

+

# GEORGIA: REGIONAL STABILITY IN THE TRANSFORMED INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Pikria ASANISHVILI

*Ph.D. (Political Science), senior research associate,  
Institute of Political Science, Georgian Academy of Sciences  
(Tbilisi, Georgia)*

---

Avtandil TUKVADZE

*D.Sc. (Political Science), professor, Department of Political Science,  
the Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University  
(Tbilisi, Georgia)*

---

The end of the bi-polar world raised the questions of how the international system will function, and whether it will become multipolar or unipolar. Some members of the expert community believe that geopolitical rival-

ry in today's multipolar world will be the only way to sort things out among the entities of geopolitics. The struggle for spheres of influence is growing fiercer. Some international factors are gaining importance, while the significance of others

is waning. This was probably why Gernot Erler, a Bundestag deputy, has offered the highly thought-provoking idea that in the early 21st century we are witnessing the regression of political culture to the ideas of the 20th century. The process is gradually becoming irreversible: in the West and in the East, political decision-making depends on geopolitical and geostrategic projects to an extent which is fraught with rising tension.<sup>1</sup>

Many political decisions in the international sphere are still rooted in realism, whereby state interests prevail over all other considerations. But it should be noted that many of the conceptions and approaches circulating in the world system have changed. In the 20th century, it was vitally important to place state interests above anything else since international contacts were limited and the coefficient of their mutual dependence low. Today, globalization is gradually pushing aside national ideologies. Against the background of the changing international system, when the international community and its institutions are gaining weight and states are growing more interdependent, it has become possible to realize common interests. This, in turn, pushed the regional security problem to the foreground. The old models of the Cold War period should be revised.

Security as a social category has long become a liberal postulate along with democracy and human rights, even though Emma Rothschild of Great Britain has pointed out that politicians of various political affiliations, irrespective of their willingness or unwillingness to embrace liberal values, treat security with due attention. The security category presents equal problems for all, despite the fact that it is equally urgent for each and every country: it is hard to determine which security type is needed for countries and social groups and what should be done to achieve it.<sup>2</sup>

The post-bipolar international system tends toward regional security complexes for the simple reason that the capitalism/socialism ideological confrontation no longer interferes with the functioning of regional sub-systems. Today, while

regional and sub-regional systems are gradually coming into being, the process sometimes assumes sharp forms. The international system is seeking roads leading to a secure political and social milieu and complexes which can add stability to security. Today, the Eurasian zone is the main area of international relations; according to Zbigniew Brzezinski, it should acquire a Trans-Eurasian Security System (TESS).<sup>3</sup>

History knows of several regional stability and security models: the Holy Alliance formed in 1815 based on the primacy of super-regional power expected to consolidate other much weaker countries; and the collective security system which emerged after World War II when the West and the Soviet Union found themselves in two hostile camps. This gave rise to NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) as collective security models. Under the latter model, states are fully aware of the real or associated enemy to be stopped by concerted military efforts. The entire model hinges on the idea of a common enemy, therefore it is better suited to rebuff it and deal with international problems rather than with regional socioeconomic issues. Then we see a collective security model designed to address regional problems by means of negotiations within international legal principles, rather than through the use of force. It also envisages a collective response to aggression against one of its members. According to A. Malgin, a system which is too loose at the global level is best suited to the regional level. In his article "Sredizemnomorskoe izmerenie evropeyskoy bezopasnosti" (the European Security Mediterranean Dimension), he used the OSCE to demonstrate that it is successfully coping with the tasks posed by its founders. Not limited to the military sphere, it is dealing with the humanitarian, economic, and political baskets.

The changing international system has posed the problem of choosing a regional security model; by the same token it has confronted the Southern Caucasus (and Georgia as its part) with the need to identify its place in it. The correct choice is critically important: the region is developing into a

<sup>1</sup> See: "Geostrategic Transformation of the Post-Bipolar Period," *Politics*, No. 11, 2002 (in Georgian).

