

Spoils of a War: Impact of Georgia-Russia War on Russian Foreign and Security Policies in the 'Near Abroad'*

Bir Savaşın Ganimetleri: Gürcistan-Rusya Savaşı'nın Yakın Çevre'de Rus Dış ve Güvenlik Politikaları Üzerine Etkisi

Güner Özkan**

Abstract

Prior to the war in Georgia in August 2008, Russia's efforts to maintain and strengthen its influence in the 'near abroad' had been challenged by its competitors. Hence, the war in Georgia over South Ossetia came just in a right moment for Russian leadership to strongly reassert the presence of Russia's exclusive interests in the 'near abroad'. In this study, the war in Georgia is treated as an event not being a total game-changer but an event capable of having important geopolitical implications in the 'near abroad'. Thus, the article argues that Russia's reaction to Georgia aimed to carry out what it had already been doing politically and economically, now in a heightened alert with multifarious tools to enhance Russian national interests in the 'near abroad'. Despite harsh criticism and some measures taken particularly by the US and the EU, Russia has largely succeeded in taking the 'near abroad' back into its influence. Russia has been doing this through a number of methods showing the very bases of Russia's pre-Georgian war realism. After identifying Russian conception of 'near abroad' before the War, the study will delve into four policy areas through which Russia's geopolitical re-claim in the same region is thought to be best identified: Russia curbing the US and the EU, Collective Security Treaty Organization for deepening security space, Shanghai Cooperation Organization for widening security space and energy pipelines for making Russia 'great' again.

Key Words: Russia, Near Abroad, War in Georgia, Foreign Policy, Security

Özet

Gürcistan'da Ağustos 2008'de yaşanan savaştan önce Rusya'ya karşı bir çok rakibi, Moskova'nın 'yakın çevre'de etkisini koruma ve güçlendirme çabalarına karşı meydan okudu. Bu anlamda, Rusya için Güney Osetya üzerine Gürcistan'daki savaş, aynı aktörün 'yakın çevre'de özel çıkarlarının olduğunu güçlü şekilde tekrar belirtme anlamında tam zamanında ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu çalışmada Gürcistan'daki savaş, 'yakın çevre'de total olarak 'oyunu' değiştirecek bir gelişmeden ziyade, önemli jeopolitik sonuçlara yol açabilen bir olay olarak ele alınmıştır. Dolayısıyla çalışma, Gürcistan'a yönelik reaksiyonuyla Rusya'nın, önceden zaten 'yakın çevre'de siyasi ve ekonomik olarak ulusal çıkarlarını arttırma çabalarını, şimdi daha fazla araçla ve daha dikkatli biçimde sürdürme amacı taşıdığını

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** Assist. Prof. Dr., Necmettin Erbakan University, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of International Relations, e-mail: gunerozkan005@yahoo.com

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ileri sürmektedir. Özellikle ABD ve AB'nin kendisine karşı sert eleştirilerine ve aldıkları bazı önlemlere rağmen, Rusya 'yakın çevre'yi tekrar kendi etki alanına çekmeyi başarmıştır. Rusya bunu, Gürcistan savaşı öncesi izlediği realist tutumunun temel özelliklerini taşıyan bir çok metodu bugün de kullanarak sürdürmektedir. Rusya'nın savaş öncesi 'yakın çevre' konseptini açıkladıktan sonra çalışma, aynı aktörün yine aynı bölge üzerinde jeopolitik iddialarını tekrar gerçekleştirme çabasını en etkin biçimde açıkladığı düşünülen; ABD ve AB'yi kısıtlayan Rusya, güvenlik alanını derinleştirmek için Ortak Güvenlik Antlaşması Teşkilatı, güvenlik alanını genişletmek için Şangay İşbirliği Örgütü ve Rusya'ya tekrar 'büyük' yapmak için enerji boru hatları konularını ele almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rusya, Yakın Çevre, Gürcistan'da Savaş, Dış Politika, Güvenlik

Introduction

Russia was the winner of a short five-day war with Georgia between the 7th and 12th August 2008. For nearly four years after the conflict, its shock waves have still continued to shape the relationships between Russia and Georgia, and significantly influence political, economic and military developments in the wider region of 'near abroad'¹ and perhaps beyond. The reason of this is rather clear due to the fact that winning the war carries more meaning than just giving a 'lesson' to a small and weak state, Georgia. By the war Russia reminded once again and boldly reasserted that it demanded a multi-polar world and a periphery with which it has an exclusive relationship. Dymitry Medvedev, then the Russian President, already stressed conspicuously after the war that Russia had 'special' relationships and interests in the 'near abroad', and promised to protect them rigorously. Although whether Russia in its claim for a multi-polar world has sufficient capacity to turn the tide towards itself and away from the US is open to discussion, it seems that it has so far been very much determined to protect its interests with a great vigour in regional level- the 'near abroad'.

Prior to the war in Georgia, maintaining and strengthening of Russia's influence in the 'near abroad' that had been challenged by its competitors- the US and the EU- in a number of economic, political and military areas had been a protracted strategic objective of Moscow. Even Russia has unhesitatingly, though partly, linked some of its serious internal problems (Chechen separatism and impasse on an acceptable political system and economic development) to 'unfavourable' and 'intolerable' occurrences in the 'near abroad', such as 'colour revolutions' and extra- regional security cooperation, with the support and active involvement of some western states and forces such as civil society organisations. Hence, the war in Georgia over South Ossetia, or Russia's vehement response to Tbilisi, came just in a right moment for Russian leadership to strongly reassert the presence of Russia's exclusive interests in the 'near abroad'. Otherwise, in the case of Russia's inaction in such a situa-

1 In this paper, the term 'near abroad' covers the Newly Independent States in the former the USSR territories excluding the Baltic States and the Russian Federation.

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tion, Russian interests would have been whittled further away by the 'west' in cooperation with the latter's so-called state and non-state 'agents' in the 'near abroad'.

The war between Russia and Georgia over South Ossetia is here treated as not a total game-changer but an event capable of having important geopolitical implications in the 'near abroad'. The war is also used in this paper as a significant development having played a complementary role with those of Russia's pre-war geopolitical objectives and policies. In other words, the war has become a new marker, which has been of great instrumental value for Russia to hasten the applications of its geopolitical objectives much more defiantly in the 'near abroad'. This paper does not obviously concern about how Russia should act in the 'near abroad', but about why and in what ways pre- and post- August war motivations and policies of Russia have been converged towards that region. The article argues that Russia's reaction to Georgia aimed to carry out what it had already been doing politically and economically, now in a heightened alert with multifarious tools to enhance Russian national interests in the 'near abroad'.

Since the war, much of what Russia has said and done domestically and internationally pertaining to the 'near abroad' has been consistent with national interest, power, positional competition and prestige that all great powers are thought to seek incessantly. Thus, the paper also contends that since the war in Georgia, despite harsh criticism and some measures taken particularly by the US and the EU, Russia has largely succeeded in taking the 'near abroad' back into its influence. Russia has been doing this through a number of methods showing the very bases of Russia's pre-war realism. After identifying Russian conception of 'near abroad' before the War, the study will delve into four policy areas through which Russia's geopolitical re-claim in the same region is thought to be best identified: Russia curbing the US and the EU, Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) for deepening security space, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) for widening security space and energy pipelines for making Russia 'great' again.

Russian Conception of 'Near Abroad' before the War

From the early 18th century to the collapse of the USSR in 1991 Russia had always been one of the great and/or super powers. The fact that the break-up of the USSR was a voluntary and peaceful choice of the Soviet/Russian state at the dawn of the 21st century, new Russia as being the main successor of the USSR has, though weakened, continued to have great power feeling maintained nearly in the last 300 years. Thus, unlike the successor states of the latest Austrian-Hungary and Ottoman Empires, which were by no means in a position to re-claim great power status in international arena, Russia with the end of the USSR had a number of still strong and standing power sources to think differently.

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It was true that the end of the USSR created a kind of Russia that it faced between 35-47 percent cumulative fall of GDP from 1991 to 1994 and gradual economic growth after 1996 was shattered as a result of the collapse of emerging markets in East Asia in 1998.² Though maintaining its nuclear arsenal, Russia lost its military capability and power position in conventional sense compared to those of its western challenger, the US. Moreover, Russia not only lost the control of a huge size of territory- the 'near abroad', but it also faced the danger of further exclusion from there by external 'intrusion' and of instability (Chechen problem) that could destabilise Russia irreversibly in security terms. Nonetheless, Russia was still in much better economic position than those of many newly independent states (NIS) in the 'near abroad'.

