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CRISIS IN GEORGIA: UNDERSTANDING ITS NATURE AND IMPLICATIONS

Abstract

The Georgian crisis in the European theatre took the entire world by surprise and generated anxiety and concern in the international community with respect to its future implications for peace and stability in Europe in particular, and the world in general. While the causes of the conflict are very intricate, the fact remains that it is basically an internal ethnic conflict with few of its distinct features. The internal dimension of the conflict soon attained an international one, and eventually the conflict turned from an intra-state to an inter-state one. The Russian involvement in the crisis evoked certain questions with respect to the nature of the future international system, security of the West sponsored mechanisms in the Caucasus, the future of oil politics in the region and the like. The paper purports to study all such elements from a neutral standpoint.

“What Vietnam was to the 1960s and 1970s, what Lebanon and Afghanistan were to the 1980s, and the Balkans were to the 1990s, the Caspian region might be to the first decade of the new century: explosive region that draws in the Great Power” – Robert D. Kaplan

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I. Introduction

The crisis in Georgia in the Caucasian region resulted from two successive military ventures, i.e., Georgian invasion of South Ossetia (a mountainous region in the country bordering Russia in the north) on 07 August 2008¹ followed by a Russian invasion in Georgia on 08 August 2008. Both the events in an ensemble called 'Georgian crisis' took the entire world by surprise and generated anxiety and concern in the international community with respect to its future implications for peace and stability in Europe in particular, and the world in general. More signs of perplexity were, perhaps, noticed in the international relations scholarship. In the laboratory of many of the scholars, analysts and observers of international relations and politics, the Georgian crisis soon appeared as a new theme of research with certain problematic queries. *First*, how can Europe remain still vulnerable to new threats and forms of conflict witnessed elsewhere in the periphery mostly in the post-Cold war period? The query seems to place the new peaceful order as expected out of the structural changes in the post-Cold War international system before a question mark. *Second*, how can dormant Russia become audacious enough to take an offensive move against a country considered to be a staunch ally of the West? The question behoves one to make a deep enquiry on the possibility of changes likely to usher in the current international system marked by tight uni-polarity under the hegemony of the US. *Third*, is the Georgian crisis in a strategically important and oil rich Caucasian region indicative of a scramble for oil and energy by the contending parties? In other words, does oil politics enter the scene? Alongside these queries, the scholarship on 'Peace and Conflict Studies' seemed to investigate a still more bewildering question, i.e., the quick transformation of a conflict from

¹ On the night of 7 August 2008, the forces of Republic of Georgia drove across the border of South Ossetia. The South Ossetian *de facto* authorities reported that 18 persons have been injured in overnight shelling attacks against the breakaway capital of Tskhinvali and the South Ossetian controlled villages. Russia advised the Georgian government to declare a unilateral cease fire and to allow Russia to defuse tensions in the conflict zone. But the Georgian government has not taken any initiative at the time. At the latter of the day, the Georgian authority received information that Russian troops are coming towards South Ossetian conflicting zone. Then on 8 August 2008, Russia launched an invasion of Georgia.

internal (intra-state) to an international one. Still more interesting is the attempt by many to understand the crisis from a socio-politico, cultural and psychological viewpoint. In this respect, the theoreticians invoked various works like 'The End of History' by Francis Fukuyama, 'The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, Tribalism, and Diseases are Rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of our Planet' by Robert D. Kaplan, 'The Great Game' by Arthur Conolly, 'The Clash of Civilizations' by Samuel P. Huntington etc. either to discern the applicability of the stated works in case of Georgian crisis or to research out a new theory to explain the crisis.

Needless to mention, while the recent conflict in the Caucasian region brought the issue to the heart of world politics and drew the rapt attention of the Western scholars in no time, for most of the Third World scholars, the Georgian crisis in the European theatre was a distant event with its effects to be felt quite steadily. Nonetheless, the forthcoming ideas and viewpoints of the Western scholars with respect to the crisis in its immediate aftermath were of great academic interest to many scholars in the periphery. In particular, they were keen to observe the degree of subjectivity or objectivity in Western observation. This is because a plethora of factors as involved in the Georgian crisis like ethnicity, big power game, hunger for oil, spheres of influence and the like can only be studied properly with a non-jaundiced mind. It is in this spirit that the article seeks to address the following questions: (i) what are the genuine reasons behind the Georgian crisis? (ii) what is, as revealed so far, is the colour and texture of the crisis? (iii) what have been the responses to thwart the crisis at various levels? (iv) what implications does the crisis have for the region and the international community? and finally (v) what portents does the Georgian crisis bear for Europe in particular and the international community at large in the future? Barring introduction that constitutes section I of the article, the above stated questions plus few relative ones would be studied in five successive sections as follows: Section I: Introduction, Section II: Georgian Crisis: Finding Out its Genesis, Section III: Georgian Crisis: An Enquiry into its Nature, (iv) Georgian Crisis and the Responses for its Mitigation, (v) Georgian Crisis: A Study of its Implications, and finally the paper ends with

general comments on the Georgian Crisis and its Portents for Future in the concluding part.

II. Georgia Crisis: Finding Out its Genesis

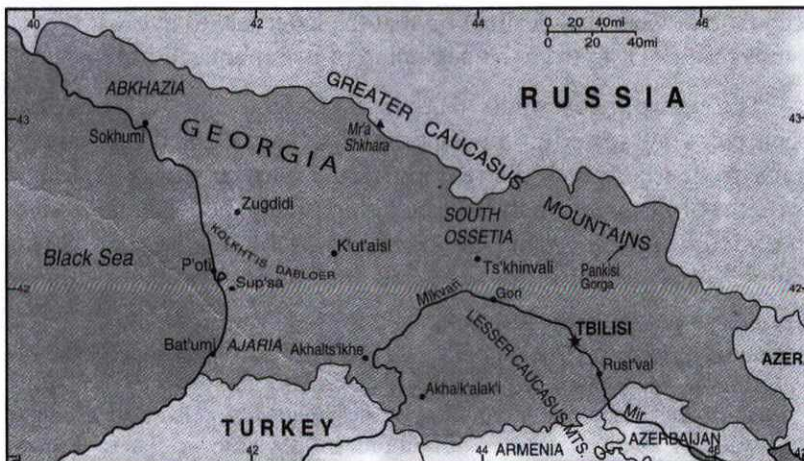
In the Caucasus and Central Asia, the issue of ethnicity gained prominence and that nationalist sentiment increased dramatically after the disintegration of the USSR in the late 1980s. Earlier, in the Soviet Union, a country of bewilderingly complex ethnic mosaic, the centralist exercise of power by the Communist Party elites was seen as the most effective means for subduing any ethnic unrest in its fifteen republics. Once such iron fisted rule from the central Soviet authority was over, many of the fifteen independent successor states of the Soviet Union began to witness ethnic conflicts in one form or other as manifestation of long felt mass political and economic discontentment and their aggrieved sentiment against inaccessibility to opportunities and privileges. Many pundits see the phenomenon through the prism of 'pot-lid' theories² which mean that with the end of communist regimes that earlier repressed national and ethnic sentiments and differences and frozen down national identity, the 'pot-lids' have been lifted thereby paving the way for ethnic conflicts to evolve in its natural course. One thus notices that as soon as the USSR fell apart in the late 1980s, ethnic enclaves as Chechnya in Russia, Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, as well as those in Georgia soon found themselves in a cauldron of severe ethnic strife resulting in virulent forms of civil war and chaos in the Caucasus region. Viewed in this light, the Georgian crisis that the world has witnessed recently is, in reality, not a new phenomenon, rather it is the revival of the old ethnic conflict that Georgia witnessed in its polity more than a decade back. Perhaps, the only newness of the recent crisis is

