

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MILITARY CONFLICT AROUND SOUTH OSSETIA

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The fate of national minorities is determined by how
humane and civilized is the host nation.

Lord Acton (1834 – 1901)

The military operation performed by Russia with regard to the South Ossetia conflict can be classified as a war which was local and rightful. The current article presents some features of the accompanying war of information analyzing the possible motivations of the warring sides, including US, which motivations had facilitated the start of hostilities. It has been shown that the military and political developments under consideration conform to the logical structure of Cold War II, being based upon the strategy of Information Wars of the Third Generation.

The South-Ossetian-related August events resulted in shaping the new geopolitical realities, their comprehensive perception and development being a priority both for the RA decision-making political elite and for the community of experts and analysts. In the meantime, the armed conflict between Russia and Georgia has many components and aspects, i.e., a complex research of this process will for a long time retain its meaningful analytical content. The purpose of this article is to derive definitions of the military and strategic processes, and to consider their characteristics and possible incentives. The basic approach was adopted, whereby the occurrences are distinctly subordinated to the logic relevant to a multi-polar system of Cold War II [1]. Within another viewpoint, one party to the conflict, the United States, have followed the strategy inherent to the information wars of the third generation [2]. Suchlike approaches have to facilitate the formation of completely unbiased presentation of the Russian-Georgian war enabling some conclusions and forecasts to be made at least within the context of tactical perceptions.

The Local and Rightful War. It is common knowledge that characteristic for Cold War I were the local wars occurring on limited territories¹, e.g., Korea (1950 - 1953), Vietnam (1957 - 1975), and Afghanistan (1979 - 1987) [3]. In the bipolar world the local wars were sort of sites where US and USSR fought each other, with no contact between their respective armed forces (AF), lest it should result in a nuclear disaster: the direct partaker of hostilities was US implicitly countered by the Soviet military potential, while Afghanistan showed a reverse picture. Remarkably, the local US wars of today in Iraq and Afghanistan do not involve Russia as a counteracting party. In the case of Afghanistan Russia even rendered the US (NATO)² a certain support in communications, while with Iraq its disagreement is shown diplomatically (say, through Russian support to Iran, which is active in the Iraq issue), or economically (the Russian oil companies).

Within this context, the military clash between Russia and Georgia was the first local war subjected to the logic of Cold War II this time, wherein the US – RF confrontation has for the first time assumed a military character. I.e., it can be stated that the current global political processes are entirely ruled by the classical Cold War, which in turn asserts the ultimate formation of the multi-polar world order.

It is to be noted that in military science wars are classified, among other things³, as rightful and wrongful. In this connection, it is beyond doubt that the Russian and the Ossetian parties are conducting a war, that is classical and rightful⁴: the indigenous Ossetian nation using the Russian assistance⁵ defended their national identity, physical existence and historical territory. As to the war deployed by Georgia and its allies, it has to be seen as a wrongful anti-national, inhuman action aimed at rehabilitating the mini-Empire that was there at the time of the USSR.

All-out Information Operations The Informational Component of the Conflict deserves a specially targeted research, therefore we shall identify only some features of the Information War. The Media processes were reminiscent of the agitation and propaganda struggle of Cold War I, when US and USSR were extensively spreading completely opposite and incompatible information, aimed mostly at their respective domestic audiences. In keeping with Cold War traditions, Tbilisi banned not only the Russian TV channels, but also the quite moderate Euronews. Attempts

¹ <http://www.voina-i-mir.ru/dicdefinition/?id=83>

² The cooling relations between RF and NATO, caused by war, may result in changes in this field as well, as stated by RF officials.

³ Special literature contains about a score of definitions and characteristics of wars (see [3]).

⁴ <http://www.voina-i-mir.ru/dicdefinition/?id=80>

⁵ The rightful military action by Russia has prompted some political scientists to interpret them as a rehabilitation of the Russian tradition to rescue the oppressed nations (as it was in the 19th c. when liberating the Bulgarians from the Ottoman yoke).

at technical interference were also made in US, when a Fox News coverage was interrupted in the middle of an interview of an invited Ossetian woman. Naturally, a large share of propaganda activities falls upon disinformation¹.