<sup>2</sup> See: E. Rothschild, "What is Security?" *GSC Quarterly*, No. 3, Winter 2002, pp. 21-22.

<sup>3</sup> See: Zb. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, New York, 1997.

zone of rivalry among the superpowers. The local states, including Georgia, should clearly identify their positions in Eurasia; they should take into account the current and future processes in which the strong states are playing first fiddle. Georgia's position is vitally important in terms of

the regional security system it will choose, even though for political and economic reasons it carries little weight in the international system. The positions of strong states and their geostrategic and geopolitical interests in Georgia and the Southern Caucasus are much more consequential.

## Russia's Role and Strategy

In the wake of the Cold War, when NATO started its rapid eastward movement, Russia allegedly opted for democracy; this eased confrontation in Central and Eastern Europe. The Russian Federation, however, negatively responded to a new regional defense system in this part of the world. Russian politicians are convinced that the enlargement of NATO in Central and Eastern Europe and its presence in some of the post-Soviet states will draw new dividing lines in Europe and cripple the cause of security. On top of this, relations with the West could move away from cooperation to confrontation. Moscow believes that a European system of collective security with the OSCE playing the leading role may become an alternative to NATO enlargement. The Russian Federation is prepared to discuss joint RF-NATO security guarantees to the Central and East European states.

In this way, the NATO transformation process acquired new trends—transition from the conception of “mutually complementary institutions” to the NATO-centrist model, in which the alliance could claim the leading role when dealing with security problems across the Euro-Atlantic expanse (with the OSCE playing a much less prominent role). This created certain problems for Russia: eastward expansion was no longer regarded merely as a source of new dividing lines in Europe. Russia felt threatened because by the same token it would be removed from the centers and mechanisms of decision-making on issues directly related to its national interests.<sup>4</sup>

Regrettably, the fears turned out to be well-founded: the West came to post-socialist Europe and, together with Turkey, started moving toward the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia. (This is explained not only by the regions' energy fuel reserves, but also primarily by meta-strategic interests.) “Through the Caucasus, armed forces can soon become deployed in such important regions as Central Asia, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East, as well as in the Persian Gulf trans-region. This explains why early in the 1990s, the Caucasus attracted attention from the viewpoint of safe transportation of strategic resources.”<sup>5</sup> This is related to regional issues. There were also global reasons behind America's interest in the Caucasus and Central Asia: the Taliban, dictatorship in Iraq, and the Indian-Pakistani tension over Kashmir (Islamabad tried to place Afghanistan and Central Asia under its control). These factors are behind the U.S.'s resolution to spread its influence to these post-Soviet regions; otherwise destabilization would have spread from Central Asia and the Caucasus worldwide.

At first Russia watched America's activities in the post-Soviet expanse and all the projected oil and gas transportation routes with a great share of skepticism. Moscow expected to promptly wind up the war in Chechnia, while Russian experts predicted the failure of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, the TRACECA, and the Great Silk Road projects. Their forecasts proved incorrect. The Kremlin started using the agreements with CIS members to consolidate its role of regional leader. It added much more vigor to its efforts to set up a regional security system within the military-political Collective Security Treaty (CST) ratified in Tashkent in 1992. At first it united Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Uzbekistan,

<sup>4</sup> See: V. Laber, O. Skripchenko, “Partnerstvo Rossii i NATO: real'nost i perspektivy,” *Bezopasnost Evrazii* (Moscow), No. 4, 2001, pp. 474-475.

