia, Turkey and Iran, among which the region is located. The territory of the region is less than the UK, and the total population is roughly equal to population of the Netherlands. The isthmus, which lies between Russia and the Middle East on the one hand, and between Europe and Central Asia - the other has serious strategic implications for the future development of a rather large and important region, which lies at the crossroads of

³ Schmitt, K. Concept of the Political / Issues Sociology. 1992. № 1. Pp. 37-67.

⁴ International Relations: Theory, Conflicts, Movements, Organizations, ed. Prof. P. Tsygankov, 3rd edition, Moscow, Alfa M, Infra-M, 2011. Pp. 22-23.

⁵ Samuel Huntington "The Clash of Civilizations", Multipolar, Polycivilized World, source: <http://lib.rus.ec/b/79038>

South-Eastern Europe and the Greater Middle East⁶. The geopolitical position of the region attracts attention and keen interest of the big neighbors since time immemorial and, in terms of our, increased interest in South Caucasus of the West (NATO) with a dominant of United States - a superpower of modernity. The continuing rivalry for influence in the South Caucasus on the one hand raises the importance of small countries and gives the population of optimism, but is also fraught with danger to be milled in the mill of interests of major actors. South Caucasus - is a link between east and west, a bridge between American democracy and Islamic petro-dollars. Thus, in the South Caucasus one faces a complex configuration. The problem is that the interests of political actors rely on completely different, often very personal dimensions such as geopolitical, ethnic, religious, etc. The current alignment of forces is two-tier: on one side - the South Caucasian states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), on the other side - cross-border large states (Turkey, Russia, Iran), plus the United States. Nowadays this is an area of so-called "frozen conflicts" which prevent the use of the geopolitical potential of the region. "The Karabakh conflict is often called "frozen", but this term is misleading. Around the conflict happens a lot of changes which not always are for the better ...», said Thomas de Waal⁷. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are the de facto independent republics under the shadow of "big brother " - Russia, Nagorno-Karabakh and some adjacent areas, constituting the so-called "security belt", regarded as the de jure territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, in fact are an unrecognized state under the auspices of the Republic of Armenia and ambiguously tacit approval all of the same Russia. Analysis of the political forces shows that the South Caucasian states themselves cannot resolve their ethnic and territorial issues. The situation is especially acute after the events of the Tskhinvali war in August 2008.

Specific character of conflicts in the South Caucasian region requires separate consideration. Following S. Minasyan, L. Deriglazova can be said that conflicts of the region are asymmetric, the statuses of the parties are not equal: Azerbaijan is an internationally recognized state, Nagorno-Karabakh - an unrecognized formation⁸ whose interests in the international community represents Armenia. Asymmetry in this particular conflict is also reflected in the fact that in the international community Armenia

⁶ Caucasian Neighborhood: Turkey and South Caucasus. Yerevan, the Caucasus Institute, 2008. The article Iskandaryan A. "The South Caucasus between Isolation and Integration: Genesis and Perspectives". P. 7.

⁷ Thomas de Waal. Black Garden. Between war and peace. Chapters from the Russian edition, source:http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/russian/in_depth/newsid_4148000/4148580.stm

⁸ L. Deriglazova, S. Minasian. Nagorno-Karabakh: the Paradoxes of the Strengths and Weaknesses in Asymmetric Conflict. Yerevan, the Caucasus Institute, 2011. P. 5.