Although Russia could still be the sole super power in comparison with the states in the 'near abroad', this was no longer a relevant point with respect to wider international arena. While Russia stayed weak in military and economic terms, the states in the 'near abroad' sought to become member of western political and military organisations, such as the Council of Europe, the EU and NATO, and developed bilateral economic, trade and military relations with 'far abroad', most of which were, from Russia's view point, developments at the expense of Russian national interests in Russia's periphery. Especially, the Caspian region became one of the major attraction spots for a plethora of western energy companies and states, as well as for China, in the exploitation of energy resources and transportation structures. In short, Russia's retreat from the former Soviet territories created an area where economic, security and political deprivations, as well as fortunes, attracted many 'outsiders' and 'insiders' either to take advantage of, or to do genuine business with, the states in the 'near abroad'. As a great or aspirant great power, however, Russia could not remain silent to these developments.

Despite its weakened position in economic, political and military areas, Russia still showed great power behaviour in international arena and especially in the 'near abroad' from the very beginning of the 1990s. Numerous initiatives and policy views were revealed and put into practice to counter challenges Russia faced and to regain its great power status that it had long enjoyed for years during and even before the USSR existed. The emergence of the idea of 'near abroad' itself and the establishment of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Collective Security Treaty (CST) by the end of 1993 were all the Russian initiatives either to retake the NIS under its control or to influence them under new national and international conditions of Russia. Russian Foreign Policy Concept of 1993, for instance, warned that the weak positions of the states and security dangers in the former Soviet territories and adjacent areas would allow external powers to take advantage of the situation to enhance their strategic positions at the ex-

2 Country Profile, Russia, 1996-97, The Economic Intelligence Unit, 1997, p. 18; Country Profile, Russia, 1999-2000, The Economic Intelligence Unit, 1999, p. 41.

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pense of Russia.³ In the Concept, economic revival of Russia was directly tied to the survival/security of the country and seen as the central prerequisite for Russia to take its place among the great powers then and in 21st century. Russia's failure to accomplish this revival, as the Concept cautioned, was the difficulty for it to defend its interests and the interests of the Russians around the world.⁴

When Vladimir Putin rose to power in 2000, basic parameters of Russia's policies towards the 'near abroad' had already been established under Boris Yeltsin. Indeed, for Putin, there were no need to form new objectives, but how to produce more effective results in Russia's pursuit of already determined policy choices to make Russia great again. Therefore, similar to what was said in the early 1990s in the official documents, Putin strongly emphasised the importance of economic growth for Russia to be a great power. In the absence of a strong economic structure, Russia would be destined to remain a weak and ordinary state open to harmful influences from both inside and outside creating great security risks for the country. Under Putin it was, for instance, this concern of Russia, which gave a crucial place to the linkage between national security and economic development in the Russian National Security Concept in 2000.⁵ No shortage of importance was given by Putin to the relationships between economic growth and security in relation to Russia's global position. For him, Russia could only succeed and preserve its great power status so long as it acquired economic advantages alongside intellectual and military improvements.⁶

Indeed, according to some statistics, between 1998 and 2007, even if they were due to the rise of oil and gas prices in international market, Russia witnessed the biggest economic growth that it had not seen for years since the collapse of the USSR. GDP in dollar was reported to have grown 26 percent making it to be \$ 1.29 trillion in 2007, a sufficient amount to consider Russia as one of the biggest economies in the world. In line with the GDP rise, per capita income increased from \$ 1,312 in 1999 to \$ 9,070 in 2007. While President, Putin set an ambitious target of 7 percent annual growth of GDP for Russia in years ahead. Furthermore, Russian defence budget soared up from \$ 5.4 billion in 1999 to \$ 32 billion in 2007.⁷ Sergei Ivanov, then the Deputy Prime

3 "Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation (1993)", Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shakleina (Ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities*, New York, Central European University Press, 2005, p. 36, p. 55.

4 Ibid., pp. 38-39.

5 "National Security Conception of the Russian Federation (2000)", Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shakleina (Ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities*, New York, Central European University Press, 2005, p. 132.

6 President of Russia, Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, 16 May 2003, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2003/05/16/0000_type70029type82912_44692.shtml.

7 Olga Oliker et. al., *Russian Foreign Policy: Sources and Implications*, RAND Corporation, 2009, pp. 45-47, p. 57, p. 67, p. 71, <http://www.rand.org>.

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Minister of Russia, in charge of the military-industrial complex, revealed in October 2008 that they would spend \$ 50 billion on modernisation of the Russian army in 2009, especially by concentration on the development of new strategic nuclear forces and navy, such as new nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers.⁸

At the same time, under Putin, Russia had begun further seeing the running of Russian domestic political and civil society affairs through more of a national security prism and place of Russia in the 'near abroad'. For instance, the Russian leadership under Putin quickly saw 'Rose Revolution' in Georgia, started in late 2003 and completed in early 2004 as an unwanted development that could spread to other states in the 'near abroad' at the expense of Russia's vital interests and for the benefits of the US and Western states in general. It was this supposed peril for Russia that Putin in his address to Federal Assembly on 26 May 2004 paid, among other things, attention to the danger of foreign non-governmental organisations in Russia. In his speech, Putin uttered such discrediting words about some foreign and national NGOs in Russia as not "standing up for people's real interests", prioritising "to receive financing from influential foreign foundations" and "serving dubious group and commercial interests".⁹ Not long after, on 31 January 2006 during his press conference in the Kremlin for Russian and international press, Putin continued, even increased, his critique against some NGOs as saying that "we want these organizations...not to be controlled by some puppet master from abroad... because non-governmental organizations cannot be used as a foreign policy instruments by one state on the territory of another".¹⁰ Overall, these suggest that Putin interpreted the idea of pluralistic society including democracy, free media and activities of NGOs in a very strict term, as their demands and activities were believed to have been used by external actors. It can also be said from the words of Putin that 'colour revolutions' in the 'near abroad' were not real democratic movements, but some developments engineered by the west in order to expand their interests in Russia's 'backyard'.

From the middle of 2004 after Putin made what he had in mind about NGOs in public, various branches of the Russian state begun their active lobbying on the leaderships in the CIS to reduce NGO activities there. For instance, Chief of Russia's Federal Security Service, Nikolai Patrushev, addressed to the deputies at State Duma and lectured his counterparts in Astana during CIS

8 "Russia to Spend \$50 Billion Buying Arms in 2009", *RFE/RL*, 16 October 2008, http://www.rferl.org/content/Russia_To_Spend_50_Billion_Buying_Arms_In_2009/1330511.html.

9 President Vladimir Putin, Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Moscow, 26 May 2004, http://www.mid.ru/Brp_4.nsf/arh/2E998AB77466FAC7C3256EC9001C93BE?OpenDocument.

10 President Vladimir Putin, Transcript of the Press Conference for the Russian and Foreign Media, 31 January 2006, the Kremlin, Moscow, http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2006/01/31/0953_type_82915type82917_100901.shtml.

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gathering of secret service chiefs in May 2005 that NGOs from US, Britain and other countries were engaging in collecting sensitive data and clandestine activities in the CIS at the expense of Russia's security and interests.¹¹ Following the Russian urge, in line with what Russia was already pursuing against the domestic and international NGOs, media organisations and freedom of assembly in the Federation, the Uzbek, Kazak, Kyrgyz, Tajik and Turkmen regimes adopted a number of measures to curtail or close down similar entities and democratic rights.¹²

Russia Curbing the US and the EU

As a number of pre-August War examples in political, military and economic objectives revealed, Russia's resistance and competition in the 'near abroad' take their roots from Russian great and/or super power feeling and related policies required towards the same region. Therefore, the war in August itself and developments afterwards have shown heightened and refreshed Russian efforts to stand strong against the US and the EU efforts for their becoming influential over the states in the 'near abroad'. Especially prevention of political change towards a more pluralistic and democratic forms, and stopping the full membership prospect of some states to NATO alliance, in the 'near abroad' by Russia are worth mentioning here in some detail.