<sup>5</sup> V. Maisaia, “Otnosheniia Gruzii s NATO,” in: *Voprosy politologii*, Tbilisi, 2002, p. 62.

and Russia. Later, Belarus, Georgia, and Azerbaijan also joined it (the latter two left it in 1999). Moscow spared no effort to turn the CST into an effective collective security organization. In 1995, the structure was registered with the U.N. Security Council, which gave it more weight in the international security system. It seems, however, that since several members had already left, its efficiency somewhat decreased. To reach an adequate efficiency level, its members must embrace new principles of strategic thinking; this might attract those that left and help Moscow reconfirm its status as a super-regional power. This might end fragmentation of the CIS expanse into regional groups seen as CIS alternatives (the GUUAM, EurAsEC, and SCO). If Russia changed its strategy for the sake of a genuinely effective regional security system, Georgia and other post-Soviet countries would have become its active partners. On many occasions, Georgia described its good-neighborly relations with Moscow as one of its key priorities and repeatedly stated that stable and secure Russia was the guarantor of regional stability.<sup>6</sup>

## America's Role

In the post-Cold War period Eurasia moved to the forefront of the U.S.'s geostrategic designs. Gernot Erlner's words about the revived geopolitical thinking of the 20th century were addressed primarily to Washington. Prominent American politicians have armed themselves with the Heartland theory of British and German political thinkers to insist on three indispensable principles: the United States should prevent Russia's rebirth as an empire; the post-Soviet expanse should acquire geopolitical pluralism; while the West should immediately start looking for a key to the Caspian energy reserves.<sup>7</sup> Washington is pursuing these aims by creating corresponding regional complexes. By actively cooperating with NATO, the CIS countries could create stable structures, which, in turn, would contribute to the regions' economic and political defense systems. At the first stage, the United States contemplated several variants: direct integration of the region's states into NATO; alternative military-political projects outside NATO; a new military-political bloc compliant with Western geo-economic interests. The regional cooperation model, GUUAM being one, could potentially develop its political contacts to bring regional interests closer together in order to become a solid foundation of strategic partnership with the West and the U.S.

On the whole, the United States attaches great importance to strategic thinking and corresponding projects. At the state level strategy is seen as policy; common actions with other countries to secure national aims are seen as politics, while the prospects of strategic thinking are described as strategic vision. Policy is the most important. It also has a great influence on the U.S. political culture, which, in turn, helps the American political elite formulate strategic aims and identify adequate instruments. It is easy to see, considering the above-mentioned values, what radical changes are occurring in U.S. strategy.

According to a prominent Russian expert Alexey Bogaturov, today the United States is busy resolving a dual problem. First, Washington is seeking soft mobilization of the allies' reserves to use them to attain common Western aims under American guidance. Second, America is out to fragment and break up the real and latent potential of opposition to the West, including the "leveling-off" strategy. To achieve this, the U.S. is creating and supports not very strong (and not very stable) new states in the post-Soviet expanse involved in cooperation and "asymmetric mutual dependence" with the West. They cherish American help, which makes these countries responsive to American recommendations.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See: M. Saakashvili, President of Georgia, "Georgia's Security Challenges," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 5 August, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> For more detail, see: Zb. Brzezinski, op. cit., pp.120-121.

<sup>8</sup> See: A. Bogaturov, "'Strategia razravnivania' v mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniakh i vneshnei politike SShA," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia*, No. 2, 2001, p. 24.

Viewed from Russia, the American strategy looks like a resolute turn toward regionalization of the entire expanse of western and partly central Eurasian zones to provide it with a new state and communication structure suited as much as possible to prospective worldwide economic growth, including in the industrially developed countries.

Indeed, America's strategic interests do lie in Eurasia, to be more exact in its central and western parts, which seemingly threatens Russia's interests. We are convinced, however, that its strategy is not aimed either at weakening the Russian Federation, or at squeezing it out of this place for the simple reason that Russia's destabilization and complete weakening will not only threaten Western interests, but may also endanger international stability. This explains why, when it comes to the crunch, the United States never fails to publicly declare its complete trust in and its complete support of Russia. Eurasian security, Eurasia being the central target of the White House's vital interests, makes Moscow Washington's most indispensable partner. The United States sees control over this zone as a tool of protection against Mid-Eastern fundamentalism. With this aim in view, Washington is creating America-oriented complexes in the Middle East able to balance the regional security system to protect the Euro-Atlantic Alliance against Islamic terrorism. In this context, control of the Caucasus will not be enough; it seems that the GUUAM project is stagnating precisely because Washington is mainly interested in Eurasian zones much larger than this "tiny part of the continent." The White House needs new security structures on the continent to serve as regional systems of sorts and as NATO partners able to preserve security in their spheres of influence and on a worldwide scale.