is the representative of Nagorno-Karabakh who takes the obligation to regional security. And the Nagorno-Karabakh is though unrecognized, but nevertheless separate actor⁹. Thus, all talks are held in a bilateral format between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Azerbaijani side interprets the conflict as an "aggression" from the Armenian side. Armenia has long sought to bring negotiations on a trilateral level, which is unacceptable for Azerbaijan¹⁰. The same is true with the conflict Georgia-Abkhazia-South Ossetia. The position of the Georgian-Russian relations, or to be more precise lack of them is rather tense. In this case the "victim" is Georgia. By official recognition of states of South Ossetia and Abkhazia Russia sharply limited the ability of the West to use the "peacekeeping" toolkit for the implementation of its geopolitical interests in the region. At the same time, the ideas of entering "western peacekeeping forces" are still being discussed regarding the settlement of the Karabakh conflict¹¹. Participating countries cannot achieve any significant breakthrough in the current situation; however, leaders of major mediator countries, although they manifested a lively interest, do not have any visible changes in the peaceful settlement of conflicts of the region. Pro-Russian political analysts and geopolitics say that the Minsk Group has exhausted itself¹², whereas the Armenian-Azerbaijani scientists still do not lose hope for a favorable outcome of the mediation¹³¹⁴. OSCE itself expressed the unacceptability of prolongation of the status quo in the region in the executive summary of the "Report of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs' Field Assessment Mission to the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan Surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh"¹⁵. Russia's mediation¹⁶ in the Georgian-Ossetia conflict, by contrast, led to an escalation, rapid "unfreeze" of the conflict in August 2008, which greatly influenced the positions of all stakeholders in the region. Although the cause of the deployment of military action in the region to be the

⁹ *ibid*, p. 32.

¹⁰ Guluzade V. Caucasus among enemies and friends (articles, interviews, speeches)", source: http://www.azeribook.com/politika/vafa_guluzade/sredi_vragov_i_druzey.htm "...But it is not a conflict of Azerbaijan with Nagorno-Karabakh, it is Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict and Russia in it is directly involved..."

¹¹ V.A. Zakharov, A.G. Areshev, Caucasus after 08/08/2008: Old Players in the New Alignment of Forces. Moscow, Quadriga, 2010. P. 199.

¹² *ibid*, p.200.

¹³ South Caucasus: The Origins of Separatism, Conflict Resolution, Long-term Peace. Proceedings of the International Scientific-Practical Conference on the 90th Anniversary of the Diplomatic Service of Azerbaijan. Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. 20 November 2009, ed. N.G. Aliyev.P. 6.

¹⁴ Caucasus 2009. Yearbook of the Caucasus Institute, 2010. P. 106.

¹⁵"Report of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs' Field Assessment Mission to the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan Surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh" <http://www.osce.org/mg/7620>

¹⁶ South Caucasus: The Origins of Separatism, Conflict Resolution, Long-term Peace. Proceedings of the International Scientific-Practical Conference on the 90th Anniversary of the Diplomatic Service of Azerbaijan. Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. 20 November 2009, ed. N.G. Aliyev.P. 94.

impulsive foreign policy of the President of Georgia M. Saakashvili¹⁷, some experts believe.

Nowadays, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict exists in the form of low intensity conflict¹⁸. However, the situation is ambiguous it is both fragile and stable. This phenomenon is associated with a balance of forces in the region. The point is that NATO (read - U.S.), Collective Security Treaty Organization (read - Russia), the OSCE Minsk Group, as well as immediate neighbors-Turkey, Iran, are interested in direct *participation* in the settlement of peace in the region. Each of these countries and the participating organizations are seeking to expand their own influence in the region. Resolution of geostrategic disagreements peacefully will lead to the neutralization of the regional significance of the mediating countries, and thus weaken their influence in the South Caucasus. Whereas, the resumption of active hostilities could lead to worthless and very dangerous development, namely, engaging in military operations cross-border Russia, Turkey and Iran. This confrontation threatens to escalate into something more global, as the west will want to respond to military actions that unfolded in South Caucasian affairs. Moreover, this development means a sharp aggravation of relations between Turkey and Russia, Iran, U.S., Iran and Turkey, and of course, the Russia-NATO Council. Each country will have to move an already fragile line of neutrality, and thus sacrifice some interests, stand before a choice, and so obviously lose much of the influence in the region. Not worth even mentioning, that this alignment would be devastating for participating countries. Therefore, it is important for small countries to be able to hold the balance of forces. However, even such a balance can not last forever, despite what many experts believe that all conflict participating countries and country mediators will do everything possible to keep the conflict in this suspended state^{19,20,21}. According to the President of the Foundation for Political Studies of the Caspian region

¹⁷ V.A. Zakharov, A.G. Areshev, *Caucasus after 08/08/2008: Old Players in the New Alignment of Forces*. Moscow, Quadriga, 2010. P.195.