² Among journalists but also academics, the most conventional explanations for the ethnic conflicts that arose in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the communist regimes are the ones that are called 'pot-lid' theories or the 'refrigerator' theories (Sampson 1992, p. 396, Brown 1993, pp. 5-6 and Sunny 1998, p. 3). The communist regimes especially the Soviet Union are said to have repressed national and ethnic sentiments and differences and frozen down national identity. The ethnic/national differences, grievances and/of conflicts that existed were repressed and have now re-emerged, hence the metaphor of the pot-lid has been lifted.

the full scale Russian military and physical intervention in Georgia in support of South Ossetia, the ethnic enclave of unrest in Georgian territory since the late 1980s. Another important development during the recent crisis is the resurfacing out of Abkhazia ethnic issue in Georgian territory concomitantly with the one in South Ossetia, and that too with Russian support. The emergence of such a complex politico-socio-cultural and security scenario in the Caucasian theatre behoves one to address few pertinent questions like: what went wrong with the two Georgian enclaves, i.e., South Ossetia and Abkhazia? What fuelled a mere domestic ethnic conflict to attain the intensity of a full-fledged conventional war? What reasons do explain Russian intervention in Georgia in support of South Ossetia and Abkhazia? This section of the paper purports to answer these relevant questions in a manner as brief as possible.

Georgia is situated between the Black Sea, Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey (see Map 1). The location gives it a strategic

Map-1: Political Map of Georgia



Source: Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Political reference map, available at <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/LPAA-7HBQML?OpenDocument&rc=3&cc=geo>, accessed on 05 October 2008.

importance far beyond its size. It is developing as the gateway from the Black Sea to the Caucasus and the larger Caspian region, but also serves as a buffer state between Russia and Turkey. Historically,

Georgia has always been a multinational country promoted by its geopolitical location. It was the crossroads of major trade links involving people from different areas of the region. Georgian penchant for remaining independent of any external power is historic. But it was not successful, in particular when its several attempts to remain outside the then Soviet Union failed and set the stage for Russian-Georgian conflict after World War I. The Soviet Red Army finally occupied Georgia in 1920 and since then it remained as a constituent republic of the former USSR until it achieved *independence* from the Soviet Union in 1991. It may be mentioned that Georgia was one of the first republics of the Soviet Union to seize the opportunity of the *glasnost* and *perestroika* policies of Mikhail Gorbachev. In the then USSR, while Georgia was a union republic, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were its autonomous republics. In the Soviet ethno-federal construction, the union republics had the highest status, followed by the autonomous republics and finally the autonomous regions in the third rank.³ In the process, the Abkhazia and South Ossetia enjoyed an enviable political, economic and social position as titular nations in the Republic of Georgia – a situation that the latter had to live with much annoyance right up from the beginning of its republican life.

The autonomous status that South Ossetia and Abkhazia had been enjoying since the Soviet time, in effect, created the vantage point from where both the regions started nurturing their aspiration for either full fledged self-determination or separate statehood once the wind of *glasnost* and *perestroika* was set in the then Soviet Union.⁴ Apart from the Soviet legacy, there were few other factors to

³ Bruno Coppieters, "The Roots of the Conflict", *Conciliation Resources Publication*, September, 1999.

⁴ 'Each of the fifteen union republics of the Soviet Union had, for example, its own parliament and other institutions of government. These became ready vehicles for expression of anti-Moscow sentiments, once Gorbachev's political reforms permitted open discussion of politics and free elections. The most striking examples of this phenomenon were the three Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, whose ties to the Soviet Union were always tenuous, given their forced incorporation into the union during World War II. Beginning in 1987, new political organizations and politicians arose in the Baltic region, demanding and ultimately achieving independence from Moscow – with very little bloodshed'. See for details,

catapult such aspiration. First, from ethnic standpoint, the two communities reveal few interesting features. South Ossetia is inhabited mostly by ethnic Ossetians who are believed to be descended from tribes which migrated into the area from Asia many hundreds of years ago and settled in both North and South Ossetia. In South Ossetia in Georgia, the Ossetians constitute the majority of the population (around 70%) while the rest being Georgians. The majority of the Ossetians are orthodox Christians, though there are also Muslim Ossetians. The Ossetians speak a language which belongs to Indo-European group and is distinctly related to Iranian *Farsi*. While during the Soviet period, Russian was the official language and Georgian was the official state language, the Ossetians preferred to interact in their community in their own language (Ossetic) thus keeping their own distinct linguistic identity. At the same time, they were unhesitant in using Russian language because of close relationship with Russia and the presence of their brethren in North Ossetia (in Russian Federation). Thanks to the autonomy that South Ossetia enjoyed during the Soviet time, the enclave enjoyed political, economic, social and cultural prosperity. At one moment, their political ambition rose to crescendo when South Ossetia struggled to upgrade the status of the region through reunification with the North Ossetian Autonomous Republic much to the disliking of the Georgian authority. Out of a fear that the Ossetians might secede one day, the Georgian authority at best showed little generosity by not regarding the Ossetians as indigenous.

Coming to the case of Abkhazia, one notices that in ethnic sense there is not much difference between the Abkhazians and the Georgians. Both are of North-Caucasian origin and their languages, although different from each other, are declared the State languages. By the religious belonging, Abkhazians are divided into two groups: orthodox Christians and Muslims. Demographically, Abkhazia enclave hosts approximately 45% of the Georgians while the Abkhazians account for 18%. Despite the minority status, Abkhazians were given a greater role in the governance of the

Mathew Evangelista, "Historical Legacies and the Politics of Intervention in the Former Soviet Union", in Michael E. Brown (ed.), *The International Dimension of Internal Conflict*, The MIT Press, Massachusetts, 1996, pp. 107-140.

republic. As in the most of smaller autonomous republics, Abkhazia was encouraged by the Soviet government to develop their culture, in particular literature. Ethnic quotas were established for certain bureaucratic posts, giving the Abkhazians a degree of political power that was disproportionate to their minority status in the republic. Many interpreted such Soviet action as a 'divide and rule' policy whereby local elites were given a share in power in exchange for support for the Soviet regime.⁵ The politically privileged position of the Abkhazians was totally unacceptable to the Georgian authority, and their anger flared up further when the leaders of the Abkhaz National Movement demanded equal status with Georgia in a loose federative framework.⁶

Few reflections as thrown above point out the fact that the peculiar political structure of the erstwhile Soviet Union comprising of union republics, autonomous republics and autonomous provinces/regions (oblasti) gave several ethnic groups special status and privileges irrespective of their size, whether majority or minority. The result being as Jessica Stern points out, "the establishment of a federal state based on ethnic divisions gave ethnic groups the expectation, and in some cases the administrative infrastructure, of statehood."⁷ Shenfield further substantiates her view in the following words, "were it not for the Soviet tradition of ethnic autonomies, it is doubtful whether the Abkhaz political leadership could have rationalized giving precedence to Abkhaz 'self-determination' over the rights of the Georgian majority in Abkhazia."⁸ For obvious reasons, special consideration and privilege that had been historically enjoyed by a number of autonomous republics or autonomous regions in erstwhile Soviet Union could not be given up easily. Thus, one notices that well before the independence of Georgia from the Soviet Union in 1991, South Ossetia in 1989 campaigned either for joining its territory with North Ossetia or for gaining independence from Georgia. In a similar

⁵ Abkhazia, available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abkhazia>, accessed on 21 September 2008.