Though there was not a formal military alliance between the US and Georgia before the war in August, the latter had received substantial amount of military hardware and training from the former, signifying that an informal alliance had already been in place between the two. Moreover, Georgia is of great strategic value for economic (mainly energy pipelines) and political reasons (democracy impact with 'Rose Revolution' on some other NIS). In the war, none of the military assistance was effectively used by the Georgian forces against Russia. Nor could the US show enough determination to repel Russia's assault against Georgia during a short five-day war. Georgia seemed to be left to Russia's mercy; had the latter wanted to go further, it would have easily occupied Tbilisi and deposed the Georgian President, Michael Saakashvili, from power.

Having supplied the about \$ 1 billion aid to Georgia after the war in August, the US government just tried to save Saakashvili. Perhaps the only solid expression of solidarity that the US government under the G. W. Bush showed for Georgia, and of Washington's warning towards Russia, just after

11 Josh Machleder, "Contextual and Legislative Analysis of the Russian Law on NGOs", *INDEM Foundation*, Moscow, 16 March 2006, p. 9; "Russian Security Chief Alleges NGOs Cover for Spies," *US Today*, 5 December 2005, http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2005-05-12-russia-ngos_x.htm?csp=34.

12 Josh Machleder, op cit., pp. 9-10; Nicole J. Jackson, "The Role of External Factors in Advancing Non-liberal Democratic Forms of Political Rule: A Case Study of Russia's Influence on Central Asian Regimes," *Contemporary Politics*, Vol.16, No.1, March 2010, pp. 105-107.

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the cease-fire was to send humanitarian assistance carried by US warships to this country.¹³ The US vice-President Dick Cheney's visits to Baku, Tbilisi and Kyiv in early September, the three states which had been the most troubling for Russia by their continuous effort to intensify relationships with the western countries, also aimed to display US political support for those pro-Western leaders.¹⁴ Additionally, the outgoing G. W. Bush administration at the time speeded up concluding the treaties for the establishment of the Missile Defence System (MDS) with Poland and Czech Republic, evidently partly, to punish Russia for its actions in Georgia in a time of highly tensed atmosphere between Washington and Moscow.¹⁵ Nonetheless, Russian government responded in kind and did not back off from its adamant opposition to such potential military instalments, and declared that it would deploy its short-range Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad in order to neutralise the perceived security threat from the United States and/or NATO.¹⁶ It was perhaps this strong Russia reaction in the wake of war in August with Georgia, as well as replacement of the American government from Republican G. W. Bush to Democrat Barack Obama in November 2008 Presidential Election, that played, not perhaps great but, an important role for the US government to scrap the plan of instalment of MDS in Poland and the Czech Republic in 2009 and to concentrate such alternative allies as Turkey, over which Russia would express less or no opposition.

From geopolitical point of view, the EU also failed to develop a robust response towards Russia. The Council of the EU held an emergency meeting on 1 September in order to determine a common position against Russia on the war in Georgia. However, the EU too failed to produce concrete measures against Russia in political, economic or any other levels. The only step taken by the Council was the postponement of the negotiation meetings of the Partnership Agreement with Russia. The rest of the EU Presidency conclusions included either emphasis on the importance of good and healthy relationships between the EU and Russia or Brussels' readiness to deploy observer and fact-finding missions to the region.¹⁷ Even just less than two months after the suspension, at the Nice Summit on 14 November, the EU decided to resume

13 "U.S. Warship in Russian-patrolled Georgian Port", *Reuters*, 05 September 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/09/05/us-georgia-ossetia-poti-idUSL561032420080905>.

14 "Cheney to Rally U.S. Allies in Russia's Backyard", *Reuters*, 02 September 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/09/02/us-georgia-ossetia-idUSL272497420080902>; "In Tbilisi, Cheney Affirms U.S. Support, Condemns Russia", *RFE/RL*, 04 September 2008, http://www.rferl.org/content/Cheney_In_Georgia_To_Show_US_Support/1196264.html.

15 Thom Shanker and Nicholas Kulish, "Russia Lashes Out on Missile Deal", *The New York Times*, 15 August 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/15/world/europe/16poland.html?_r=1&hp.

16 President of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev, Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, the Kremlin, Moscow, 05 November 2008, http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/11/05/2144_type_70029type82917type127286_208836.shtml.

17 Presidency Conclusions, No. 12594/08, *Council of the European Union*, Brussels, 01 September 2008.

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negotiations for the Partnership Agreement with Russia despite the fact that Moscow did not fulfil the EU's condition of the complete withdrawal of Russian troops to their pre-war positions.

Having seen Russia's unbending behaviour both in the war and aftermath, the EU felt obliged to announce its Eastern Partnership initiative towards six NIS of Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in May 2009.¹⁸ For the EU officials, the Eastern Partnership is designed to provide economic, social and security benefits for all and has no desire to take those states in the 'near abroad' within EU's sphere of influence. Despite this very fact, however, since the war, Russia has been now opposed to this project more than ever before because, irrespective of the denial of the EU officials, the Russian government considers that Brussels has tried to create its sphere of influence in the 'near abroad' at the cost of Russia's.¹⁹ No matter how much the EU's Eastern Partnership appears to now prefer pragmatism to idealism, for Russia, it simply means; the longer the six participants from the 'near abroad' in this EU project, the more their inclinations towards the EU at the expense of Russia's own projects for re-integration in the same area in the context of Russian-led Customs Union, Common Economic Space and Eurasian Union.²⁰ After all, it can be said that, as the European Partnership of the EU has the dimension of promoting western type of democracy, Russia has not wanted it to be developed free from Russian control and/or influence. It is because success of the Eastern Partnership project in the total absence of Russia may in the long run help access anti-Russia political actors in the 'near abroad' to power, just like what had happened in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan through 'colour revolutions'.

As for the NATO membership, few months before the August war, despite Russia's opposition, Georgia and Ukraine were promised to be full member of the alliance during the Bucharest Summit of NATO in April 2008. However, after the war, neither Barack Obama Administration nor NATO itself has any longer pushed for their full membership to the Alliance. On the surface, in fact, the US government supports Georgian and Ukrainian membership

18 This initiative by the EU is actually an enhancement of the bilaterally-based and not-so-much-successful EU project of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) of 2003. Eastern Partnership is expected to provide a new level of communication and cooperation with those six states that could not be succeeded with the ENP.

19 Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, "A Conversation with Russia", Brussels Forum 2009, Brussels, 2009, p. 21, <http://brussels.gmfus.org/archives/2009-2/transcripts/>; "EU's Eastern Partnership Program not against Moscow", *Ria Novosti*, 28 April 2009, <http://en15.rian.ru/russia/20090428/121350475.html>; Justin Vaisse and Hans Kundnani, "European Foreign Policy Scorecard 2012", *the European Council on Foreign Relations*, January 2012, p. 51, http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR_SCORECARD_2012_WEB.pdf.

20 Dmitri Tymchuk, "Eastern Partnership Close to Expiration Date?", *Ria Novosti*, 14 October 2011, http://en.ria.ru/international_affairs/20111014/167681676.html.

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to NATO, yet the same administration has had no plan to admit them into it. For instance, during the 60th Anniversary of the establishment of NATO in Strasbourg-Kehl in April 2009, while Obama welcomed the new membership of Albania and Croatia to the Organisation, he did spare no words about any possible joining of Georgia and Ukraine to the Alliance. As well as in Strasbourg-Kehl, since the war the other two NATO Summits of Lisbon in November 2010 and Chicago in May 2012 showed that membership of Georgia and Ukraine to the Alliance has only remained as a promise without giving any specific deadline.²¹

NATO itself as Organisation, the US and some influential members such as Germany and France individually have pointed out that Georgia and Ukraine could be full members so long as they live up to the democratic reforms on their electoral systems, rule of law, media, civil society participation and so on.²² However, the real reason behind continuous delay of the full membership of both Georgia and Ukraine to NATO is the fact that Russia is much more important than Kiev and Tbilisi for the US, Germany, France in terms of their economic and security interests.²³ It is also safe to say that neither the US nor Germany nor France wants to take a big risk of going to war against Russia by admitting such a state as Georgia governed by a 'reckless' leader, Saakashvili. Therefore, Russia's choice of going into war against Georgia alone, as well as Moscow's continuous strong stance against the enlargement of NATO to the East seems to have played a significant role in the increased reluctance of the US, Germany and NATO as a whole security body to admit Georgia and Ukraine into the Alliance.