¹⁸ L. Deriglazova, S. Minasian. *Nagorno-Karabakh: the Paradoxes of the Strengths and Weaknesses in Asymmetric Conflict*. Yerevan, the Caucasus Institute, 2011. Remarks made by S. Minasian. The term "low-intensity conflict»(LIC) today is often used synonymously with asymmetrical, guerrilla, rebel or unconventional wars and conflicts. Traditionally, the term military-strategic analysis is used to define armed conflict with the low level of interaction of the parties, low loss and low participation of major combat units. Examples of hostilities during low-intensity conflicts are sniper attacks, raids and reconnaissance and sabotage groups of small mobile units, using mainly small arms and light weapons without escalation, and active operations, major portions of the regular forces.

¹⁹ *Caucasus 2009. Yearbook of the Caucasus Institute, 2010. Article – David Petrosyan “The Unrecognized Countries of Southern Caucasus in 2009: on a Way to Formation of new Status Quo in Region”*, p.110.

²⁰ *Armenia-Azerbaijan 2005-2008: Opinions about the Main*. Yerevan, 2008. Interview with the Head of Research Centre East-West, Arastul Orojulu.

²¹ *South Caucasus Today. Collection of Articles, Interviews, Essays*. Yerevan, 2009. Interview with the American Political Scientist V. Sockor. Pp. 64-65.

V. Guluzade, conflicts in the Caucasus will last until the state of the region is not completely freed from the pressure of Russia²².

Nowadays, Azerbaijan leads sufficiently independent and aggressive policy that, in principle, is rather clear: seven districts of Azerbaijan occupied by military forces of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, the so-called "security belt"²³, speak for themselves, and the export pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline increased interest in the country both of the West and Russia. So now we see that due to balanced and independent position Azerbaijan is sometimes being declared as NATO partner (although, unlike Georgia, the country never applied for its membership) and sometimes as a strategic partner of Russia²⁴. This, coupled with oil revenues, which the country freely spends on armaments, makes Azerbaijan's position more than understandable. Though, some pro-Armenian experts consider that there will be some pressure used towards I. Aliyev during the upcoming meeting of the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Kazan.²⁵

While the geo-strategic situation in Armenia so far dictates its own rules: to maintain a balance in foreign policy Armenia has resorted to the principle of complementarities²⁶. It maintains a delicate balance. In foreign policy of Armenia the two vectors took shape: a pro-Russian direction and the direction towards the West. Also cannot be ignored the emerging shoots of the Armenian-Turkish diplomacy, which were the cause of deep dissatisfaction of their permanent strategic partner Azerbaijan²⁷, and not least the influence of a large Armenian Diaspora^{28,29}.

On the territory of Georgia continues "tug of war", arranged both by Russia and by the West over Georgia's bid to join the NATO membership. Although, lately, in connection with a string of Arab revolutions, and in particular the events in Libya, the West is a little cold to the region. Russia's recognition of the sovereignty of Abkhazia

²² "But it is not a conflict of Azerbaijan with Nagorno-Karabakh it is Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict and Russia in it is directly involved...", Vafa Guluzade "Caucasus among Enemies and Friends" (Articles, Interviews, Speeches). http://www.azeribook.com/politika/vafa_guluzade/sredi_vragov_i_druzey.htm

²³ Material from Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian-controlled_territories_surrounding_Nagorno_Karabakh

²⁴ Kh.Gadji-Zade. Azerbaijan – Regional Integration into Explosive Region and the Next Ten Years of the Southern Caucasus. P. 56.