It is curious that the European Media showed a balanced approach: without vindicating the Russian party, they were critical of the actions by the Saakashvili administration.

The humanitarian and moral factor of the war were dealt with mostly by the Russian Media, while the American media put more accent on Georgia's territorial integrity. That seemed to be done in violation of the Cold War I tradition whereby raising the humanitarian problems had been a monopoly of the West². Note that this situation weakened the Western propaganda while adding more emotional charge and efficiency to the Russian one. The awareness of that fact may have become the reason why the BBC Russian page having long-time propaganda traditions were not unambiguously anti-Russian, otherwise it could have discredited the British Media before the Russian audience.

In the cyber attacks domain, it was the Georgians who were first to assault. On August 8, along with the Tskhinvali bombardment, the cyber space of the South-Ossetian sites came under hacker-type attacks (www.osradio.ru, www.osinform.ru, et al.). There followed later attacks on the Russian Media, specifically, on the English-language TV Channel RUSSIA TODAY. The response came pat: many sites were broken open: President Saakashvili, Georgian Parliament, Government, MFA, et al.

The coverage by the Armenian Media was balanced but not substantial. In this context there was a primitive commentary by Maratyan (12.08.08), a VOA anchor rebroadcast on the "Armenia" TV Channel, claiming that the US denied military aid to Georgia because President Saakashvili violated the electoral procedures³.

The course of the conflict showed the crucial character of the information factor in today's military and political processes. There is good reason to believe that hostilities make part of the information war of the third generation. This approach however suggests a preliminary discussion of the possible causes of war.

¹ Cf. e.g.: <http://lenta.ru/news/2008/09/08/cnn/>

² It was particularly meaningful in 1968, when the Soviet troops entered Czechoslovakia, it should be noted in this connection that some Western Media remarks on the current Russian action being similar to the Czechoslovak action, are baseless.

³ It is to be noted that such interpretations of the democratic ideals reiterate the communist propaganda, which is an indirect evidence that in perspective the democratic ideology may cast its lot with the communist regime.

The Possible Driving Forces of Military Action. Prior to the August war, Georgia waged a positional psychological war with its former autonomies – Abkhazia and South Osetia. It is to be noted that the Georgian actions guided by American and British advisers¹ were quite efficient, due to, among other things, geographic position and non-uniform population in Abkhazian and South Ossetian Republics. Tbilisi had quite successfully implemented a strategy of the so-called creeping expansion: it managed to establish control of Kodori Canyon, while the South-Osetian territory became a ground for deploying the Georgian military bases. The resulting situation could seemingly look gratifying for the Americans, since following the Russian troops withdrawal from Georgia the existence of buffer zones under permanent tension (Abkhazia and South Osetia) on the Russian border must look strategically very attractive. That would enable them to control the pipelines, to be located close to hot spots in South Caucasus, and to have the military bases for strikes against Iran, and, most importantly, to block access by the Russians to South Caucasus. In the meantime, the indeterminacy of status and border of the buffer zones have been shaping an amorphous and dynamic situation, making the political prospects unpredictable. In other words, the forthcoming relations between Georgia and the former autonomies, with regard to the global and regional triggering of the Russian factor, contained risks for US.

Apparently, the problem of rehabilitating the so-called territorial integrity of Georgia could hardly cause Washington too much concern. Moreover, the permanent presence of this problem is for US a sort of guarantee with regard to the long-time relationships with Georgia. The mentioned circumstances provide an argument for some analysts, with all due respect for the American factor², to attribute the unleashing of the war to Georgia's president alone, to his near-sighted policies and to his certain personal merits. We, however, deem it completely possible that the anti-South-Ossetia operation under the coded name CLEAR VIEW had been both conceived and implemented under the direct American supervision, this approach having definitive substantiation.