- 21 See Strasbourg / Kehl Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Strasbourg/Kehl, Press Release (2009), 04 April 2009, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52837.htm?mode=pressrelease; Lisbon Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Lisbon on 20 November 2010, Press Release, http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2010_11/2010_11_11DE1DB9B73C4F9BBFB52B2C94722EAC_PR_CP_2010_0155_ENG-Summit_LISBON.pdf; Active Engagement, Modern Defence: Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Lisbon 19-20 November 2010, p. 31 http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/pdf/Strat_Concept_web_en.pdf; Chicago Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Chicago on 20 May 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-D6A5053B-72C00533/natolive/official_texts_87593.htm.
- 22 "NATO Secretary General confirms Alliance support for Georgia", *North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*, 01 October 2010, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_66580.htm; "NATO Tells Georgia Keep Up Reform Momentum", *Civil Georgia*, 09 November 2011, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24121>.
- 23 "Leaked Cables: Two Views on U.S.-Georgia Military Cooperation", *Civil Georgia*, 03 December 2010, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22921>; also see "Putin, Russia and the West: War", *BBC*, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51592s0H5JQ>.

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Likewise, at the gaze of the US and the EU, the Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan have moved to the Russia's camp in about five years after their 'Orange' and 'Tulip' revolutions, respectively. Especially, Ukraine experienced a fierce political battle about which way to go- the West or Russia, which allowed witnessing a power struggle between President Viktor Yushchenko and Prime Minister Julia Tymoshenko- the two strong allies during the 'Orange Revolution'. Two most important reasons of their falling apart deeply were because of their differing level of approaches to Russia in the war over South Ossetia and thereafter and the three-week-long gas crisis with Moscow in January 2009. At the end, mainly due to economic difficulties, Ukrainian people chose Viktor Yanukovich- a pro-Russian figure portrayed as a loser against the pro-Western Yushchenko and Tymoshenko during the 'Orange Revolution', after the second round of elections on 7 February 2010. Ukraine's prospect to become a full member of NATO has been dashed for a considerable future by the election of Yanukovich as he signed an agreement with Russia in April 2010 by which Ukraine extended Russian military base in Crimea until 2042 in return for a 30 percent discount on gas export from Russia.²⁴ Though less clear it seems to be than that of the swift case of Ukraine's moving back to Russian sphere, Russia's financial, energy (natural gas) and media tools played a crucial role on the deposition of Kurmanbek Bakiyev in April 2010 by a popular revolt.²⁵ Russia has very much disliked the establishment of parliamentary system in Kyrgyzstan, but it has at the same time been satisfied with the fact that all leading political figures in the new Kyrgyz government have acknowledged and shown how much they were in need of Russia in economic, military and political terms.²⁶ Although this has not yet resulted in the closure of the Manas Air Base used by the US army in the war in Afghanistan, the new Kyrgyz government's behaviour of revaluing of Russia has obviously strengthened Moscow's hand that it could use against the US whenever it sees fit in the region.

Likewise, especially, since the short war, Georgia has been deeply divided between the ruling party and the opposition. The opposition political figures marched in mass and asked Saakashvili to resign due to his taking the country to a war with Russia that could never be winnable. Even some, if not all, influential opposition figures, such as Zurab Noghaideli (the former Prime Minister and now head of For A Just Georgia Movement) and Nino Burjanadze

24 "Russia Grants Ukraine Gas Discount in Return For Fleet Lease Extension", *RFE/RL*, April 21, 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/Russian_Ukrainian_Leaders_Meet_On_Gas_Deal/2019642.html.

25 "Kyrgyzstan: A Hollow Regime Collapses", *International Crisis Group*, Policy Briefing, No. 102, April 27, 2010, p. 5, pp. 11-13, www.crisisgroup.org.

26 "Kyrgyzstan Asks for Russian Peacekeepers as Violence Goes On", *RIA Novosti*, 12 June 2010, <http://en.rian.ru/news/20100612/159400063.html>; Daniyar Karimov, "Kyrgyz Backtracking: Putin Brings Atambayev back in the Beginning of 2009", *24.kg News Agency*, 29 December 2010, <http://eng.24.kg/cis/2010/12/29/15627.html>.

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(former Speaker of the Parliament and now Head of Democratic Movement-United Georgia Party) have come to terms that Georgia should talk to Russia to reduce the differences. That is why they have been in search of building close relations with Russia and United Russia of Putin.²⁷ Most importantly, Bidzina Ivanishvili, who is the richest businessman in Georgia with his investments in Russia, decided to enter into politics in October 2011 to challenge Saakashvili. As a result of these, Georgia also now witnessed a power change in the Parliamentary Elections held in October 2012 in which United National Movement of Saakashvili- a strong anti-Kremlin political figure- lost the majority in the Parliament to Georgian Dream coalition led by Ivanishvili. Among other things, main objective of Ivanishvili is to establish a balanced foreign and security policy for Georgia between Russia and the west (the US, NATO and the EU).²⁸

CSTO for Deepening Security Space

Prior to the war in Georgia, there had been a number of joint proposals and projects within the CSTO,²⁹ such as regular joint military exercises, modernisation efforts of military forces of the member states, fighting against illegal drug-trafficking and emergency deployment to provide relief in the humanitarian situation. However, it can be said that the CSTO was not a successful Organization in the development and fulfilment of these tasks due to the structural, financial problems as well as lack and differing objectives of member states. Despite still ongoing difficulties on these matters, however, the Georgian crisis seems to have elicited the CSTO to an important regional and international security organisation or alliance. The CSTO Summit of the heads of states in Moscow on September 5, 2008, and following Russia's efforts to strengthening military cooperation among member states were instrumental in the re-emergence of the Organisation as a military alliance under the leadership of Russia in the 'near abroad'.

Joint Declaration of the CSTO Summit in Moscow in September touched upon not only a common position towards the recent war in Georgia but also important strategic geopolitical and other security issues. Apart from Russia,

27 "Ex-PM Nogaideli Signs Cooperation Treaty with Russia's Ruling Party", *Civil Georgia*, 09 February 2010, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21964>; "Burjanadze Meets Putin in Moscow", *Civil Georgia*, 04 March 2010, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22052>.

28 "Ivanishvili on Foreign Policy, Territorial Integrity", *Civil Georgia*, 21 October 2011, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24061>; "Ivanishvili's First-Ever TV Interview", *Civil Georgia*, 17 October 2011, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24039>; Caucasus Elections Watch: A Weekly Review of Elections Related Processes in the Caucasus Region, 9 October 2012, http://caucasuselections.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/election-watch_21_email-f.pdf.

29 This is a security organisation that was established in 2002 with the transformation of the Russian-led Tashkent Security Organisation of 1992 for improving security relations among Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

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the other members of the CSTO remained silent in their reaction to the war in Georgia until the Moscow Summit because they did not know how to react in the condition that they all had different level of strategic economic and military relations with Western European countries and, most importantly, with the US. The Joint Declaration of the CSTO in Moscow openly and clearly endorsed Russia's reaction to Georgia in the war over South Ossetia by saying that "Member states support the active role of Russia in peace and cooperation assistance in the region and stand for ensuring lasting security for South Ossetia and Abkhazia."³⁰ Having accused Georgia of breaking the peace and security in the Caucasus, the Declaration called on "all states to approach in a well-considered and an objective manner, without double standards, assessment of the situation and not to take any action capable of provoking its further exacerbation."³¹

In addition to this pro-Russian stance by the CSTO in the War in Georgia, the Joint Declaration of the Summit stressed on approaching a serious and wider conflict to be caused by NATO's attempts to stepping into the areas fallen into direct responsibility of the CSTO. In this regard, the CSTO in the Declaration warned that NATO was the responsible side for any implications to be induced by its Eastward expansion and instalment of missile defence systems along close proximity of the borders of CSTO members. In order perhaps to evade such a danger, and most likely to stand behind Russian strategic position, the CSTO in its Declaration showed their own solution as the right direction by pointing out that they supported Russia's proposal for developing a European Security Treaty.³² With all these reactions, it can be said that, for the first time in its history, the CSTO as a security body managed to express a joint assessment to the crisis in Georgia and a united stance to wider international security issues – a kind of behaviour that is displayed by a strong military alliance like NATO.

