

Influence of August war 2008 on South Caucasus

Introduction: After the 90s of the last century, the bipolar world order was shattered and the signs of the multi polar formation appeared. In new world order the successor of Soviet Union, Russia did not have the resources and influence to maintain a look of the old glory before the world.¹ It could not adapt with losing of the glory and started new fight for the renovation of “Derjava”.

On the route of this struggle one of the stages implied planning and implementation of war on the territory of Georgia.

It seems that in this process together with the tools of the “soft power”, the usage of rough/military forces has not lost urgency for Russia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia repeatedly tried to meet imperial ambitions, but it was not easy.

Key words: Russia-Georgian war, South Caucasus, NATO.

Theoretical framework: The Concept of Neorealism.

The meaning of South Caucasus was so important for Russia due to its strategic location, line of transit corridor, exit to sea that Russian military elite started to prepare for military intervention. With the military intervention Russia wanted not only to increase the control on over the region but also wanted to answer the expansion policy of the USA and NATO which step by step got closer to the borders of Russia.

Russia had been preparing for this war for a long time; it is proved by the announcements of the president of Russian Federation Mr. Vladimir Putin: “It is not a secret that we had a plan. Russia acted within the framework of the plan...”²

The 2008 Russia-Georgia August war was preceded by the NATO Bucharest Summit, where a promise that Georgia would adopt NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP) was made; Georgia's leadership assumed the talks about the subject as the promise and systematically appealed to it. However, it should be stated that this proposal used to be more convincing for Georgia than it seems from today's viewpoint. For Russia it was a signal of preparation for taking certain measures.

¹ President of Russia Vladimir Putin called the destruction of the Soviet union the biggest tragedy of XX century.

² Russia was prepared for Georgian aggression – Putin, <https://www.rt.com/politics/putin-ossetia-war-plan-168/>

The results of the war were heavy not only for Georgia but for whole region of South Caucasus: For Azerbaijan and Armenia it has become a message of threat; For Europe and USA it was indication that they have to be more constructive, when it comes to the interest area of Russia; For other regional actors who had interests in South Caucasus, such as Turkey and Iran, it was demonstration that despite of the collapse of the Soviet Union former soviet states cannot go out of the control of Russia.

Russia's goal to stop NATO's eastward expansion and interest in the Black Sea region by the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia could not be realized at this stage. On the contrary, the military intervention increased not only NATO's activity in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region, but the European Union's as well.

High officials of the Russian Federation made a number of statements before the August war, that any NATO approach to their borders would be responded with appropriate measures and for several years after the Russian-Georgian war Sergey Lavrov, the Foreign Minister, had been sending similar political messages to the NATO block: “We were constantly told: NATO does not have the will to take steps against the Russian Federation's security. But if there is no such intention, then why is NATO's infrastructure permanently getting closer to the Russian border? So, we will take measures inresponse.”³

If you look at the dynamics of NATO's actions over the years since the August 2008 war, we can easily assure that its activity has increased: for example, in 2014 “Readiness Action Plan” was adopted at the Wales Summit and in 2016 Warsaw Summit reiterated the principle approaches of the Wales Summit. In 2017 NATO adopted the Communiqué “Stability and Security in the Black Sea Region”. It turns out that Russia's actions in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region are not confronting security issues in the South Caucasus, it is contrary to NATO and the USA, respectively to the interests of Turkey. With respect to political and military terms the following result was set for Russia: it was unable to make its rival forces retreat in this region, primarily the United States and NATO and could not stop their activities.

After the annexation of Crimea since 2014 NATO has implemented more than two military exercises in the Black Sea region.⁴ In 2015 the volume of military contingent increased. In 2014, Russia planned to conduct naval exercises along with NATO's annual trainings, which in turn caused a tense situation in the Black Sea region. But soon the tension was neutralized.

³ Lavrov: We will respond NATO's approach to the Russian Borders: <http://geworld.ge/ge/8137/>

⁴ Preparing for the Worst: Are Russian and NATO Military Exercises Making War in Europe more Likely? <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/policy-brief/preparing-for-the-worst-are-russian-and-nato-military-exercises-making-war-in-europe-more-likely/>

In 2016 it was recorded with black on white in Warsaw's NATO Communiqué that this region holds an important place in NATO security policy and the continuation of Russian military pressure is seen as a significant challenge to the security of the region.⁵

In the resolution adopted at the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2017, "Stability and Security in the Black Sea Region"⁴ – there are obvious talks about Russian retention and strengthening of the Black Sea security policy.

Any action of NATO is responded by Russia and it continues the militarization of the Black Sea. Nevertheless, by 2015 the Turkish military forces had already exceeded (almost twice) the Russian military naval forces.⁶

However, this advantage is not enough for Turkey to balance Russia in the South Caucasus region. Turkey is actively cooperating with NATO and the European Union to achieve this goal.

Despite the fact that the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008 has helped to consolidate the forces, the fact remains that neither the power, the proximity to its borders, nor the initiation of security models from the side of Turkey, forced Russia to cease the occupation. Gestures on diplomatic, military or political arenas have not brought tangible results with Russia, however, had caused it great damage.

We think that the case is not in Russia's invincibility. In this case the point is that the US does not want to oppress Russia and use all its leverage against it, because Russia balances China, the country that the US already perceives as a rival. The US-Chinese relations are already characterized by a number of experts as "strategic distrust"⁷ and presumably in the coming years the US and Russia will have a strong new rival.

Conclusion: Considering the current processes in the world and then in the South Caucasus through the context of the concept of neorealism it will be obvious that this region takes a significant place in the process of forming the multipolar world order, since it is part of the crucial transit route leading from China and Central Asia; The August Russia-Georgia war served to strengthen Russia's interests in these processes; The EU and US peacekeeping policies and the realization of economic, energy, military and other types of projects aim at the balance of Russia, as well as to strengthen their positions in the South Caucasus. Also, the purpose of the West is to introduce respect of bigger doses towards democratic institutions, protection of human rights and freedom in the region.

⁵ Warsaw Summit Communiqué, https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm

⁶ Turkey owned 44 ships and 13 submarines; Russian navy: 22 coasters and 3 submarines.

⁷ https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0330_china_lieberthal.pdf