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Bilateral and Institutional Partnership between Georgia and the United States: a Retrospective Analysis

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Abstract---After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the South Caucasus region became an extremely unstable geopolitical space, a battleground for the interests of several global players in global politics - the United States, Russia, the European Union, and other local players such as Iran and Turkey. The current difficult situation in the South Caucasus is the result of inter-ethnic conflicts, territorial and other disputes, as well as conflicts of interest of third parties in the region. The importance of Georgia in the region is determined primarily by its geographical location, which makes the country a central hub for transport communications. In this context, achieving stability in the South Caucasus is an important task for all participants in the international political process, realizing their interests in this region.

Keywords---Caspian and South Caucasus region, conflict of interest, foreign policy, Georgia, Russia, USA

Introduction

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet space has become a priority in U.S. foreign policy, focusing primarily on the energy-rich countries of the Caspian region. The United States has provided significant economic, military, and humanitarian assistance to Georgia since independence in 1991. The United States has also become one of the main international guarantors of Georgia's sovereignty. The United States is also a key mediator in Georgia's territorial integrity and its Euro-Atlantic integration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. URL: <https://mfa.gov.ge/MainNav/ForeignPolicy/BilateralRelations>. Accessed 24 May 2021.).

The foreign policy of the Georgian government was fully in line with the situation at the time, with one pro-Western politician replacing another in Tbilisi, who differed from the previous ones only in his pro-Western orientation. Naturally, such a resolute display of Western efforts has inevitably led to major practical steps in military cooperation with the West. Leading EU countries are providing military-technical, military-educational, and financial assistance to Tbilisi. Although the United States was one of the first to recognize Georgia's independence in 1992, it later ignored the country, citing Russia's role in the region as a guarantee of stability in the wider region. Gradually, however, Washington's interest in the region has grown as Russia's influence in the CIS has waned (Ollivier et al., 2016; Deori, 2015).

The Main Part

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback told Svobodnaya Georgia (March 28, 1998): "... after the collapse of the USSR, there is an urgent need to enter areas of historical significance among world powers ..." "... At a time when Central Asia and the Caucasus are seeking US support, this opportunity must not be missed. To realize this opportunity, we must first invest in the development of Caspian oil and its transportation bypassing Russia, as well as the global project of the Eurasian transport corridor through the territories of Georgia and Azerbaijan". Shevardnadze was convinced that Western countries were capable of pursuing an active military policy in the Caucasus. He said in August 1992, "If Russian troops can be in Georgia, why can't NATO troops be here?" During a visit to NATO headquarters in Brussels in June 1993, he called on the alliance to take an active part in resolving the conflict between Georgians and Abkhazia. In August 1993, he recognized America's limited military role in the Caucasus, especially in the training

of military personnel. According to Shevardnadze, America's presence should not be seen as a sign of competition with Russia. He stressed the need for some cooperation between Russia and the United States (Litvak, 1996; Dalal & Chahal, 2016).

Another aspect of Georgian-American cooperation was the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline through Georgia to supply energy in the interests of the United States. At the same time, the Georgian government has chosen to forget about the environmental damage it could cause to its national heritage, the mineral water resources of the Borjomi Nature Reserve. It was the first non-Russian oil pipeline in the CIS, and the United States' sole purpose was to change Russia's key role in transporting traffic in the Caspian region. Some analysts say that while the Baku-Supsa pipeline has been more economically viable for Georgia, the pipeline to Ceyhan is politically advantageous for Georgia (Baran, 2005).

The United States has several economic, military, and government assistance programs in Georgia. Even before Russian border guards left Georgia, the U.S. began helping build a capable border guard, and a special program was developed to provide Georgian border troops with technical equipment. In all, the United States provided \$ 72 million between 1998 and 2001 to protect Georgia's borders. If we compare this, for example, with the military budget of Georgia, it is a very large amount, which in 1998 amounted to about \$ 41 million, and in 1999 - \$ 24 million (USAID is primarily responsible for the distribution and use of US aid in Georgia: 2001).

Georgia received more per capita aid than any other country in the world except Israel. The United States accounts for about 14% of Georgia's imports of foreign goods (as of 2000), and the United States supplies Georgia with machinery and equipment, meat, grain, food, beverages, pharmaceuticals, and other goods. The United States is a major contributor to the Georgian economy. There is a bilateral agreement between the United States and Georgia to promote and protect the investment. In 1999, Georgia received \$ 20 million in U.S. private direct investment, which accounted for 24 percent of all capital investment by foreign companies in the country. In 2001, the inflow of private direct investment exceeded \$ 20 million, accounting for 34% of all foreign investment (Balli et al., 2016; Mitchell, 2006).

The United States has also helped Georgia obtain loans from international financial institutions: \$ 364.2 million from the World Bank and \$ 325 million from the International Monetary Fund as of March 2000. In the fiscal year 2002, the United States allocated approximately \$ 187 million to Georgia, including \$ 91 million under the Freedom Support Act, \$ 31 million in foreign defense funding, and an additional \$ 20 million in funding. Emergency Response Fund; Georgia's Ministry of Agriculture received \$ 9 million in food aid and \$ 12 million in other state aid from the U.S. Department of Defense, as well as \$ 45 million in personal charitable and humanitarian donations. Georgia and the United States signed the Strategic Partnership Charter on January 9, 2009, in Washington. The charter identifies strategic cooperation between the two countries, strengthening sovereignty, ensuring territorial integrity and inviolability of borders, and ensuring democracy and peace (Pleurdeau et al., 2016; Margaryan et al., 2017). At the same time, the Charter is a very important basis for cooperation in security and defense, economy and trade, energy, culture, and education, as well as for the development of democratic institutions and humanitarian ties (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

The GSP (Generalized System of Preferences program) regime is used for a wide range of agricultural products exported from Georgia to the United States, which allows for the application of favorable customs duties on Georgian products. On June 29, 2015, President Obama signed H.R.1295, which updated the GSP and refunded the tariffs paid for the relevant imports. The law was passed on July 29, almost two years after its expiration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia: 2021). From 2007 to 2012, U.S. foreign direct investment in Georgia amounted to \$ 426.5 million, representing 8.4 percent of Georgia's investment during the same period. In 2013, the foreign investment amounted to 44.8 million US dollars, and in 2014 - 80 million US dollars (The Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2007).