It is true that none of the members of the CSTO apart from Russia has thus far recognised the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In fact, the important point in the common stance of the CSTO is not very much related to whether other members of it recognized independence of the two breakaway regions. Such a behaviour would mean the submission of what Russia wanted from CSTO members on a specific and important security issue and a total compliance with the interests of Russia sparing for them no manoeuvre of independence. Moreover, most of the members of the CSTO host a number of different ethnic groups who have been at loggerheads with

30 Declaration of the Moscow Session of the Collective Security Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, Moscow, 05 September 2008, *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, 09 September 2008, http://www.in.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/39AE7686F5EA1126C32574C20032F125.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

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the governments and dominant ethnic groups such as in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. If those multi ethnic members of the CSTO recognised the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, this would mean opening a door for their own ethnic minorities to follow a similar line. The answer of why then Russia as being a multi ethnic state followed a different line of action in the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is quite clear because while Russia is strong and powerful enough to challenge any internal ethnic separatist challenges such as Chechnya, and external criticisms by applying force or using other geopolitical tools, other states of the CSTO are weak and have to rely on support for, or rescue of, other powerful states which, in their case, is no other than Russia in their geographies and regime interests. Therefore, Russia has not expected other CSTO members to behave the same as it acted in the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but it wanted to get a legitimacy and an approval for the way it reacted to Georgia and a common position on strategic security issues in international arena such as the missile defence system and a new security structure in Europe- a kind of behaviour that can be displayed by a strong military alliance. Since the end of the Soviet Union, Russia has worked hard to establish a political, economic and security environment in which it has wanted to be the pivotal actor bringing as many states as possible in the post-Soviet space around itself. By then for the first time the war in Georgia has tested Russia's resolve as it failed to accomplish in international arena in several cases against the West like in the Balkans.

Accordingly, Russia, by its reaction in the war in Georgia, gave message not only to the unfolding conflict in the 'near abroad' but also to likely security developments and alliance strength of the CSTO in years ahead. Having approved by the members of the CSTO on the crisis in Georgia, Russia has proved that its position in the security matters in the 'near abroad' consolidated its first place among equals and its interests mattered much more than those of what other CSTO member states. Also, Russia indicated that it is the only actor in the CSTO it had the will and capacity, when necessary, to use military force to reach its regional and international objectives. All these appear to have raised the status and leadership of Russia, and increased appearance and credibility of the CSTO as a military alliance in the 'near abroad' and wider international arena, while the US and the EU were dismayed from the actions Russia developed in the South Caucasus.

It can be accepted that the CSTO has still been lacking the necessary and strong functional instruments for joint cooperation in the military and political areas. However, after the war in Georgia, Russia intensified its efforts to turn the CSTO into a real military-political alliance by furthering the development of its peacekeeping capacity and military-technical cooperation among members. Member states have increasingly cooperated on joint

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military exercises under the name of fighting against terrorism, extremism, organized-crimes and so on.³³ In this case, the most important tasks of the CSTO is to protect sovereignty of the members from any external aggression, and to contain terrorist acts and illegal drug trafficking from Afghanistan inflicting states and societies in Central Asian and Russia. In order to achieve these objectives of the CSTO, the member states led by Russia have focused on developing an efficient and united control, command and communication mechanism to improve joint decision making mechanism of the Organisation. Moreover, Russia has been supplying high tech weapons in a discount price to the members of the CSTO. By doing so, Russia has been not only balancing the US and NATO political and military actions in the 'near abroad', but also making its military and political presence strong in the same area especially in the territories where inter-state and intra-state conflicts are ripe for explosion. In this sense Russia's policy of giving priority to the members of the CSTO in its arm sales provides a double gain for Moscow while, on the one hand, it makes itself inevitable for the states in the 'near abroad', on the other it constantly maintain a reason to have a strong military coalition led by Moscow. Whether Russia will manage to succeed in the creation of a NATO-like military alignment in the 'near abroad' seems to be dependent not very much on what small and weak states of the CSTO wish and want, but on how much powerful Russia will be in economic, political and military terms and on the level of confidence Moscow will show in regional and international levels.

Although some states in the CSTO do not hesitate to express their differences, most members including those who are critical for Moscow have no option but to prolong their military coalition with Russia. For instance, Uzbekistan arguing that its views were not paid much attention in the CSTO left the Organization in June 2012 at a time when Islam Kerimov regime has improved relations with the US³⁴. In fact, such an action is not alien to the Uzbek leadership for Uzbekistan suspended its membership to Russian-led security structure in 1999 and got back in the CSTO in 2006 when it was criticized by the US after Tashkent's bloody crackdown in Andijon in 2005. This is a behavioral pattern of Uzbekistan, which fits well in its constant search for a strategic balance between the US and Russia making Tashkent a kind of partner that had always kept away from participating actively in the works of the CSTO. Though Uzbekistan's exit does not make any difference for the CSTO's capacity and capability in practical security sense on the ground, such a decision by a member, as Vladimir Socor, a Russian political analyst, admits,

33 "Russian-Led CSTO Grouping Adds Military Dimension", *RFE/RL*, 04 February 2009, http://www.rferl.org/content/Rapid_Reaction_Force_Adds_Military_Dimension_To_CSTO/1379324.html.

34 "Uzbekistan Suspends Membership in CSTO", *RFE/RL*, 28 June 2012, <http://www.rferl.org/content/uzbekistan-csto-suspends-membership/24629244.html>.

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has an inevitable damaging effect on Russia's effort to portray the CSTO as a strong regional security alliance and its acceptance in international level.³⁵

Though strengthening the CSTO as an effective military alliance has been an ongoing process which has not been completed yet, Russia's bilateral military relations with the member states of the Organisation continue to be an important avenue to keep it alive and make it a mature military alliance. In this context, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are three states in the CSTO that they have always been willing to deepen their relations with the Organization since they have felt much more vulnerable to the security challenges in their regions. Armenia for instance has wished to have a much more unified position of the CSTO on foreign and security issues in the 'near abroad', meaning that Russia should strengthen its leadership and geopolitical interests in those matters. Thus, the new Russo-Armenian defence treaty³⁶ signed in 2010 should be seen, among other reasons, a renewed assertion of Russia's geopolitical muscle in the 'near abroad' after the war in Georgia.

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, few days after Kurmanbek Bakiyev regime decided to close down the Manas Air Base used by the US, Russia during the CSTO summit in Moscow on February 4, 2009, revealed the establishment of Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) among the member states to better respond to regional security challenges.³⁷ It was assumed that RRF would possibly take some small number of military contingents from members of the CSTO while Russia was to be on the main political and military seats. After the CSTO meeting in Moscow, Medvedev drew a parallel objective between the proposed RRF of the CSTO and NATO's peace-making and technical capabilities.³⁸ This thought of Medvedev was not coincidental after Kyrgyzstan's announcement of the eviction of Manas Base, for the CSTO and/or Russia was assumed to take over the base and the mission in that country after NATO and the US forces would leave.³⁹ Perhaps, to support this view of strengthening the CSTO, in return for the closure of Manas Base, and extending Russian military base in Kant for 49 years, Russia promised to give \$2.4 billion of loan and credit to the

35 "Interview: Analyst Says Uzbekistan's Suspension Shows CSTO Is 'Irrelevant'", *RFE/RL*, 29 June 2012, <http://www.rferl.org/content/interview-analyst-says-uzbekistan-suspension-shows-csto-irrelevant/24629921.html>.

36 Andrei Trenin and Dmitri Trenin, "The Wider Implications Of The Russian-Armenian Defense Deal", *RFE/RL*, 24 August 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/The_Wider_Implications_Of_The_Russian_Armenian_Defense_Deal/2136480.html.

37 The plan to build a joint reaction force like Rapid Reaction Force led by Russia had been long discussed among the members. Even the CSTO expressed in September 2008 that they had plan to institute an 11,000-strong regional military force to handle possible threats to the sovereignty of the members.

38 Sergei Blagov, "Russia: Trying to Put the Obama Administration on Defensive", *Eurasia Insight*, 04 February 2009, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav020409e.shtml>.