⁶ Brunno Coppieters, "The Roots of the Conflict", *op.cit.*

⁷ Jessica Eve Stern, "Moscow Meltdown: Can Russia Survive?" *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Spring 1994, p. 40.

⁸ Cited in Matthew Evangelista, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

fashion, after bitter armed clashes between Abkhaz and Georgians, Abkhazia declared its sovereignty and independence in 1989. However, any disassociation of the two regions, South Ossetia and Abkhazia respectively from Georgia somewhat appeared to be a distant possibility as Georgia, euphoric over its newly achieved independence from the Soviet Union, was not prepared to concede any territorial compromise. It may be mentioned that unlike other Soviet republics, Georgia has maintained the strongest sense of nationalism tracing its national identity as far back as 4th century BC as one of the most advanced states of its time. This resurgent nationalism led the newly re-emerged independent Georgia to assert its sovereignty over its autonomous regions by all means, if possible even by force.⁹ As a result, the attempt by the two autonomous regions, South Ossetia and Abkhazia to break away from Georgia resulted in civil strife of serious nature in the early nineties within Georgia itself as well as in South Ossetia and Abkhazia resulting in widespread ethnic cleansing and damage to both life and property of many. The paper does not intend to go into a detailed discussion on the series of conflictive events that took place between Georgia and the stated regions in the country beginning from the early nineties.¹⁰

⁹ Stephen Zunes, 'US Role in Georgia Crisis', *FPIF (Foreign Policy in Focus) Policy Report*, 14 August, 2008.

¹⁰ In January 1991, hostilities broke out between Georgia and South Ossetia, contributing to an estimated 2,000-4,000 deaths and the displacement of tens of thousands of people. However, South Ossetia became a *de facto* independent country in the region. A cease fire agreement of 1992 isolated the Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, from the control of Georgia. Russian, Georgian and South Ossetian "peacekeepers" were stationed in South Ossetia under the Joint Control Commission's (JCC) mandate of demilitarization. Russia remains as an important player in South Ossetia considering its interests. Some observers have argued that Russia's increasing influence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia over the years has transformed the separatist conflicts into essentially Russia-Georgia disputes. Most residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia have been granted Russian citizenship and passports and most of the citizens of the regions want to be part of Russia. In case of the war in Abkhazia, the Georgian government dispatched 3,000 troops to the region, ostensibly to restore order. The Abkhazians were relatively unarmed and the Georgian troops were able to march into Sukhumi with relatively little resistance and subsequently

Suffice it to state that these conflicts were more or less settled with Russian involvement in the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Abkhazia and a Russian peacekeeping force under a Joint Control Commission in South Ossetia. To the international community, perhaps, an important revelation brought about by a series of conflicts in Georgian territory during the early nineties is the fact that henceforth, South Ossetia and Abkhazia came to exist as *de facto* independent entities in Georgian territory with Russian support.¹¹ The scenario was charged with the potentials to destabilize the region at any opportune moment. Henceforth, peace and stability in the region, therefore, depended upon certain factors like building confidence among the Ossetians and Abkhazians, lifting their isolation and integrating them into the main national stream, help them gain a sense of security etc. Among all the factors, the cardinal one was, perhaps, to keep away from doing acts antithetical to Russian interests in the region. Dismayingly, very little attention was paid to these factors by the successive Georgian regimes.

Needless to state, at the domestic front, the Herculean task for the government in independent Georgia was to revive the dysfunctional economy created by the inefficient Soviet economic institutions and agencies. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the first president of the country, was an ultra-nationalist whose ambition was more political than economic. He wanted a total 'Georgianization of his country, and even wanted South Ossetians to return to their 'real' homeland in neighbouring North Ossetia in Russia. As mentioned above, several sporadic outbreaks of violence between the Ossetians and Georgian authorities and the escalation of a war in the early nineties, leaving an estimated 3,000 people dead with many injured and displaced, took place during Zviad Gamaskhurdia's time.¹² His

engaged in ethnically based pillage and looting. During the war, gross violations of human rights were reported by the Human Rights Watch.

¹¹ It should be mentioned that while the Russian presence in Georgian soil was to support the peacekeeping role, in reality, they were found aligned with nationalist elements within the two ethnic enclaves. On many occasions, they effectively prevented any exercise of Georgian government authority over most of these territories.

¹² Fiona Allision, 'An Introduction to Breakaway Regions of the Former Soviet Union', available at:

focus on the ethnic unrest impeded any substantial economic growth. His successor, Edward Shevardnadze (former Soviet Foreign Minister) inherited a weak economy coupled with widespread corruption. Meanwhile, the US became the biggest foreign backer of the Shevardnadze regime, pouring in over \$1 billion in aid during the decade of his corrupt and semi-authoritarian rule.¹³ Nonetheless, high unemployment, a breakdown in the allocation of energy for heating and other needs, a deteriorating infrastructure, widespread corruption and inept governance led to growing dissatisfaction with the government. Having worked with the Russians in the past, Shevardnadze knew the limit of going too close to the US. He, thus, attempted to balance between the US and Russia. In 2003, he signed big deals with Russia's Gasprom and Russian Energy, effectively giving them control of Georgia's energy market for 25 years. This attempt could not but annoy the US intensely. In the end, Shevardnadze was obliged to sign an agreement with the US that would allow the US troops to enter and leave the country without visas, and army units, aircraft and ships could cross Georgia's borders in any direction without restriction. For granting such right to the US, Georgia was to be given an amount of \$75 million annually constituting nearly 10% of Georgia's budget. As far as ethnic issue is concerned, one notices Shevardnadze's complete indifference. The fact that he kept Russia placated did help in keeping the ethnic scenario in status quo position. However, at the national plank, he was globally discredited by virtually every social class, ethnic group and geographical region of the country for two substantial reasons: total mismanagement of the country's economy and disappearance of money (mostly funnelled through the US aid) into the pockets of the corrupts.