²⁵ <http://henaran.am/?p=21188> (in Armenian language)

²⁶ Pro Patria, II, Studies on Strategy and Security, compiled and edited with an introduction and commentary by A. Ayvazyan, Yerevan, 2007. Hrachya Arzoumanian, Military Security of Armenia (Basic concepts and definitions). P. 38.

²⁷ Saban Kardas. Turkey and Azerbaijan: One Nation Two States? Jamestown Foundation, Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 6 Issue: 193, October 21, 2009. [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35630](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35630)

²⁸ Caspian Weekly, "Armenian Diaspora – influence on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" <http://en.caspianweekly.org/main-subjects/others/armenian-issue/1850-armenian-diaspora-influence-on-nagorno-karabakh-conflict.html>

²⁹ B. Dyatlov, E. Melkonian. The Armenian Diaspora, Essays Sociocultural Typology, the Caucasus Institute, 2009. Chapter 4, P. 130.

and South Ossetia has also played a role in this matter. Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia G. Vashadze commented the ongoing as follows: "In general, Russia does not need the international mission in Georgia, because it acts contrary to international law. To this end, it "killed" the OSCE mission in Georgia and for the same purpose vetoed the extension of UN mission"³⁰.

It is also worth touching another factor related to all the countries of the South Caucasus. This factor is important in the aspect of developing good-neighborly relations between the countries of the region and resolves their ethnical conflicts in a peaceful way. This refers to a deficit of democracy in the ruling regimes of the South Caucasus countries, which also gives a good feed to the Western actors to put the pressure on the leaders of the countries by threatening to stop financing them³¹. In Azerbaijan, for instance, the new ambassador of U.S. M. Bryza said about the regress in democratic processes³². As noted by the April 15 U.S. Ambassador Mary Jovanovich, the decision to suspend the provision of assistance to Armenia program "Millennium Challenge" at the end of the implementation in September this year, five-year program funding of \$ 235.6 million was dictated by, among other things, the lack of progress in such areas of "good governance " as the freedom of press and assembly³³. The latest clashes of Georgian police with opposition had also a backfire³⁴, though EU ambassador has regarded the actions of government legal³⁵.

Conclusion

Summing up, we would like to briefly identify the factors hindering the integration of South Caucasus countries. In the first place we should mention ethno-conflicts that are not only an apple of discord between the neighboring countries, but also provide a good opportunity for international actors to speculate various categories of diplomacy, putting pressure on that one to the other participating countries, and supporting, thus not only their own presence, but also their influence in the region.

³⁰ Press-Conference of the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia. June 16, 2009. http://www.mfa.gov.ge/print.php?gg=1&sec_id=58&info_id=10521&lang_id=GEO (in Georgian)

³¹ <http://www.monitorjournal.com/arxiv/50-kemaleddin.htm>

³² Matthew Braise: U.S. says not enough reform in Azerbaijan and ascertains regression. source: http://analitika.at.ua/news/mehtju_brajza_ssha_schitajut_nedostatochnymi_reformy_v_azerbajdzhane_i_konstatirujut_regress/2011-05-20-44889

³³ Armenia debates reasons for Millennium Challenge cancellation, Eurasianet.org <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/63337>

³⁴ <http://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/georgian-opposition-clash-with-police-in-tbilisi-2113/>

³⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIGP-E1x8Ls>

The problem for the small countries of the South Caucasus region is that in the clashes of interest of the Great Neighbors it is very difficult to keep the balance of powers, which would be the best solution for the national security of the local countries. Both the peaceful solution of ethnical conflicts of the region and the resumption of active hostilities are not profitable for the mediator countries, thus their representatives in region will do all possible to keep the conflicts in such "frozen" state as long as possible. The lack of democracy is one more hook used by the West to rule the region and dictate its own conditions.

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