39 Ibid.

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Kyrgyz government. However, Russia did not insist on the closure of the Manas Base after the deposition of Bakiyev regime in April 2010, at least until the withdrawal of the NATO forces by 2014 from Afghanistan. Instead, Russia has agreed with the new Kyrgyz government in September 2012 to extend the stay of its Kant military base in Kyrgyzstan until 2032 in return for writing off Kyrgyzstan's \$ 500 million debt.⁴⁰ Following a year-long bilateral discussions, Russia has finally succeeded in the extending its military presence in Tajikistan as well. By the agreement that was signed in October 2012 in Dushanbe between Putin and Rahmanov, Russia will maintain its military unit of 7000 strong in Tajikistan until 2042 apparently for protecting common strategic interests of the two states, providing further security and stability for entire Central Asia. While Russia prolongs its military presence in Tajikistan for a long time period, Tajik defence will be strengthened by Moscow in terms of modernisation of the army with new Russian arms and training.⁴¹

Though some Russian experts, like Aleksei Malashenko at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Moscow, defends that the CSTO was unable to form a counter balance against the US or NATO and to defeat a possible radical Islamist uprising against Central Asian regimes,⁴² it can still be of important use through protecting Central Asian regimes from western influences and thus from similar 'anti-Russian developments' in the 'near abroad' like Saakashvili government in Georgia. As said earlier, Russia is already selling military hardware to the CSTO members at cheap price, and the Organisation under the banner of RRF began conducting military exercises, such as in Kazakhstan (September 2009), in Tajikistan (April 2010) and in Armenia (September 2012), aiming at, among other objectives, strengthening member states' capability to fight against terrorism and boosting law enforcement agencies' abilities.⁴³ Moreover, the CSTO has been much more relevant to any security and/or strategic security developments in the 'near abroad' than it had never been before. Whether it is individual or organisational level, Russia will

40 "Russia to Keep Kyrgyzstan Military Base, Forgive Debt", *Defense News*, 20 September 2012, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20120920/DEFREG03/309200007/Russia-Keep-Kyrgyzstan-Military-Base-Forgive-Debt>.

41 "Russia Signs Deal to Prolong Troop Presence at Tajik Military Base", *RFE/RL*, 05 October 2012, <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-signs-deal-troop-presence-tajikistan-military-base/24730251.html>.

42 See "Russian-Led CSTO Grouping Adds Military Dimension", *RFE/RL*, op cit.

43 "Russia: Moscow Offers to Peddle Cheap Arms to Neighbors", *Eurasia News Briefs*, 08 May 2009, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/news/articles/eav050809c.shtml>; "CSTO Military Maneuvers Kick Off in Kazakhstan", *RFE/RL*, 17 September 2009, http://www.rferl.org/content/CSTO_Military_Maneuvers_Kick_Off_In_Kazakhstan/1824913.html; "CSTO Rapid-Reaction Forces End Exercises In Tajikistan", *RFE/RL*, 27 April 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/CSTO_RapidReaction_Forces_End_Exercises_In_Tajikistan/2026156.html; "CSTO Military Exercises to Develop Joint Organizational Skills", *Armenpress*, Armenian News Agency, 15 September 2012, <http://armenpress.am/eng/news/693290/csto-military-exercises-to-develop-joint-organizational-skills-anatoly-timoshenkov.html>.

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stay as the dominant security actor in the post-Soviet space. Especially, it is unlikely to ignore, even if it is a changing degree, the role of the CSTO in that security domain bordering an unstable Afghanistan that is getting ready to provide security on its own when the US and other NATO members leave the country by the end of 2014.

SCO for Widening Security Space

In much of the official statements made by the SCO, the Organisation is said to have aimed at enabling its members to discuss regional security and economic issues. Much noted such issue areas to work jointly on are those of terrorism, extremism, separatism, political instability, energy and economic cooperation. Though the SCO has often come into forward with these objectives, its documents reflect much broader claims. Such calls then, despite various opposing views on the geopolitical ambitions and utility of the SCO, can be interpreted in the case of war between Russia and Georgia. It can be thus said that the way the SCO saw the war in Georgia and subsequent developments in regional security seem to have increased its geopolitical weight, at least psychologically, if not yet materially, in favour of Russia.⁴⁴

In the Second Article of the Declaration of the Establishment of the SCO, it says that the member states would commit themselves to “establishing a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order”.⁴⁵ In the Article 10, the SCO stresses the importance of the preservation of “global strategic balance and stability”.⁴⁶ These suggest that both Russia and China, the two most important members of the SCO, are not happy with international economic and political order dominated by the West, particularly the US, and believe in the need for creation of a ‘global strategic balance’ in which Moscow and Beijing are, too, indispensable.

Regarding the ‘near abroad’, some Russian officers in Defence Ministry and independent analyst have acknowledged broader strategic utility of the SCO for Russia by stressing, for instance, that democracy-promotion in western style in Central Asia has posed regional instability and a security threat. Thus, for them, the SCO, now with joint military exercises against terrorism and perhaps later on with building a real military alliance, would help prevent, what they believe, western political and military activities from destabilising

44 The SCO consists of six members of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and of four observers of India, Pakistan, Iran and Mongolia as well as of six guest attendances of CIS, ASEAN, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Belarus and Armenia.

45 “Declaration on Establishment of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation”, 15 June 2001, Shanghai, <http://www.sectsc.org/html/00088.html>; “Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism”, 15 June 2001, Shanghai, <http://www.sectsc.org/html/00093.html>.

46 Ibid.

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Central Asian states and related security threats in the 'near abroad'.⁴⁷ Similar to the CSTO, therefore, the SCO is of important strategic tool for Russia to keep much powerful and influential forces of the West away from becoming very powerful actors in the 'near abroad'.

The war in Georgia seems to have proven successful, though limited, usage of the SCO by Russia. In contrast to many views that Moscow failed to get a desired solid backing from the SCO during and after the war with Georgia, it indeed gave political support to Russia on the same issue. It is true that none of the member states during and after the SCO Summit held on the 28th of August in Dushanbe has followed the Russia's path to recognise independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. However, just opposite to how the EU and US have seen the war in the South Caucasus as an issue between Georgia and Russia, the SCO considered it as a conflict centred around South Ossetia.⁴⁸ This clearly shows that, contrary to Western approach of treating the issue as a subject of territorial integrity of Georgia, the SCO supported Russian position by making a direct reference to South Ossetia as a distinct and direct reference object in the conflict.

Further, the members of the SCO openly defined Russia's role in South Ossetia, but not mentioning Georgia, as a position promoting "peace and cooperation" in the region. Most importantly, the SCO conformed with the Russian view that the conflict in South Ossetia is tantamount to shaking, if not entirely changing, the global balance of power orbited around the US supremacy since the end of the Cold War. Thus, the SCO rejected 'uni-polar mentality' of the US as the Organisation considered it as a source of conflict rather than a cure for common challenges in the world. Stressing the necessity to have a multi-polar world for the sake of international security, the SCO called for the maintenance of strategic balance of power. The SCO warned that the US endeavour to create a global antimissile defence system like in Poland and the Czech Republic was a futile attempt, as such efforts would neither help to uphold the strategic balance nor prevent the spread of any kinds of weapons including nuclear one.⁴⁹

Similar to the position within the framework of the CSTO mentioned above, the SCO has followed the same pattern of linkage in its treatment of the war between Russia and Georgia. In the regional level, the SCO supported the Russia's position in the war over South Ossetia. Furthermore, the SCO remained short to urge its members and other states in international arena on

47 Roger N. McDermott, "The Rising Dragon: SCO Peace Mission 2007", *Occasional Paper*, The Jamestown Foundation, October 2007, pp. 18-19, pp. 22-23, www.jamestown.org.

48 "Dushanbe Declaration of Heads of SCO Member States", Dushanbe, 28 August 2008, http://www.sectsco.org/news_detail.asp?id=2352&LanguageID=2.

49 Ibid.

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the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Similar to the logic behind the behaviour of the CSTO members, China did not show any inclination in the way of accepting Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states because Beijing itself has had deep worries about the independence struggles of Tibetans and Uighurs respectively for Tibet and Xinjiang regions. Also, as the CSTO saw, the SCO placed the war over South Ossetia into a global context in which relatively isolated problem and a short war in the Caucasus were pulled by it into the discussions of bipolar and/or multi-polar international order- a political stance that is consistent with the claim that both Russia and China have long defended.