Following the Rose Revolution¹⁴ and with the restoration of Saakashvili (Harvard trained) administration in Georgia in 2004, the

<http://www.csa.com/discoveryguides/discoveryguides-main.php>, accessed on, 10 October 2008

¹³ Stephen Zunes, "US Role in Georgia Crisis", *op.cit.*

¹⁴ 'The Rose revolution is one of the phases of 'coloured revolutions' that spread like wildfire across the region in the middle of the last decade. In broad strokes, starting with Serbia, through the Rose Revolution in Georgia, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan,

politico-economic and social landscape of the country began to witness dramatic changes. After Saakashvili overthrew Shevardnadze through a victory in an election highly controversial in nature, he and his ally Nino Burdzandze represented an alliance between anti-Russian, pro-US Georgian nationalism and neoliberalism. Although the new administration has had significant success in rebuilding moribund institutions and implementing sweeping economic reforms, thanks to generous and unbridled flow of American money into the Republic, the economic conditions of the general masses did not improve as was expected. 'The concentration of power in the hands of a small elite, cronyism and lack of judicial independence and media representing different points of view remained a challenge to democratization. Political unrest in late 2007 with a state of emergency and violent crackdown on protesters underscored the fragility of the new political leadership and revealed increasingly authoritarian tendencies within it'.¹⁵

For the purpose of the paper, it is relevant to look into few policies and strategies as pursued under the Saakashvili administration for further fuelling the ethnic crisis in Georgia. Few reflections would also be thrown on Saakashvili's pro-American policy that greatly infuriated its northern neighbour, Russia. As would be noticed, both these elements in unison acted as the catalyst for generating the recent crisis.

On ethnic issue, President Saakashvili appeared to be an absolute Georgian nationalist marked by chauvinism and jingoism. He threw a bombshell on ethnic problem in his country when on his very first

these movements developed in countries in which there was widespread discontent with the state of the economy, social degradation and corrupt and undemocratic governments. Because of the absence of working class and left-wing organizations capable of mobilizing this discontent in a socialist direction, western-oriented neo-liberal politicians, with the backing of considerable financial and 'politico-technological forces (spin doctors) were able to parasitically use the popular discontent to overthrow the old broadly pro-Russian regimes'. Rob Jones, 'Russia-Georgia: Background to the Present Crisis', *Committee for Workers' International*, 23 August 2008.

¹⁵Georgian Crisis, International Crisis Group, available at: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=1250>, accessed on 25 September 2008.

day in power, he expressed the desire to bring Abkhazia and South Ossetia back under the control of Georgian authority. 'President Saakashvili has been outspoken and clear in his determination that Abkhazia and South Ossetia will always remain part of Georgia'.¹⁶ What emboldened him to be assertive towards the mentioned regions is his success in reasserting Georgian authority in the south-western autonomous republic of Ajaria soon after his resumption of power in 2004. It may be mentioned that Ajaria too was a break-way region in Georgia, but because of its remote location away from Russia, its voice for separatist ideas was rarely heard outside the country. Saakashvili was successful in winning election in the region through open blackmail and bribery and afterwards in installing a puppet government by removing Abashidze regime. The new government in Ajaria was kept floating on American dollars. However, unlike Ajaria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were hard nuts to crack. Given the fact that most residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were granted Russian citizenship and passports and that many wanted their regions to be part of Russia, any endeavour to resolve the ethnic problem in Georgia could not, perhaps, bypass the 'Russian factor'. Saakashvili probably ignored this reality. Remaining under an illusion that his chauvinistic nationalism coupled with material support from the US would enable him to address the Ossetian and Abkhazian problems to his liking was his greatest mistake and this got reflected in few of his abortive peace plans vis-à-vis the mentioned two groups.

In the first place, in 2004, much to the chagrin of Russia, President Mikheil Saakashvili declared to re-gain central government authority over the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.¹⁷ In 2005, he announced a new peace plan for South Ossetia that offered substantial autonomy and a three stage settlement, consisting of demilitarization, economic rehabilitation, and a political settlement. But the South Ossetian President, Eduard Kokoiti rejected the plan saying, "we are citizens of Russia."¹⁸ The

¹⁶ Fiona Allison, *op.cit.*

¹⁷ David Holley, "Georgia's Steps Echoing in the Caucasus", *Los Angeles Times*, 30 August 2006.

¹⁸ Many South Ossetians voted in the 2007 Russian Duma election and the 2008 Russian presidential election.

plan was later backed by the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Ministerial Council in December 2005, but was again rejected by South Ossetian President who wanted nothing short of South Ossetian independence. To him, the concepts like 'demilitarization, economic rehabilitation and political settlement' appeared like 'sugar coated quinine'. The true voice of the South Ossetian was reflected in a popular referendum held in 2006 to reaffirm South Ossetian independence from Georgia. The separatists reported that 95% of 55,000 registered voters turned out and that 99% approved the referendum. Alongside the referendum, Kokoiti was reelected bagging 96% of the votes. Like the rejection of the Hamas victory in Palestine by the US, the latter along with the members of the OSCE rejected the election, and in place put forward an alternative election with the participation of the Georgians living in South Ossetia and those earlier displaced from the enclave. In the election, the pro-Georgian Dmitriy Sanakoyev was elected governor of South Ossetia and under him a referendum took place supporting Georgia's territorial integrity. The election and its outcome were totally unacceptable to the South Ossetians.

In March 2007, President Saakashvili proposed another peace plan for South Ossetia that envisaged creating 'transitional' administrative districts throughout the region under the authority of Sanakoyev which would be represented by emissary at Joint Control Commission (JCC) or alternative peace talks. In July 2007, Saakashvili decreed the establishment of a commission to work out South Ossetia's "status" as a part of Georgia. The JCC finally held a meeting in Tbilisi, Georgia, in October 2007, but the Russian Foreign Ministry claimed that the Georgian emissaries made unacceptable demands in order to deliberately sabotage the results of the meeting. However, no further meeting has been held. In this way, the relations of Georgia and South Ossetia have deteriorated, and all peace efforts foundered on the rock of dissension between South Ossetia and Georgia on one hand, and between Russia and Georgia, on the other.

Whilst at the domestic front, all peace efforts of Saakashvili crumbled displeasing all the parties, i.e., the Ossetians, the Abkhazians and its northern neighbour, Russia, the displeasure and disconcertment caused in case of Russia has, perhaps, been of the

highest magnitude. No other factor other than Saakashvili's pro-US policy explains the fact. A blindly pursued pro-US policy is also indicative of the fact that Saakashvili misconstrued Western strategic support for his cause at home as 'déjà vu' while remaining totally indifferent to Russia. The chronicle of Saakashvili's pro-US-Western acts reveal few ordinary measures starting from renaming the main road from Tbilisi's airport as 'George Bush Street',¹⁹ hoisting US and EU flags along with the Georgian flag in public institutions as a mark of empathy for Western values, sending troops to Iraq²⁰ etc., to some of the very serious and provocative measures, in particular when viewed from Russian angle.