It is general knowledge that following the colored revolution of 2003, Georgia was transformed into a regional outpost for US. A far more than substantial American political and military presence in Georgia (armaments, intelligence, particularly radar, electronics and military advisers³) enables some political ana-

¹ It is to be noted that in the aspect of information and psychology the current Georgian authorities act with the same efficiency.

² Perhaps, an exception to this issue is some representatives of the Armenian opposition, who, though limitations imposed by their political orientation, try to rule out the role of the American factor in the events under scrutiny.

³ As stated by the yet unverified statement by V. Putin, RF PM, the US Army representatives took part in the military action. See <http://www.expert.ru/news/2008/08/29/putin/>

lysts to reckon this country among the so-called proxies, i.e., entities controlled from outside¹. Under those conditions the Georgian Government could have hardly been expected to do their own decision making; that would be controversial to the logical basis of US-Georgia relationships, which is the most ostensible substantiation of our approach². It is quite probable within this script that the US provided an indirect inspiration to Georgia (making use of the head of state's inconsistent psychology) to undertake the military action, or at least did nothing to encumber the Georgian initiative, (which is unquestionable, considering the presence of the American military advisers).

Meanwhile, in order to start the military operations, the United States, considering the Iraq and Iran problems, as well as the rich traditions of strategic art, needed serious reasons. To clearly see them, one has to touch upon the problems linked with the global political situation. It is known that the transitional period of the unipolar system being transformed into the multipolar one was shorter than predicted, the principal indicator of this process being US receding from their global monopolistic positions. As a result, the American political elite started developing a new policy, better suited to the emerging realities. In particular, there is an impression that the countries and regions with latent strategic perspectives of US withdrawal, develop long-time resource-conserving situations (the so-called delayed-action mines) that would protect American interests and exert influence. This type of policy can be facilitated by the effect-based information rigging of the third generation, when the complex operations, either military or peaceful, alter the aggressor's behavior to suit the operator.

There can be no doubt in any case that prior to launching the operation against South Ossetia, the American Party must have considered the contingency of Russian interference, i.e. it must have considered the unfavorable outcome of the war. This strategy, or the policy of negative-outcome effects³, follows certain logic and objectives, viz.:

¹ <http://noravank.am/ru/?page=analitics&nid=794>

² Within the context of this approach, let us note that following the Rice visit to Tbilisi on July 10 for talks on the Georgia-Osetia and Georgia-Abkhazia conflicts, the statements by Saakashvili gained in toughness (see <http://www.newsru.com/world/10jul2008/drugba.html>).

It should also be noted that in the course of her post-war visit, it took Secretary of State Rice over 5 hours of talks to have Georgia's President sign the Medvedev – Sarkozy armistice plan – a lot of time seems to have been needed to persuade Saakashvili au contraire, so that he looked even more confused after the talks.

³ A similar strategy in our region was clearly designated during the RA Presidential Election. By fuelling the failure-bound colored revolution, a political force was created having an unconditionally American orientation, and more or less reckoned with both domestically and overseas.

1. Regardless of the result, a war will irreversibly bastardize the relations between Georgia and Russia (no matter what the political preferences of any new Georgian administration), which will strengthen the US positions in this crucial country.
2. If Russia wins, (the American political and military command must have considered that option), she will develop an image of the aggressor. This is topical for the US interior layout within the context of Presidential Election, thus encouraging the radical political bias, raising the demand for the aggressive figures like the Democratic VP candidate Joseph Beiden¹.
3. The Russia-win option of the war would also be efficient for consolidating the European allies: it would be a convenient occasion to remind the old Europe about the Russia-bound risks, while the new Europeans would consolidate the US connections (as with the deployment of the anti-missile systems in Poland).
4. With regard to the relevant American policy a Russian military advantage might draw it into the processes of global confrontation, which would in turn require large resource expenditure. Incidentally, the evidence of that global confrontation appeared promptly: in early September Moscow announced a Naval exercise in Venezuela's waters². A similar strategy during Cold War I resulted in an Arms Race which was to become one of the causes of USSR's economic collapse. In a strategic perspective, the American elite may be counting upon similar collapsing development in today's Russia as well.
5. Recognition of South Osetia and Abkhazia by Russia (if victorious) would have created a precedent for separatist activities by some confederate states of the Russian Federation.