There are also some, though implicit, consequences of the war between Russia and Georgia especially for Central Asian states with respect to the SCO. Firstly, the US's and EU's inability to help Georgia during the war seems to have further convinced Central Asian states that they could not rely on any Western promise of military assistance in case of a clash with Russia or China. Secondly, the more military presence and the deeper political influence the US and/or NATO had in Central Asia, the more likely that the weak and 'illegitimate' regimes there would face domestic political threat and destabilisation. Thirdly, if Central Asian states felt squeezed in any terms by Russia or China or any other regional states, they would swing towards the other side. Therefore, it is likely that, as is now, the SCO will keep its important place for Central Asian states to further develop their political, military and economic relations with the two authoritarian great powers that they may one day need it much more in order for regime stability and some kind of independent manoeuvrability. Thus, it can be argued that the SCO has been very much complimentary with the interests of Central Asian states, and thus far served for Russia's prospective image of 'near abroad' in terms of reducing Western political and military influences as much as possible, and of once again getting Chinese approval of Moscow's legitimate presence in the same post-Soviet region.

Energy Pipelines for Making Russia Great Again

As it was for the Soviet Union in the past, income generated from oil and gas and complex web of pipelines carrying them to domestic and international consumption are the main source and instrument of badly needed capital for the Russian Federation. As well as cooperation, but inevitably competition over the energy pipelines in the post-Soviet territories has become one of the most, if not the most, important reasons in the formation of the idea of the 'near abroad'. It can be said that Russia's harsh response to Georgia over South Ossetia was, also indeed, provoked by the fact that Russia has wanted to strengthen its grip on energy pipelines and used related issues, such as energy prices and transportation fees, to extract more geopolitical benefits in the 'near abroad'.

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As stated earlier, Putin wanted to see an economically strong Russia. Throughout his eighth years of Presidency, Russia managed to produce important sum of oil and gas with huge revenues by the help of high energy prices. Before the War in August 2008 over South Ossetia, still staying behind the late energy production level of the Soviet Union, Russia's annual total oil and gas yield from 2000 to 2007 amounted to nearly 500 million tonnes and 600 billion cubic metres, respectively.⁵⁰ In total, energy export of Russia was made up of over 60 percent of its total export commodities until the War in 2008.⁵¹ According to the statistics, Russia accumulated an amount of \$ 476 billion currency reserves from energy export by 2007, a sum that was only \$ 12 billion just before Putin was appointed as Prime minister in 1998.⁵²

The reason to give the above energy-related numbers covering the period by the War in 2008 is to say that the conflict with Georgia was and still is, to a certain extent, reflected on the economic and geopolitical worries, calculations and decisions of Russia and energy rich Caspian states. Of them, especially Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan were the potential energy suppliers to Europe and, thus, had to think of likely impact of the war on regional geopolitical and economic developments when tension died down. Russia, the dominant state in a number of ways in the 'near abroad', however, did not see itself being confined with heavy criticisms exerted by the US and the EU. In so feeling, Russia has tried to take advantage of the turmoil in Georgia and made, at least, a verbal contract with Islam Karimov, the Uzbek President, on September 2, 2008, for another pipeline in the region to carry around 30 bcm of natural gas per year from Uzbekistan to Russia with a link to Turkmenistan.⁵³

50 Country Profile, Russia, 2007, *The Economic Intelligence Unit*, 2007, p. 45; "BP Statistical Review of World Energy", June 2008, pp. 8-9, p. 24, http://www.bp.com/liveassets/bp_internet/globalbp/globalbp_uk_english/reports_and_publications/statistical_energy_review_2008/STAGING/local_assets/downloads/pdf/statistical_review_of_world_energy_full_review_2008.pdf.

51 Country Profile, Russia, 2008, *The Economic Intelligence Unit*, 2008, p. 37.

52 Ibid., p. 63; Country Profile, Russia, 2007, *The Economic Intelligence Unit*, op cit., p. 55.

53 Farangis Najibullah, "Moscow Seeking Alliances in Energy-Rich Central Asia", *RFE/RL*, 04 September 2008, http://www.rferl.org/content/Moscow_Seeking_Alliances_in_EnergyRich_Central_Asia_/1196365.html; "Central Asia: Russia and United States Intensify Energy Competition", *Eurasia Insight*, 05 September 2008, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav090508a.shtml>. Russia's rush to secure another gas pipeline from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan was not realized in the following years because, starting with the cut-off of the flow of gas with explosion of Turkmenistan-Russia pipeline in April 2009, Moscow and Ashgabat entered into a gas price dispute that was further complicated by global economic crisis; reduction of Russian gas demand; EU's renewed-gas resources away from Russia and its increased interest in Nabucco; suspension of Russia's gas supply to Europe due to the dispute between Russia and Ukraine on gas price and pipeline fee in January 2009. All these have allowed Turkmen leadership to reduce its dependence on Russian pipeline system and thus showed more interest in exporting gas to Chinese and EU (despite still existing difficulties via Nabucco) markets, and supplying gas to the proposed TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) gas pipeline.

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This behaviour, therefore, suggested that Russia tried to further solidify its dominance over the pipelines in the Caspian region and wider area of the 'near abroad' by sending a message to those who attempted to divert energy lines away from Russian territory.⁵⁴

Likewise, for several years before the war in Georgia, Ukraine and Russia had disagreements on the flow of gas and pricing through Ukrainian territory. However, the one that came in January 2009, few months after the conflict in Georgia, was unlikely a coincident so far as its severity is concerned. Different from the previous disagreements that could be seen as a commercial issue between a buyer and seller, this new one appeared to be more like a Russian geopolitical reflection in the region that had a long term objective like disgracing the 'Orange Revolution' and punishing Yushchenko for his political and moral, if not material, support of Georgia in the August war. In this case, for instance, in January, Gasprom of Russia initially required \$ 418 for one thousand cubic metres of gas- an amount closer to the level that Europe had paid to Russia (\$ 500)- from Ukraine. After negotiations Russia dropped its demand first to \$ 250, but then again increased to \$ 418 when Ukraine offered to pay \$ 235. The price disagreement between Ukrainian and Russian governments stopped the flow of gas from Russia to Europe via Ukraine for nearly three weeks. Then a new accord was succeeded between Ukrainian Prime Minister Tymoshenko and Russian Prime Minister Putin on the terms of Ukraine to buy Russian gas at a 20 percent discounted European price and transfer it to Europe with a reduced transit cost.⁵⁵ During the stoppage of gas flow from Russia, a number of Eastern and Western countries which are, a changing degree, dependent on the Russia gas, had to bear the cold winter and shut down some factories working with natural gas. Though not openly admitted by Russia, which has always seen the problem as a commercial matter, it caught Ukraine as well as Europe unprepared, and used its gas as a geopolitical leverage to show that

54 Since the end of the Soviet Union, directions of oil and gas pipelines of the energy-rich Caspian states including Russia's have always been subject to various conditions determined by demand and supply in international market, safety and security situation in hosting territories, geopolitical rivalries, strength of sovereignty and independence of the states/regimes, technological innovations and so on. For instance, difficulties and risks caused by instability and insecurity in the Caucasus region, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Chechnya conflicts in the 1990s, played a substantial role in the delay of the realisation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. It was because of this and many other reasons, the regimes of the countries having abundance of oil and gas in the Caspian and South Caucasus regions have always preferred to diversify the flow of their oil and gas to different markets and paid a particular attention to the security and stability in the countries to host their pipelines.

55 "Gazprom Harms Russian Interests, Ukraine Refuses To Compromise", Interview with Former Russian Deputy Energy Minister Vladimir Milov, *RFE/RL*, 08 January 2009, http://www.rferl.org/content/Interview_Gazprom_Harms_Russian_Interests_/1367968.html; "Russia and Ukraine Say Gas Deal Reached", *RFE/RL*, 18 January 2009, http://www.rferl.org/content/Russia_And_Ukraine_Say_Gas_Deal_Reached/1371486.html.

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it was indispensable for them. One may, therefore, conclude that this quarrel between Russia and Ukraine would have been managed in a quicker and better way like it was managed before, had there not been a war in Georgia in which Tbilisi received political support from one of the leading 'Orange revolutionaries'- Yushchenko, then the Ukrainian President, who was strongly seeking to place his country into NATO alliance.