## Georgia's Place in the Regional System

At the beginning of the post-bipolar period, Georgia was busy looking for a new place in the international system; there was no unity in its political elite: there were pro-Russian and pro-Western camps. Some people went as far as saying that Georgia should become a regional state to fulfill what they described as Georgia's historic mission. Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia was one of them: it was his aim to set up the "Caucasian House" in which Georgia would play the role of a link between the region's south and north. The idea was short-lived: it died when a Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, which had no warm feelings toward official Tbilisi, was set up in the north.

In the hope of gaining access to the Black Sea, the Confederation made Sukhumi its capital. The choice was a significant one in terms of geopolitics: at that time, Abkhazia was seen as a toehold of the Confederation's struggle against Georgia and separatist actions against Russia. Later, when Jokhar Dudaev came to power in Chechnia, the Confederation's Chairman Iu. Soslanbekov personally knocked together, in Abkhazia, the Chechen battalion (later known as the Abkhazian battalion) under Shamil Basaev's command. Its widely known cruelty toward those who lived in Abkhazia was later confirmed by the fighters themselves.<sup>9</sup>

On 20 August, 1992, at the very beginning of the war in Abkhazia, a Confederation "decree" instructed its armed units to make their way to Abkhazia, described Tbilisi as a disaster zone, and designated it as a terrorist target. The hysterics in Abkhazia caused panic in Georgia; its political will and economic potential weakened; it could no longer insist on its statehood idea, while its political community was busy discussing neutrality in relation to the Caucasus and the West, even though the geopolitical context was hardly conducive to it. There are many conflict zones inside the country, which makes neutrality next to impossible; on top of this, America, the EU, Turkey, and Russia, all of them strong states, will never agree to Georgian neutrality.

<sup>9</sup> See: B.U. Kostoev, *Kavkazskiy meridian*, Moscow, 2003, p. 125.

According to a prominent Georgian expert, A. Rondeli, in the early 1990s the country was pursuing the nearest aims, while its strategy remained obviously idealistic. Later, Tbilisi finally arrived at a much more balanced foreign policy. By the end of the 1990s, Georgia had acquired two highly urgent political problems: its dependence on unpredictable Russia and its internal weakness, which did not allow it to pursue independent foreign policy, made it impossible to address Georgia's strategic tasks: European integration and an effective model of regional cooperation. A. Rondeli managed, however, to formulate some priorities: restored territorial integrity; integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures; friendly and balanced relations with the neighbors; decreased Russian military influence; and regional cooperation, including the country's involvement in economic projects.<sup>10</sup>

Its clear priorities made it easier to identify regional partners. In 1997, the GUAM regional structure was set up; two years later, its members were openly discussing the possibility of moving from economic cooperation to a coordinated regional security policy. Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Kh. Khasanov, for example, supported the idea of a coordinated defense policy within the Partnership for Peace NATO program, which had already attracted 16 NATO states and 4 GUAM members (16 + 4). It was realized in April 1999. Georgian territory was used for military exercises of Ukrainian, Georgian, and Azeri armed units. The GUAM members declared that their organization was open to all states; very soon Uzbekistan joined it. The Organization received one more letter "U" to become GUUAM. Since its members left the CST, Russia interpreted GUUAM as a CIS alternative designed to leave Moscow out in the cold. In this context, Russia felt it expedient to assume stricter control over the post-Soviet expanse, which primarily affected GUUAM—the structure was rapidly losing its functions and popularity within its geopolitical area.