Developments have also to be assessed in case of a hypothetical victory by Georgia. This was a theoretical option, since this scenario, with the 58th Army standing at call, was highly improbable. It may though have been a possibility that a victory in war could have been perceived as a retreat by the Georgian Army following some successful assaults resulting in a Russian counterattack, that could be softened through many channels attempting to exert pressure upon the RF Administration. Later there would be a new and winning stage of negotiations

¹ Remarkably, a new political tradition seems to be generating in US, whereby the real power is wielded by the vice-presidents, the presidential functions being merely representative. That impression is produced by the twain Bush – Chaney, there is no guarantee, however that the situation will not be the same after the victory by Barak Obama.

² <http://lenta.ru/news/2008/09/07/maneuvs/>, <http://lenta.ru/news/2008/09/08/base/>

of the broken SOR, weak-willed Russia and the victorious Georgia. This scenario, beside strategic advantages, would raise the US authority both regionally and globally, fixing the RF image as an impotent country with all ensuing consequences¹.

A circumstantial evidence of the US readiness to war is a sharp fall of oil prices, which for Russia is very painful, while war is going on in the immediate proximity of the Baku – Jayhan pipeline². Meanwhile, all previously obtained data on military activities or even their theoretical contingency in the oil-carrying regions used to raise the oil prices. This formulation may be disputable, considering the complex price-setting mechanisms of energy carriers, however the price dropping has yet to be explained.

In the meantime, the third-generation information war effects related to the Russia-Georgia war cannot be restricted to the US interior developments and to possible negative aftermath to Russia. They are also targeted at other countries.

It is common knowledge that the present-day sports events are highly politicized, while the Peking Olympics were preceded by the protests of the Tibetans and their supporters, classical information operations arranged to discredit the PRC. Starting the war at the same time with the Olympics can be perceived as this action continued at a higher level, since a major event of sports and politics was informationally shaded.

It can be seen that the US political gain from the lost war are quite substantial, showing that implemented by US is the policy of effects stipulated by negative results, and manifested both by the attempt at a partial colored revolution in RA, and by the Russian-Georgian war.

At the same time there is an impression that the Americans committed some miscalculations or omissions leaking through in the words by President Bush on Russia having used excessive force. This formulation became widely spread and was taken up by many Western politicians as a basic assessment of the situation. In other words, the entities planning the US military and political actions had underestimated the tough character and the scale of the Russian response. It might have been due to the fact that the current US Administration was generated way back in 2000, i.e., under the unipolar system, with Russia playing a second hand in the global environment: suffice it to say that the then budget of Russia was only a few score of billion dollars.

¹ It cannot be ruled out that this option was presented to the Georgian Party by the American advisers.

² Remaining quite fuzzy in this aspect is the explosion on the Turkish section of the Baku-Jayhan pipeline on August 5, thus ruling out all speculation on the pipeline-related subjects during the hostilities. See <http://www.rian.ru/economy/20080820/150532957.html>

Conclusions. The aftermath of war is ambiguous to all parties. The above observations were all about US. Let us now give a short review of the possible aftermath of war for RF, Georgia, and RA-NKR¹.

Russian Federation. As noted before, the American Party might have seen Russia's determination and the scale of military operations – establishing control over Kodor Canyon, the temporary capture of population centers on Georgia's territory, a rapid recognition of SOR and Republic of Abkhazia – as quite unexpected. At the same time, it should not be suspected that the Russian side had a detailed scenario of military operations or its own ideas on its development and aftereffects. Some analysts are inclined to the version that the Russian Party had deliberately permitted the massive bombardment of Tskhinvali and advancement of the Georgian Army, in order to present its action as a rightful war carried out to prevent a humanitarian disaster.