It can also be said that the US, EU and Turkey have intensified their efforts to realise the Nabucco gas pipeline after the war in Georgia. Just like the development process of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline in the 1990s, Russia has also increased its effort to discrediting the Nabucco pipeline by offering its Southern Stream pipeline from Novorossiysk via Black Sea to Bulgaria and then to Central and Western Europe. Russia is well aware that if Nabucco was realised it would lose not only lucrative transportation fees and natural gas at cheap prices from the Central Asian states but also an important geopolitical leverage in the 'near abroad'. In line with this consideration, Russia considers Nabucco as a project motivated by western geopolitical concerns but not by its economic necessity. Even Putin went further and warned the supporters of Nabucco by asking them where they would find gas resources to fill it.⁵⁶ Also, as stated in its new National Security Strategy, revealed in May 2009, Russia does not rule out the use of force in the competition over the energy resources in the 'near abroad'.⁵⁷

Therefore, increased Russian effort to build the Southern Stream line as a rival to Nabucco can be seen as, among other things, a direct consequence of the war in Georgia in South Caucasus. In fact, as there are many actors in the energy game in the 'near abroad', they have now had to play their roles under a new power perception created by the conflict in Georgia. For instance, the US and the EU, as state actors, appear to have already been that they are weaker than Russia in the energy game in the same area. This weakness is not surely caused by Western deficiencies in resources and capabilities, but by their lack of will and unitary stand in the energy and pipeline policies towards the post-Soviet geography.⁵⁸ Furthermore, as well as some governments, private companies, especially from the US and the EU, have serious hesitation

56 Bruce Pannier, "Multiple Pipelines, but No Happiness, at EU-Russia Summit", *RFE/RL*, 21 May 2009, http://www.rferl.org/content/Multiple_Pipelines_But_No_Happiness_At_EURussia_Summit/1736349.html.

57 национальной безопасности Российской Федерации до 2020 года National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020, Security Council, Russian Federation, No.537, 12 May 2009, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/99.html>.

58 For instance, the US is now supporting a difficult engagement closely linked to the energy and pipeline development in Central Asia, such as TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India)- a proposed gas pipeline project from Turkmenistan to India that it must not only bring the two arch-enemies, India and Pakistan, on the table but also have a secure and stable Afghanistan.

on the idea of further relying on unstable regions such as South Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as on unpredictable governments there⁵⁹ which may take their countries to a war creating a heavy risk for existing and planned big energy pipelines.

Hence, it can be concluded that there have always been numerous determinants in the energy issues in the post-Soviet geography. Evidently, Russia did not go to war with Georgia first and foremost for the aim of preventing alternative energy pipelines to be built away from Russian Federation. Naturally, the security risk that has been increased in the South Caucasus with the war in Georgia, no matter whether this is caused by Russia or not, has obviously favoured Russian interests in the energy pipeline 'game' in the 'near abroad'. Although if Russia has been so far able to fully materialize the war for its own benefit on the energy pipelines is open to debate, it can be said that, as real politic may suggest, Moscow has done its best to promote its interests in the same area.

Conclusion

Russia's reaction to the war between Georgia and breakaway region of South Ossetia cannot just be considered as an act of re-establishing regional 'peace' and 'order', but as an act of punishing an 'aggressor' who dared to challenge Russia's prolonged desire to realise its beliefs and objectives in its 'backyard' and global arena. The war in August against Georgia then became an opportunity for Russia to remind that Russia was determined to reassert and maintain its grip on the 'near abroad' when or if necessary. In its re-assertion, Russia has used a number of tools in various political, security and economic areas in the 'near abroad', such as further limiting the US and the EU and expressing further utility of CSTO, SCO and energy pipelines.

Georgia is a small and weak state but has a big strategic importance at the crossroads of regional and, to some extent, global economic, cultural and military divisions. Each side, Russia on the one side, and the West as the US and the EU on the other, have endeavoured their interests and ideas to be accepted by Georgia in particular and states in the 'near abroad' in general since the end of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the robust reaction of Russia to Georgia by the war could not just be taken as an act of pacification of a government in the region defying Russia's interests in, and 'image' of, the 'near abroad', but to show that Russia was a great power capable of protecting its interests in all condition and time. Russia appeared to have been successful

59 Bruce Pannier, "Russia-Georgia Conflict Raises Concerns About Caspian Energy Exports", *RFE/RL*, 13 August 2008, http://www.rferl.org/content/Conflict_Raises_Concerns_About_Caspian_Energy_Exports/1190774.html; Anatoly Medetsky, "War Casts Cloud Over Pipeline Route", *The Moscow Times*, 14 August 2008, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/1009/42/369783.html>; Ahto Lobjakas, "EU Fights For Nabucco's Future", *RFE/RL*, 05 November 2008, http://www.rferl.org/content/EU_Fights_For_Nabuccos_Future/1338540.html.

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in that policy in the 'near abroad' so far as the US's and the EU's hesitation to challenge Russian policy practices are concerned. For instance, Georgia is now far more away from being a full member of NATO than it was before the War erupted with Russia. Regardless of whether Georgia conducts a democratic election or not, which happened peaceful, free and transparent manner in October 2012, the US and EU have continued to stress that Georgia still needed time for NATO membership. Similar conciliatory policies pursued by the US and EU could also be seen a number of other fields in the 'near abroad' since the War in Georgia. For instance, EU's restart of Partnership Negotiation with Moscow in a short time after the War and Washington's search for resetting the relationships with Russia in 2009 are the Western approach to Russia that it has given priority to Moscow rather than to a small state in the South Caucasus or post-Soviet geography. Hence, the US and EU hesitation or reluctance to stand strong against Moscow during and post-War developments have emboldened Russia to take advantage of a number of political, security and economic areas of interest in the 'near abroad'. If this had not been the case, Russia would not have been so much successful in providing full security for the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and being a key actor in the power changes in Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and, to some degree, Georgia.

Russia's effort to increase functionality and importance of the CSTO and SCO as international security entities with the war in Georgia has indicated that Moscow stepped up its policy of redesigning the 'near abroad' in favour of its security interests. Members of the CSTO, apart from Belarus, has already signed a treaty to establish a RRF that aims at nothing less than countering possible western military expansion and long term stay in the 'near abroad' and beyond such as in Afghanistan. The SCO has similar objectives although it does not appear to be aiming to create a military block. While both Russia and China complain about the outcomes of a uni-polar world and western global dominance, it would be naïve to think that the SCO is a formation merely established to combat against terrorism and regional economic and political cooperation. Even so, it also proves that the more the states in the 'near abroad' get involved in these organizations, the more likely they would incline towards Russia and/or China.

Russia has seen controlling energy pipelines in the 'near abroad' as one of its most important priorities since the break-up of the Soviet Union due to their strategic and economic benefits. Competition over the energy pipelines in the Caspian region has been heated once again since the war in the South Caucasus. Let alone intra-state ethnic conflicts in South Caucasus, as well as inter-state disputes like NK between Azerbaijan and Armenia, such a war in a region so strategically important for energy transportation is itself enough to make those states and private companies trying to avoid Russian territory much more worried.

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Among other reasons, that is why after Russia shook the evolving regional balance of power with the war, possibility to cross the Nabucco gas pipeline via South Caucasus has become much more complicated, if not difficult. As given another example, disagreement on gas price and pipeline transit fee between Ukraine and Russia in the beginning of 2009 intensified domestic political division among the ruling elite. The energy dispute with Ukraine was an economic and geopolitical tool used, when needed, by Russia against the Ukrainian government which came into power with the 'Orange Revolution' in 2004, wanted to take the country into NATO and gave political support to Saakashvili-led Georgia in the war. Therefore, for Russia, there was no single, but various closely linked reasons, one of which was the Ukrainian pro-Georgia stance in the War, that Moscow punished Ukraine by dragging its feet in the energy dispute.

Developments in the post-Georgian war have informed that the 'near abroad' is not the same region in terms of policy perspectives and practices pursued by intra- and extra- regional actors. Most apparent of all is that the war in Georgia has elevated the geopolitical dynamics of the 'near abroad' to a point where Russia has got the chance to further promote its political and military power, global position, relative gains and prestige in both regional and international levels. In this sense, the war in Georgia should be accepted as an important event or development in the South Caucasus that its outcomes have, to a differing degree in various policy areas, resonated in the entire 'near abroad' in which Russia, as the most powerful actor there, has naturally tried to pick up as much of the spoils as it possible could.

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