The spending spree of Georgia on various economic projects at home with the US given money was of little concern to Russia. What concerned Russia is the rapid militarization of Georgia with strong US support probably for causing unpredictable events in the region. As Stephen Zunes observes, "with strong encouragement from Washington, Saakashvili's government reduced domestic spending but dramatically increased military spending with the armed forces expanding to more than 45,000 personnel over the next four years, more than 12,000 of whom were trained by the United States. Congress approved hundreds of millions of dollars of military assistance to Georgia, a small country of less than five million people. In addition, the United States successfully encouraged Israel to send advisors and trainers to support the rapidly-expanding Georgian armed forces".²¹ The rapid militarization programme in Georgia catapulted the country's ambition to join NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). The ambition which in all likelihood was to strike at the very core of Russian own security interests in Eurasia, did not come in a vacuum as the US President Bush himself launched the campaign of drawing Georgia within the NATO orbit. With the green signal from the US, Georgia has been harping on its NATO membership as one of the few ways to guarantee its security against its powerful neighbour. As one analyst observes, "NATO membership has been a policy priority for Saakashvili since coming

¹⁹ Rob Jones, *op.cit*

²⁰ Rovshan Ibrahimov, "Russian-Georgian Conflict-Reasons and Possible Results", *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, 06 August 2008.

²¹ Stephen Zunes, *op.cit*.

to power, one to which he has devoted significant resources to upgrade Georgia's military capabilities to ensure interoperability with alliance forces."²²

However, despite all US efforts, NATO failed to give Georgia a Membership Action Plan (MAP) like in case of Ukraine in the face of strong opposition by France and Germany at the Bucharest Summit in April 2008. While it is hard to predict the course of Russian action against Georgia if the latter succeeded in acquiring MAP within NATO, the fact remains such acts, at least from the viewpoint of Russian history and strategic thinking, constitute a grave threat to its security. In other words, Russia needs a *cordon sanitaire* around it in perpetuity for its peace and security. Much to the consternation of Russia, such a zone was disturbed by few recent events in the region. First to point out is the expansion of NATO. In Russian view, any eastward expansion of NATO is a flagrant violation of the pledge made by the US earlier that 'NATO would not expand to take in former Soviet countries. "That promise had been broken in 1998 by NATO's expansion to Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic – and again in the 2004 expansion which included not only the rest of the former Soviet satellites in what is now Central Europe, but also the three Baltic states, which had been the components of the Soviet Union."²³ While Russia, through its weakness at the time, was somewhat forced to acquiesce to such Western acts, it in no way could comply with the Western desire to include Ukraine in NATO. As Stephen Friedman remarks, "inclusion of Ukraine in NATO represents a fundamental threat to Russia's national security. It would, in Russian calculation, have rendered Russia indefensible and threatened to destabilize the Russian Federation itself. When the US went far to suggest that Georgia be included as well, bringing NATO deeper into the Caucasus, the

²² "Russia vs Georgia: The Fallout", *Crisis Group Report No. 195*, 22 International Crisis Group, August 2008. It may be mentioned that President Saakashvili championed Georgia's credentials as a candidate at every opportunity - even holding a referendum in conjunction with the most recent presidential election in 2008 in which 77% of the electorate voted in favour of NATO membership.

²³ George Friedman, 'Georgia and the Balance of Power', *The New York Review*, Volume 55, No. 14, 25 September 2008.

Russian conclusion – publicly stated – was that the US in particular intended to encircle and break Russia.”²⁴ Being alerted by the Ukrainian experience that the US was engaged in a plan of strategic encirclement and strangulation of Russia, henceforth, the latter sought to draw a line at Ukraine and Georgia whose strategic move, if deemed antithetical to Russian security interests, would by all means be thwarted.

While the question of Ukrainian and Georgian MAP in NATO constituted a strategic issue to evoke the Russian fury, there were few other tactical moves by the West to add further to the fury. These would be taken up for discussion in a brief manner. First, the wave of so called ‘coloured revolutions’²⁵ that spread like wildfire in the region in the last decade caused a great irritant in Russian mind. As felt by Russia, in the name of peaceful democratic transition and economic reforms, many such revolutions like ‘Rose Revolution’ in Georgia, ‘Orange Revolution’ in Ukraine, ‘Tulip and Purple Revolution’ in Kyrgyzstan, through the participation of various CIA sponsored Western NGOs, in effect, sought to serve the US long term interests in the region in terms of its access to energy, gaining support in its war against terrorism, create ground for its strategic expansion etc., to the detriment of Russian interests in the area. Also dismaying to Russian has been the overthrow of pro-Russian regimes in its periphery in the waves of such revolutions.²⁶ Second, Georgia’s oil politics caused a scar on its relations with Russia. The US from the beginning tried to establish Georgia as a major energy transit corridor building an oil pipeline from the Caspian region known as BTC (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan) and a parallel natural gas pipeline ostensibly to avoid more logical geographical routes through Russia

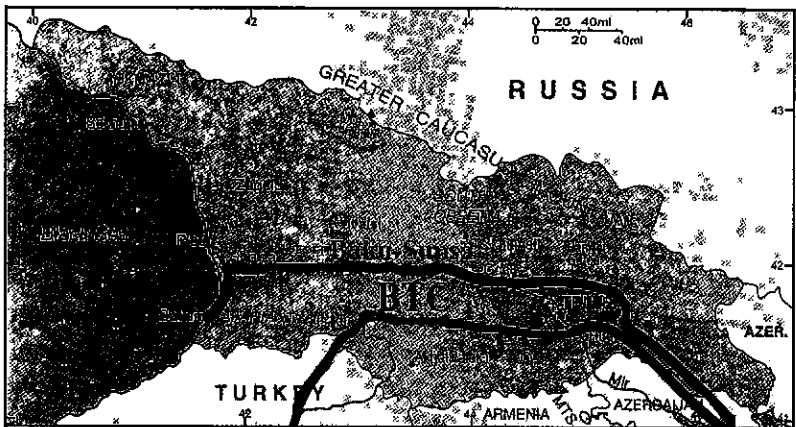
²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Since 1998, the Eurasian geopolitical landscape has been affected by what have been labelled ‘colour revolutions’, referring to a number of socio-political transformations attempted, but not necessarily achieved in a number of countries, namely Slovakia (1998), Serbia (2000), Belarus (2001 and 2006), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), Kyrgyzstan (2005) and immediately sedated in Russia, Uzbekistan (2005), Azerbaijan (2005) and Kazakhstan (2005).

