

Destabilization: Caucasus Geopolitics Threatens Russia's Security

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The Caucasus and Central Asia



The analysis of the situation in the Caucasus and in Transcaucasia shows that the outlook for the geopolitical entirety is going to be shaped by the key Western countries' efforts aimed at debarring Russia from the Caspian oil and gas projects.

The rivalry between various geopolitical centers of force leads to the escalation of separatism and extremism, the intensification of the activity of international terrorist groups, and the perpetuation of conflicts in the region.

The main threats to Russia's security are bred by the instability in Transcaucasia, Iraq, and, potentially, Iran.

Georgia can be expected to continue pursuing a propaganda campaign aimed at convincing the international community that the zones of conflict in the Caucasus and in Transcaucasia should be passed under the UN, the EU, and NATO control. Terrorist provocations are likely to follow and Russia will be charged with the failure to ensure the security of local

populations.

The persisting US military presence in Iraq and the buildup of its infrastructures and centers of reconnaissance and control in the country provides Washington with a broad range of operative and tactical capabilities.

Given Tehran's current model of behavior in international politics, the permanent pressure exerted by the US and the EU on Iran under the pretext of nonproliferation can trigger escalation and spread of instability over neighboring territories including the Caspian region and Transcaucasia.

A serious challenge to Russia's security is posed by the extremist groups' attempts to disseminate Muslim fundamentalist doctrines in its regions with predominantly Muslim populations. The activity is supported by the ruling circles and religious centers of Pakistan, Turkey, the Saudi Arabia, and a number of other countries.

In 2009, the threat to Russia's security in Transcaucasia stemmed from the instability generated by the Georgian aggression against South Ossetia in August, 2008. While the full-scale political settlement is still lacking, M. Saakashvili's regime is steering a course of intense militarization accompanied by aggressive rhetoric targeting Russia, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia.

Though the EU (Tagliavini's Commission) report issued on September 30, 2009 stated clearly that Georgia was responsible for the aggression and that the West's arms supplies to the country over several years preceding the conflict had had a generally destabilizing effect, several countries (the US, Ukraine, Israel, and Turkey) still plan to resume military assistance to Georgia.

In the settings of the crisis caused by the August, 2008 hostilities, the new US Administration is fostering Georgia's hostility towards Russia and the tensions in the regions of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts. The implementation of Washington's plans concerning Georgia would result in the deployment of US military bases and forward operating locations in the country and in the strengthening of the American influence over the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia.

Tbilisi is cultivating its partnership with the US and NATO. Currently the Pentagon is preparing a draft agreement on the construction of three US military bases in Georgia and the dispatch of up to 25,000 US servicemen to the country by 2015.

The Georgian Administration refuses to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and makes political and military efforts aimed at regaining control over the breakaway territories. Georgia's foreign politics remains markedly anti-Russian and pursues the goal of forming a negative perception of Russia by the international community.

To ensure long-term stability along its southern frontier, Russia entered into a number of bilateral political and military agreements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia including the ones on joint border guarding, military cooperation, and the creation of Russian military bases. Thanks to the pro-active stance adopted by Moscow, at present the security at the borders between South Ossetia and Georgia and between Abkhazia and Georgia is maintained at an acceptable level and the number of incidents is kept low. The agreements reached by Russian President D. Medvedev and French President N. Sarkozy set a

reasonable “division of labor” in the sphere of the Transcaucasian security: Russia is to safeguard South Ossetia and Abkhazia while the EU is responsible for guaranteeing that Georgia does not resort to military force. Russia’s policy of strengthening the security and defense potentials of South Ossetia and Abkhazia made Russia a stronger player in Transcaucasia in 2009. The course aimed at reinforcing Moscow’s political and military position in South Ossetia and Abkhazia should continue. The 2010 construction of Russian military bases and border guard infrastructures in the two Republics will help to prevent the recurrence of Georgian military revanchism in the region.

A precedent of withdrawal from the CIS was set in 2009 when Georgia enacted the corresponding decision which had been announced a year earlier. It is an indication of a purely political character of the gesture that Georgia opted for preserving – whenever the intentional law affords – its commitment to the international treaties signed in the CIS framework.

The result of the Georgian aggression against South Ossetia in August, 2008 and of its termination of the CIS membership is the practically complete freeze of Tbilisi’s relations with Russia.