Anyway, Russia's tough response has brought its definitive political dividends (the risks have been mentioned), some of which can be identified as follows:

1. The actualized war scenario is beneficial to RF domestically: for the first time within the last few years this country has effected a fast and victorious war thus liberating the Russian public mind from the defeatist complexes, consolidating society and showing efficiency of the political line taken by the Putin-Medvedev twain.
2. War was advantageous to RF for raising its authority in the post-Soviet area, the role of this state in the area will certainly go up: that was specifically manifested in the collapse of the ruling political coalition in Ukraine².
3. The war was also advantageous to RF in a global perspective. A demonstration of political will attracts new allies consolidating positions in competitive domains.
4. The War has shattered the authority of US as a traditional adversary of Russia both on the global and regional arenas.
5. The US defamation, despite the emerging RF – ES tension, has widened the flaw between the old Europe and US, clearly showing that in contrast to Cold War I, the Europeans today are not enthusiastic to make war with Russia in the name of a third state.

¹ The impact of war on other countries of the region, particularly Turkey and Iran, is a subject of separate research.

² See, e.g.: <http://lenta.ru/articles/2008/09/03/apart/>

Georgia. Having no political independence, this country has been subjected to psychological and material battering. Although massive losses¹ of armaments can be promptly recovered, the drop of rating may acquire a longer-time character: even the closest allies today see Georgia as a country manqué. In this aspect, the questionable vision of the Georgian administration of entering NATO will hardly make up for the entirety of losses incurred by that country.

Armenia (RA, NKR and Javakhk). As a strategic aftereffect, it can be stated that although the local conflicts of the Cold War I period occurred in South-East Asia and Central Asia, the first local war of the new period took place in the immediate proximity of Armenia's Northern borders. In particular, the military action caused serious problems with the lines of communication crossing Georgia: at some estimations, it may have cost Armenia some \$500 000m. Remarkably, Iran, the Southern neighbor of Armenia, may emerge as a partaker of another hypothetical war: the possible collision along the US (Israel) – Iran line is regularly updated². Those developments cannot but cause serious concern, unambiguously augmenting Armenia's risks to national security.

Meanwhile, tactically the situation following the military action can be viewed as favorable for Armenia. The Russian-Georgian war produced a sobering action upon Azerbaijan leadership (as seen in the statements by that country's political figures and analysts), providing a reminder that a real-time military operation may introduce changes in a unilateral procedure outlined by one party.

The animation of discussions on the status of NKR looks positive, not however in the aspect of an immediate recognition of NKR by RA: in this connection, the factor of security should prevail over the factors of status and recognition (unilateral, for that matter). Status-related issues are resolved using political will of the big geopolitical actors, as we have seen in Kosovo, SOR and Republic of Abkhazia, meanwhile, the current status of NKR seems to be acceptable to the large states. It is another thing that to be developed in advance are well-prepared packages of legal, diplomatic, military and political measures to be implemented in diverse regional situations.

It is to be noted that those packages have to include the issues of Javakhk and the Georgian Armenians. Evidently, the current Georgian leadership cannot pose as a valid underwriter of Javakhk security (see the epigraph). There are also serious problems with regard to the Armenian Community in Tbilisi, its members could have shown more restraint in displaying their loyalty to the authorities.

¹ See, e.g.: <http://www.lenta.ru/articles/2008/08/21/trophy/>

² Some analysts predict that Israel will strike strategic sites in Iran before October this year, however, this scenario seems to be unreal.

It is to be noted too that preliminarily undertaken steps by the RA political leadership on certain RA-Turkey adjustment and possible border opening has already been instrumental in upgrading the security level of RA and NKR under the currently emerging regional tension.

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