²⁶ See for details, Fiona Hill, “Beyond the Coloured Revolutions”, paper presented at the Central Eurasia Studies Society 6th Annual Conference, 30 September 2005, Boston University, USA, pp.1-11.

or Iran (see Map 2). As a reaction to this, Russia, in an effort to maintain as much control over its westbound oil from the region has

Map-2: Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku-Supsa Pipeline



Source: Energy Information Administration (EIA), USA, available at <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Caucasus/TransitEnergy.html>, accessed on 08 October 2008.

responded by pressurizing the governments of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to sign exclusive export agreement and to construct natural gas pipeline through Russia.²⁷ Lastly, a lesser event, yet an important part of the conflict's background is the declaration of independence by Kosovo on 17 February 2008. The Kosovo's move was duly attested by the US and its European allies, and the rapidity and promptitude with which they recognized Kosovo's independence simply took the Russian official circle aback with surprise and disgust. The then President Putin remarked, "The Kosovo precedence is a terrifying precedence. It is in essence breaking open the entire system of international relations that has prevailed not just for decade but for centuries. And it without a doubt will bring on itself an entire chain of unforeseen consequences."²⁸

From the above discussion, it becomes apparent that the Georgian crisis is rooted in domestic, regional and international geo-

²⁷ Stephen Zunes, *op.cit.*

²⁸ "Russia vs Georgia: The Fallout", *op.cit.*

political and economic contexts. While in the domestic context, conflict ascended with Saakashvili's absolute failure in addressing the critical ethnic issues at home, it is the international context which is perhaps more important in setting the background of the conflict. By all logical conclusions, Russia that had seen an eclipse in its power in the nineties under Boris Yeltsin no longer suffers from such lacunae. Of late, Russian continental power is on the rise and is going with great intensity ever since Putin took power. While many analysts view acquisition of power by Russia as a new move to reassert itself in the global arena, the real question is about Russian anxiety about its own survival, in particular after the controversial 'missile defence shield' was floated in Europe by the US. If installed by 2012, the shield is likely to put the world, especially Western Europe on a hair-trigger to nuclear war, and if combined with the entry of Russian Border States, Georgia and Ukraine, it would simply present Moscow with *de facto* defeat.²⁹ Thus, on Russian recent ascendancy to power, one analyst remarks, "This is not about Russia returning to Soviet-style rule under Putin or Medvedev. Its about the ultimate survival of Russia as a nation, as Moscow rightly sees it, not about the fine points of democracy."³⁰ In this regard, the Georgian crisis perhaps erupted as a boon for Russia to demonstrate to the world that any act that Moscow deems inimical to its politico and economic interests in its periphery would be responded to with activism that many quarters in the international community may not conceive of. What then is the nature of Georgian crisis that facilitated Russian intervention so easily? The succeeding chapter attempts to answer the query.

III. Georgian Crisis: An Enquiry into Its Nature

At the outset, it must be stated that the causes, manifestations and consequences of various conflicts that took place in the Eurasian landmass after the break-up of the Soviet Union are very complex in nature including the one in Georgia and they, till to date, continue to pose a major challenge to contemporary scholarship on conflict and

²⁹ Stephen Zunes, *op.cit.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

peace.³¹ This section, heuristic in nature, is simply an endeavour to look into few characteristics of the Georgian crisis without going into a detailed discussion of other typologies of conflicts that bedevilled the region in recent times. Nor does it purport to undertake a comparative study of the Georgian crisis with few other crises of similar nature in the region.

Given the fact that ethnic differences created the background of the Georgian conflict and as well flared it between the two distinct communities, the Georgian crisis is essentially an ethnic one and, thus be seen primarily as a consequence of conflicting views and of existing fears with regards to the preservation of language, culture and national identity of a particular group. As an ethnic conflict, the Georgian crisis has quite manifestly demonstrated that they are troublesome at best, politically, economically and socially disruptive as a general rule, and horrifyingly violent at worst. The Georgian crisis although is sparked by the powerful force of ethno-nationalism, the territorial question remains at its heart.³² As an ethnic-territorial crisis, the Georgian conflict has clearly revealed to the world that the Ossetians constitute a group of people different from the Georgians. As mentioned, South Ossetia is inhabited mostly by ethnic Ossetians who inhabit a particular piece of Georgian territory and speak a language remotely related to Farsi (the language of Iran). The Georgian crisis has clearly exhibited that in countries

³¹ For details, see, Airat Aklaev, "Causes and Prevention of Ethnic Conflict: An Overview of Post-Soviet Russian-Language Review", *Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology*, Russian Academy of Sciences, available at: <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/subsites/ccpdc/pubs/aklaev/1.htm>, accessed on 04 September 2008.

³² "Give us a state of our own" has, perhaps, been the battle cry for many around the globe, i.e., Kosovars, Tibetans, Kurds, Kashmiris and others. As Beverly Crawford observes, "With few exceptions such battle cry long ago slashed the world up into separate homogeneous ethnic and religion states, dislocating millions of people, sparkling mass atrocities and forced expulsions and igniting bouts of ethnic cleaning and genocide. In the remaining multi-ethnic societies of the 21st century, that battle cry threatens again and with the non-intervention norms in tatters, the consequences will be disastrous". See for details, Beverly Crawford, "Ethnic Conflict in Georgia: What lies Ahead", available at: <http://rpgp.berkeley.edu/?q+noode/87>, accessed on 05 September 2008.

where ethnic groups are politically active, ethnic issues are more complicated and potentially volatile. As a result, the groups that are discriminated against socially, economically and politically often form political organizations and make efforts to seek redress either through seeking a separate homeland or a merger with another territory to join the same ethnic brethren. In Abkhazia too, conflict stems from the desire of Abkhazians, an ethnic minority, to exercise their right to self-determination by creating an independent state.

Various arguments can be put forward to understand the causes of Georgian crisis like (i) understanding the conflict in relation to the political systems of the former Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Union (ii) taking a stock of sociological, political and psychological perspectives (iii) creating a linkage between nationalism and modernization in post-Soviet area (iv) the issue of ethno-nationalism and ethnocracies in the post-Soviet setting (the establishment of mono-national states based on the concept of ethnicity from which ethnic minorities are excluded or downgraded to the status of second – class citizens) (v) legitimacy crisis of modernizing political systems in post-Soviet period (vi) spill over effect and a host of others. In short, the Georgian crisis was triggered by historical grievances, perceived patterns of political, economic and cultural discrimination, and in some cases, the effects of economic development and modernization. The leaders at the helm also had their role in prompting the crisis. The causes discernible from the mentioned points may be summed up in a tabular form as follows:

Table I

Structural causes	Political causes	Economic and social causes	Cultural/Perceptual causes	Exogenous causes
Bad governance, weak economic performance, intra-group security concerns, ethnic geography	Discriminatory political institutions, exclusionary national ideologies, inter-group parochial politics, narrow elite politics	Economic problems of daily nature, discriminatory income systems, modernization with unequal development, income inequality and growing class gap	Cultural discrimination, problematic group histories, state level cultural propaganda	Tension, suspicion and mistrust in neighbourhood

The transformation of Georgian crisis from an internal to an external one also constitutes one of its noticeable aspects. As observed, the conflict arose, first, out of Georgian invasion of South Ossetia and then it turned into an international one when Russia invaded Georgia. This phenomenon of transformation can be explained theoretically by different tools.³³ However, it is outside the purview of the paper except to stress on two tools, i.e. context transformation and asymmetric nature of the conflict. A critical look into the context in which the Georgian crisis took place would reveal that the regional environment in the Caucasus region in pre-crisis period was one of tension and mutual suspicion between the West and Russia. As mentioned, arming of few nations by the US and the plan to include few independent states within the NATO framework caused chagrin in Moscow. However, considering the current besieged position in which the US finds itself due to its involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan, row with Iran, economic crisis at home etc., Russia remained more or less assured that any attempt to encroach upon its vital security interests in the region could be impeded by herself with both force and confidence, and hence, the Russian intervention. This brings geo-political factors to one's attention, in particular Russian bid to maintain its sphere of influence on its southern borders. Next, any asymmetric conflict has the general tendency to invite external intervention. The Georgian crisis is an asymmetric one in so far as the root of the conflict lies not in particular issues or interests that may divide the parties, but in the very structure of who they are and the relationship between them. In case of the Georgian conflict, the structure is such that it is only the topdog that wins whereas the underdog always loses. The only way to resolve the conflict is to change the structure, but this can never be in the interests of the topdog. As a result, there are no win-win outcomes, and the third party has to join forces with the underdog to bring about a resolution. This explains Russian intervention.