Joint mechanisms of incident prevention in the regions adjacent to South Ossetia and Abkhazia were launched in accord with the February 17-18 Geneva Conventions by the two Republics, Georgia, Russia, the UN, the OCSE, and the EU. The result should be serious ease of tensions and an improved security climate along the borders of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Russia implemented the policy of strengthening its positions in the Black Sea and the Caspian regions in the framework of such organizations as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BLAKCSEAFOR), the Black Sea Harmony and sustained dialog with its neighbors on the basis of the Turkish initiative of a platform of stability and cooperation in the Caucasus.

The Karabakh conflict remains unsettled. It puts obstacles in the way of rebuilding the relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, impedes the recovery between Armenia and Turkey, and contributes to the overall instability in Transcaucasia. The Azerbaijani leadership continues to threaten Armenia with military actions. In 2009 Russia was actively involved in resolving the Karabakh problem both in the framework of the activities of the Co-Chairmen of the OCSE Minsk Group and on the bilateral basis in dealing with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Russia’s active position in Transcaucasia is reflected by its efforts to strengthen the partnerships with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. The cooperation with Baku and Yerevan developed steadily in international organizations (mainly the UN and the OCSE) and on the regional level via the CIS, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and the Eurasian Economic Community. It will be important for Moscow to continue seeking maximal involvement in the settlement of the Karabakh problem parallel to the activity of the Co-Chairmen of the Minsk Group.

In 2010 Moscow should deepen its ties with Armenia including those in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, thus reinforcing Russia’s status of a political and military leader in Transcaucasia. The cooperation with Yerevan, particularly in the military sphere, should continue to broaden.

As a parallel process, Russia should cultivate its strategic partnership with Azerbaijan, the country which is a major energy resources producer, an important regional player, and Russia's potential ally in the Black and Caspian Sea regions.

Certain Muslim groups are disseminating doctrines of politicized Islam across Russia which are untraditional for the country's Muslim population. The activity reached particularly high levels in Dagestan, Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Karachay-Cherkessia. Foreign Muslim centers are implementing programs of training Muslim clergy to preach in Russia. At the same time, a number of Western countries tend to exert political pressure on Russia in connection with the theme.

The Muslim indoctrination in the training centers of Algeria, Turkey, Syria, the Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Pakistan is the key avenue of influencing Russia's Muslim population. Certain religious and political circles of these and other countries use student exchanges as an instrument of forming new political elites in the post-Soviet space that would wrestle over power and be oriented towards foreign Islamist centers. For example, the Saudi Arabia is allocating considerable financial resources to the cause.

A reasonable option for Russia in 2010 in the light of the objective to train moderate and traditionally oriented Muslim clergy would be to select Muslim young people to study in foreign Muslim schools of a moderate variety. The corresponding agreements can be signed, for example, with such renown centers as Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

Currently the US is putting into practice in the North Caucasus the key element of its novel military strategy – that of network wars.

North Caucasus – the Destabilization Factors

There are reasons to believe that the US and other Western countries started preparing the conditions for the realization of the Color Revolution scenario in Russia during the 2011-2012 electoral cycle. The US President suggested a 25% increase in the number of US Department of State and USAID employees by 2013. A budget amendment envisages the creation of 1,226 new jobs in the institutions by 2010. In the future, the number of US Department of State employees is to increase by 25%, and the number of USAID employees – to double.

The US and other Western countries use NGOs as instruments in the network war to collect information and to influence political developments. Over 100 foreign NGOs and monitoring networks of various types are operating in Russia's Southern Federal District.

In Russia's southern part, the implementation of the network war concept is exemplified by the activity of the American Soros Foundation, Carnegie Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. McArthur Foundation, the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and Heinrich Boll Foundation, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the Gringo Caucasian Refugee and IDP Network, the International Youth Human Rights Movement, etc. The ideologies, objectives, and tactic of the organizations are defined by their sponsors and are subject to the centralized coordination from a single center in the US.

Propaganda efforts are made in the framework of NGO activities to influence the peoples of the Caucasus so as to overcome the cultural integration of the Caucasus into Russia, to

banish the pro-Russia orientation from the Caucasian societies, and to implant the ideology of hating Russia as the foundation of a new Caucasian identity.

([To be continued](#))

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