

What Does Russia Want in the West Part of the Caucasus?

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Russia should concentrate on promoting the idea of making Georgia a confederation.

Summer'2008 in the west part of the Caucasus began traditionally - with provocations against Russian peacekeepers, explosions in Gagry, ritual aggressive statements from Tbilisi...

According to special services, what Georgia procured in terms of military hardware (or what it received as a gift from Russia's "partners") over the years include almost 400 armored vehicles (half of them tanks), almost 200 artillery pieces and mortars (including volley-fire rocket launchers and Howitzers 152 mm caliber), 25 anti-aircraft complexes and 200 portable missile launchers, 45 aircraft and helicopters (eight of them drones), 10 boats, light weapons, radios, earth-moving machinery for military engineers, uniforms, munitions by the ton... Georgia has no external enemies and nobody aspires to its territory or part of it, but arms expenditures grow with each passing year.

The Hard facts:

Russia withdrew its troops from Georgia by late 2007;

Euro-Atlantic crisis-resolution specialists frantically chart the plans to integrate the Caucasus into NATO and "united" Europe. All these plans stand for absorption of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Georgia but also include some attractive (or so they authors think) offers to Abkhazian and South Ossetian leaders.

And what about Russia? What does it need in and from the west part of the Caucasus?

First, it must be made quite plain to everyone that Russia does not want a single square meter of the former Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic! Strategically speaking, any part of Georgia is nothing Russia needs.

Second (but much more significantly), Russia cannot permit the transformation of the neighbor territory into a multipurpose anti-Russian bridgehead: with separatist bases, velvet revolutions lab, GUAM's locomotive force, and NATO barracks all rolled into one.

What Russia needs is:

A safe transit route to Armenia by land. Now that Adjara is lost (actually, abandoned) and Russian troops no longer man the Batumi -Akhalkalaki line, strategic transit to Armenia as Russia's only ally in the Caucasus depends on Armenia's neighbors. These latter include hostile Azerbaijan, neutral Iran, NATO member Turkey, and fiercely pro-NATO Georgia. The Karabakh conflict settlement plan one of NATO's "experts" charted involved exchange of territories between Armenia and Azerbaijan so as to cut the former off Iran. Air ferry service is not an option because Russia's transport aviation is not up to it. Even Russian trucks with relief aid barely make it across civilized Europe to Serbia. Armenia meanwhile is where Russia has the 102nd Military Base and some strategic enterprises under its control and management.

Poti is out of the question as a base for the Russian Black Sea Fleet no matter how it ends with Ukraine (the so called 2017 problem). It is clear that neither Poti nor revamped Novorossiisk will do even if the Black Sea Fleet is downsized to a mere flotilla!

Prices in the global oil and gas market draw attention to oil and gas exports from the Caspian basin to the West bypassing the Russian territory. Georgia is playing a central part in these plans. Baku-Supsa and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipelines are already running. Whenever they recall it, Russian state officials get mad and regularly deploy the so called "administrative resource" even though every such attempt costs Russia dearly. Suspend the transit so as to change the anti-Russian vector? But why? Oil export is business. One may make money in oil fields development or in shipment or oil refining – as long as the terms are acceptable (which is always easier to assure than enforcing of the ban).

The safety of transit pipelines may be turned over to "private armies". Why wouldn't we draw on our Anglo-Saxon "partners" 'experience'?

The attempt in the early 1990s to rebuild the Georgian micro-empire, an analog of the one remembered from 1918, created a crisis that continues to this day.

A confederation as the natural – is not only – solution is not something anybody has been giving a thought to. This state of affairs offers Russia a chance to become the settlement leader in the region with an emphasis on precisely this idea.

Seizing the initiative in the west part of the Caucasus, Russia may even rejuvenate integration all over the rest of the Commonwealth and elevate these processes to another level. Consider Europe. It never occurs to Georgia to return Alsatia and Lorraine. It never occurs to Italy to part with Nice or Austria with South Tirol.

Russia's success in the Caucasus will put an end to development of "sanitary cordons" along its own borders. Success in the Crimea and Ukraine will even wreck beyond repair NATO's and European Union's plans to expand eastward, into the zone of Russia's national interests.

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