Finally, it is relevant to study to what extent the Georgian crisis conforms to various socio-political, philosophic-psychological ideas espoused by various experts with regards to world and its future. First, the Georgian crisis has to a certain extent invalidated "The End

³³ See for details, Hugh Miall, Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Polity Press, Great Britain, 1999, p. 21.

of History' theory by Francis Fukuyama. Seeing international relations through a narrow ideological perspective that the triumph of democracy would drop the curtain of history is contestable if not fallacious. Also has been proved wrong Fukuyama's hypothesis that such triumph would usher in an era of peace and stability in the world. Perhaps, 'The End of History' overlooks the fact that conflict inheres in the international system as envisaged by Hobbes long ago. The world still faces the dangers likely to emanate from a plethora of conflicts for reasons like ethnicity, acquisition of property and resources including the environmental ones like water. To the utter dismay of many, a series of conflicts of intra-state nature that the world records after the theory of Fukuyama was propounded validate the fact that the post-Cold War is not yet free from the ominous dangers of several conflicts. Equally, the Georgian crisis has proved wrong the Samuel P. Huntington's theory titled, 'Clash of Civilizations'. While to many, the 9/11 is taken as an example vindicating the theory, Huntington probably failed to account for various ethnic factors including the indigenous ones that are surcharged with the potentials for conflict. Perhaps, an important aspect of Huntington's theory that 'future conflicts will be started by non-Western civilizations' has been proved wrong in case of the Georgian crisis.

While Robert D Kaplan's theory titled 'Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, Tribalism and Diseases are rapidly destroying the Social Fabric of our Planet' may find its partial applicability in the case of Georgian crisis, the most appropriate theory to apply in case of the stated crisis is the great game theory by Arthur Conolly. The Russian invasion of Georgia has been an opening gambit in a new round of the Great Game, the struggle for supremacy in a likely multi-polar world. As George Friedman remarks, "The war in Georgia is Russia's return to great power status. This is not something that just happened – it has been unfolding ever since Putin took power, and with growing intensity in the past five years. Part of it has to do with the increase in Russian power, but a great deal of it has to do with the fact that the Middle Eastern wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have left the United States off-balance and sort on resources. The conflict created a window of

opportunity and the Russian goal is to use that window to assert a new reality (...)"³⁴

IV: Georgian Crisis and the Responses for its Mitigation

In the preamble, it should be mentioned that the international community after having witnessed the US invasion of Iraq with its serious implication for peace and stability in the last few years was increasingly concerned over the repetition of a similar phenomenon elsewhere. Despite the record of UN's impotency in the former case, several world leaders and organizations still put their trust and confidence in the UN to find an amicable solution to the crisis at the earliest. The expectation, however, did not fructify as Russia and China refused to agree to various texts proposed by the US, France and Great Britain in the UNSC.³⁵ This section of the paper tries to highlight attempts by different quarters to mitigate the crisis in Georgia.

The Georgian crisis, perhaps, put the US in a great dilemma than what has been observed in case of the other countries. Georgia being its staunch ally, a pro-active US policy in favour of Georgia, in particular a kind of military gesture was being speculated by many. However, with its hands tied in Iraq, Afghanistan, row with Iran on nuclear issue, economic crisis and uncertain election scenario at home, and more importantly the angst that it caused in Russian mind with few of its recent activities in the Caucasian region, any military response was not in the US cards. Excepting a flurry of criticisms in the US administration against the Russian act and the media hype in America focusing on Russian reassertion of power in the region in a negative fashion, no substantial effort was rendered by the US to

³⁴ George Friedman, *op.cit.*

³⁵ At the UNSC meeting on August 10, 2004, US Permanent Representative Zalmay Khalilzad denounced the 'Russian attack on sovereign Georgia and targeting of civilians and a campaign of terror' and warned that 'Russian's relations with the US and others would be affected by its continued assault on Georgia and its refusal to contribute to a peaceful conclusion of the crisis. The Russian representative Chukrin countered that 'it is completely unacceptable' for Khalilzad to accuse Russia of a campaign of terror, especially from the lips of a representative of a country whose actions we are aware of in Iraq, Afghanistan and Serbia'.

deescalate the tension on its own. If diplomacy was to be the means for diffusing the tension, that too the US could not do alone as it needed its European partners for embarking on the process. In brief, with respect to US response vis-à-vis the Georgian crisis, a very embarrassing question disconcerted the US and this has been aptly put forward by Paul Kennedy as follows, "(...) the challenge facing Washington is: how on earth to make a coherent policy in response to a distant, fast-exploding ethno-linguistic conflict, contested borders, a risk prone Georgian ally, an increasingly assertive Russia with a new energy trump card, a confused EU and paralysed Security Council?"³⁶ In the circumstances, the Georgian crisis was put on the regional platter for finding out its possible solution.

At the regional level, in other words, in the European theatre, the role of NATO and that of EU draw one's attention. At the NATO front, the member states failed to have a unified approach vis-à-vis the crisis. The Eastern European, Scandinavian and Baltic countries expressed their respective resentment against the Russian aggression. Backed by the US and the UK, they opted for harsh measures and sanctions against Russia. The mentioned countries also sought immediate admission of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO. On the other hand, countries like France, Germany, Italy and Spain insisted on dialogue with Russia and considered isolating the former as perilous.

A similar situation found its resonance in case of EU also. While all the European countries, in principle, condemned Russian invasion of South Ossetia terming it as a threat to regional peace and stability, no unified strategy was formulated to face the challenge posed by Russia in Georgia. In effect, each of the countries acted on its own line of calculations and interests. Despite the fact that EU is different from NATO in terms of its institutional structure, goals and objectives, it suffered from a lack of concerted action. Many EU members expected that the EU would at best try to improve ties with Georgia without upsetting Russia and contribute to the economic and political stability of this small country, however, no efforts were undertaken in this direction. The EU stood divided over the question

³⁶ *The Guardian*, 16 August, 2008; Jim Nichol, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for US Interests", *Congressional Research Service* (CRS), updated 24 October, 2008. p. 13.

of dealing with Russia. Spearheaded by France, Italy and Germany, one block favoured negotiations based on shared interests, whereas the other block consisting of the UK, Poland, Sweden and the Baltic countries favoured a tough line against Russia. A close look at the division reveals that the hard-line countries are the ones that always favour US action whatever unhesitatingly; whereas the countries adhering to a 'softer line' are more 'continentalist'. In this regard, the recent role played by France is quite remarkable. In effect, France's moment in the diplomatic limelight stems partly from circumstances. As the current holder of the rotating EU presidency, Sarkozy's warm relations with Putin, France's vehement opposition to NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia, France's traditional continentalist policy (distancing a little away from the US) and above all France's interest in Russian energy created a hurdle-less ground for President Sarkozy to initiate a cease-fire process with the warring factions.³⁷