Georgian political analyst G. Khelashvili wrote that the processes became irreversible because of the involvement of the United States, Turkey, and Iran, to say nothing of Russia. Today, they are still actively interfering in GUUAM's regional processes with both negative and positive results. There were several reasons behind GUUAM's inadequate functioning: the "frozen conflicts" as factors of potential destabilization and war, and the unregulated border issues fraught with further destabilization or even wars. To be successful, South Caucasian cooperation demands concerted efforts by all the local states. Today, however, Armenia is steering clear of it because of the Karabakh conflict and will continue doing so until Baku restores its territorial integrity or Erevan joins Karabakh. Finally, along with the ruling elites, the ordinary people should recognize the urgency of regional cooperation. This has not happened so far.<sup>11</sup>

Russia's attitude toward GUUAM is another reason for its present condition. It badly hit Georgia as the most active promoter of Western values in the post-Soviet expanse. It is involved in all regional projects funded by the West, the Partnership for Peace being one of them. Since 2001, however, its policies have been changing and not without Russia's influence. Foreign policy and domestic processes have become aggravated; the problems of Ajaria and Javakhetia have moved to the fore. Aslan Abashidze, who headed Ajaria, did not hesitate to blackmail Tbilisi. This undermined its already crippled territorial integrity. Moscow, for its part, violated international legal norms by offering Russian citizenship to the people of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. On top of this, the Georgian power system was transferred to Russian companies, which made Georgia even more dependent on the Russian Federation.

Paul Goble, a prominent American political scientist, warned that Georgia might lose its independence: he was convinced that Russia would stage a series of political actions aimed at either altering state policies, or removing its leaders from power. Tbilisi would be forced to sign an agreement which would make it even more dependent on Russia than Armenia and Tajikistan. He concluded his analysis by saying that Georgia was the weakest link of the security belt which separates the South and the West from Russia.

<sup>10</sup> See: A. Rondeli, "The Choice of Independent Georgia," *Akhali azri*, No. 3, 2001, p. 7 (in Georgian).

<sup>11</sup> See: G. Khelashvili, "Regional Cooperation in the Southern Caucasus: the Context of a Historical and Political Utopia," *Akhali azri*, No. 4, 2002, p. 8.

The situation did not reach the critical point the American analyst predicted, yet the threat of Russian aggression is still alive. This makes a regional security system very much needed; in fact, both Armenia and Azerbaijan also need it—the recent initiatives of their presidents are ample evidence of this.<sup>12</sup> The South Caucasian states have to decide which type of regional stability they prefer.

We are convinced that a group regional security model based on the regional superpower factor should be rejected for the simple reason that there is no such superpower in the Southern Caucasus. A collective defense system based on the common enemy factor is likewise ineffective due to the absence of such enemy. In fact, regional stability is expected not so much to deal with problem by means of force as to adequately respond to the changes in the international system; it is also expected to address socioeconomic and other urgent problems.

The European Union is the best example of this type of security model. The West European ruling elites have transformed the very idea of security. The states abandoned enmity and territorial claims for the sake of balanced shared European interests. The mutual dependence principle created economic prosperity and ensured continental stability.

French political analyst Jean Radvanyi has pointed out that while in the past stability was interpreted as a political and geopolitical balancing act which ruled out the possibility of violating the achieved balance, European integration turned the balance of power into a balance of interests realized through supra-national structures free from any nationalist, political, or economic biases.<sup>13</sup>

We believe that cooperation within the South Caucasian regional system does not stipulate the local states' complete political, economic, and legal integration. It will be achieved through their goodwill, which will help them identify their common interests and find an appropriate place in the international system.

---

<sup>12</sup> See: P. Asanishvili, "South Caucasian Dimension of Regional Security," *Politics*, No. 8, 2002 (in Georgian).

<sup>13</sup> See: J. Radvanyi, *Geopoliticheskaia transformatsia na Iuzhnom Kavkaze*, Tbilisi, 1996.