Georgia became one of the first countries to sign a five-year agreement with the Millennium Challenge Corporation in September 2005. The \$ 395.3 million is aimed at various projects aimed at restoring regional infrastructure and developing the private sector. On June 11, 2013, the board of directors of the U.S. government's Millennium Challenge Corporation approved a second five-year, \$ 140 million agreement with Georgia to improve the quality of human capital by investing in scientific and technological education and labor development. To improve the quality of education and increase income potential in these areas, the proposed compact student will make strategic investments from the beginning of general education to the end of technical training and advanced programs, including women's STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math).

Georgia and the United States belong to the same multilateral organizations, including the United Nations, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (Mercille, 2008; Ginsburg, 2005). Georgia is

also an observer to the United States and has been a partner of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Partnership for Peace since 1994 (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

At the Prague summit in 2002, Georgia officially announced its intention to join NATO, and as a result of the serious efforts of NATO leaders in Tbilisi, an agreement was reached at the 2008 Bucharest summit to admit Georgia to the club. Despite Georgia's contribution to global security and its growth in the direction of military and political reforms, in 2008 NATO member states were directly involved with Russia due to the conflict between Georgia and Russia. They neglected to discuss the standard mechanism for preparing applicants for membership - the Membership Action Plan (MAP) - to prevent conflict. Therefore, the issue of Georgia's membership was left open at the NATO summits in 2009, 2010, 2012, and 2014. However, Tbilisi provided the two main standards of NATO's "Open Doors" policy: to contribute to NATO-led military operations and to ensure and adhere to democratic policies (Zurabashvili, 2016).

Georgia is the second-largest military force in Afghanistan, sending 12,000 troops to the country between 2010 and 2016. At the same time, Tbilisi is the sixth-largest member of NATO, meeting two percent of GDP in defense spending. It is important to take into account Georgia's military achievements. For example, the purchase of air defense systems across the country and the reconstruction of the army have increased the country's defense capabilities. In addition, Georgia's participation in NATO's Rapid Reaction Force, the first NATO-Georgia military exercises, and the establishment of a NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Assessment Center further strengthened ties and, in turn, strengthened ties. It ensured that Georgia had reliable protection against external threats (Zurabashvili, 2016).

At the same time, however, Russian experts oppose the above views and make the following comments. In particular, the United States has no interest in the integration of the South Caucasus countries into NATO. The West does not need the region as a member of the alliance or as a zone of responsibility. According to some experts, bilateral military cooperation with the South Caucasus countries seems more convenient for the United States than within NATO. It fears that once the United States joins NATO, the South Caucasus will become a priority partner for Europe's leading nations, not the United States.

According to Russian political analysts, the United States bears some responsibility for Georgia's political course, which means that strong methods should not be used to resolve conflicts in the region. However, the war in South Ossetia broke out and the United States never denied its involvement in the decision. America's direct involvement in the South Caucasus does not preclude escalation of the conflict. The situation in the region is also weak, but the current coordination of forces could provide some security, provided that Russia's military presence in Armenia, as well as in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, is maintained. The presence of the United States, the creation of U.S. military bases in Georgia, seems redundant for security needs in the region. The expectation is that under these conditions, the level of threats and risks will increase (Grundy et al., 2018; Tuathail & Agnew, 1992).

The deployment of American bases in Tbilisi is seen as the most important factor in ensuring national security. Unlike Georgia and Azerbaijan, which believe that a possible U.S. military presence in the region would hinder Russia, Armenia sees U.S. bases as a potential barrier to Turkey. The United States has declared the Caucasus a zone of vital interest, and in this regard, a statement by Secretary of State George W. Bush under President George W. Bush makes it clear: "The Caspian is not an economic or geological or technical problem. This is a very important geopolitical issue ". The United States has provided significant political, military, financial, and humanitarian assistance to Georgia since the establishment of diplomatic relations with independent Georgia. The United States has become one of the main international guarantors of Georgia's sovereignty. Once again, the United States is committed to Georgia's territorial integrity and its strong support for Euro-Atlantic integration.

Conclusion

However, U.S. involvement is not included in the long-term strategy. Interlocutors in Tbilisi are complaining that Georgia is currently "not in the picture" in Washington. It may be more accurate to say that Washington simply does not have a comprehensive strategic plan for the region and that it has not had such a plan since the end of the Bush administration. It identified U.S. policy toward the South Caucasus, including Caspian energy, the U.S. war in Afghanistan, the fight against terrorism, and the promotion of democratic institutions and practices. Today, on the contrary, there is a lack of clear principles. The situation is exacerbated by the Trump-era situation, in which agencies in Washington are not only poorly coordinated but in some cases openly distrustful. This has damaged not only the South Caucasus but also the consistency of policy.

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