The EU sponsored ceasefire agreement under the French presidency came in to effect after a few problematic areas were cleared out. The peace plan calls for all parties to the conflict³⁸ to cease hostilities and pull troops back to positions they had occupied before the conflict began. Other elements of the peace plan include allowing humanitarian aid into conflict zones and facilitating the return of displaced persons. It excludes mention of Georgia's territorial integrity. The plan calls for the withdrawal of Russian combat troops from Georgia, but allows Russian 'peacekeepers to remain and to patrol in a large security zone outside South Ossetia that will include a swath of Georgian territory along South Ossetia's border. The plan also calls for the "opening of international discussions on the modalities of security and stability of South Ossetia and Abkhazia."³⁹

³⁷ See for details, Mark Tran, "Enter Sarkozy the Peacemaker", *The Guardian*, 12 August 2008.

³⁸ The Russian Foreign Ministry has asserted that the parties to the conflict covered by the peace plan are Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia signed the peace plan as a mediator of the conflict along with France signing for the EU.

³⁹ The original Cease-fire Protocol (in French) contains the following:

(i) Not to use force (ii) Cease hostilities in a conclusive manner (iii) Provide free access to humanitarian aid (iv) The Georgian armed forces must

It should be noted with interest that the European countries took a divisive line both in NATO and EU acting on their own respective national interests, in particular on energy related issues. Old Europe relies on Russia for 30% of its gas supplies. In this respect, Germany is particularly dependent on Russia for its energy needs and thus, in no position to anger Russia. The country also formed a strategic partnership with Russia by supporting an undersea pipeline project despite the fact that it meant bypassing Poland and Baltic countries, both members in EU and NATO. Italy has invested in a Russian line that will cross the Black Sea. Being excluded from Nabucco by Turkey, France is expected to make investment in the line. As one observer remarks, 'these countries do not want to sacrifice close cooperation with Russia for Georgia for an alternative energy line. Russia is fully aware of this, thus forcing NATO members to become economically dependent on its resources.'⁴⁰ Thus, during Russian invasion of Georgia, much to the comfort of the Western powers, Russia did not damage transport infrastructures like Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline.⁴¹ Also in Europe, most, states - including all other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) effectively stood aside from the current Russia-West dispute and maintained their neutrality.

The reverberation of the Georgian conflict was also felt in China despite the fact that the latter, at the time of eruption of the conflict, was in Olympic mood. The conflict in Georgia was a reminder to China about its own problem with Taiwan. As one analyst remarks, "China's relationship with Taiwan resembles Russia's ties to Georgia. In both the situations, the big state feels a sense of grievance over the existence of its puny neighbour and resents

withdraw to their habitual places of cantonment (v) The Russian armed forces must withdraw to the line where they were stationed prior to the beginning of hostilities. Awaiting the establishment of an international mechanism, the Russian peacekeeping forces will implement additional security measures (vi) The opening of international discussions on the modalities of security and stability in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

⁴⁰ Ali Yurttagul, "Georgia, NATO, the EU and Turkey", available at: <http://www.todayszaman.com/tzweb/detaylar.do?load=detay&:oml=152659>, accessed on 08 October 2008.

⁴¹ Rovshan Ibrahimov, *op.cit.*

outsider that act as its self-appointed protectors.”⁴² From its own shades of experience gained in Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang, China has developed a perspective that separatism is evil and self-determination is a dangerous principle. As a result, China took a very cautious approach towards the Georgian crisis by maintaining an equidistance policy and refraining from taking a position supportive of Russia. The Chinese mantra regarding the Caucasian crisis is that ‘the disputes be resolved peacefully through dialogue so as to achieve regional peace and stability.’⁴³ This went at par with the EU stance vis-à-vis the crisis. Few important elements that shaped Chinese response are: its strategic cooperation with Russia, huge economic cooperation with the US and EU countries, avoidance of a war that might set in the old Cold War, Chinese quest for Russian energy etc.

The recent crisis in Georgia has been successful in averting any Cold-War style confrontation. More important, a positive revelation has been its very limited impact on the rest of the world as it remained localized and confined to Georgia-Russia context only. Nonetheless, practically all states condemned the event in a normal diplomatic manner. Bangladesh too had its comment on the conflict when Foreign Adviser (under Caretaker Government) Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury stated, “Bangladesh does not want a return to Cold War situation in the wake of conflict between Russia and the United States over Georgia.” He added, “We want resolution of any conflict through negotiation. The way French President Sarkozy had ensured a ceasefire in Russia-Georgia war through negotiation, the conflict between Russia, US and NATO could be resolved through peaceful discussions”⁴⁴ However, many analysts were of the opinion that in case of an open conflict between US and Russia, Bangladesh would find herself in an embarrassing position as the country enjoys excellent relations with the former and that with the latter, it is, of late, trying to establish constructive relations. The anxiety over supply of oil also loomed large in many circles out of a fear that the conflict would have its effect on the Middle East.

⁴² Muhammad Cohen, *The Guardian*, 20 August 2008.

⁴³ M. K Bhadrakumar, “China seeks Caucasian crisis windfall”, *Asia Times*, 19 August, 2008.

⁴⁴ *The New Nation*, 21 September 2008.

IV. Georgia Crisis: A Study of its Implications

Since the end of the Cold War, the US remained unchallenged power in the global system and that it continues to remain an important player in practically all the regions of the world till to date. Although in the US led global war on terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11, terrorism has been contained in many parts of the globe, the country's success in containing conflicts, disorder and unrest in some parts of the globe remain under question, in particular in case of the recent Georgian crisis, no recordable success can be credited to the US account. This is because the dynamics of the conflict were beyond the control of US, and that the regional actors other than the US were found to be more relevant and as well potent in dealing with the crisis as the implications of the conflict were directly felt by them. Elsewhere away from the European continent, implications of the conflict were felt indirectly, albeit with concern and anxiety from many quarters. This section of the paper attempts to deal with few implications of the Georgian crisis in a brief manner under two headings: Regional Implications and Extra-regional implications.

Regional Implications

The Caucasus region has been facing a conflicting scenario since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The growing US influence in the region created dissension in the region on issues ranging from Serbia to Georgia. However, Russia remained silent due to its weakness in terms of economy and military. The myth that 'Russia is a weak power' soon evaporated with the Russian attack on Georgia thereby posing a direct challenge to the US interests in the region. The event has, therefore, its implications for the countries of the region at the state levels and as well as at the regional levels.

It may be mentioned that since 2004, Georgia sought to internationalize the conflicts of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Georgia's complaint was that Russia can not be a neutral peace keeper or negotiator in the region.⁴⁵ Whether Georgia has succeeded in her 'Russia bashing' objectives remains under question, but the fact remains that she badly miscalculated the consequences, of the

⁴⁵"Georgia and Russia: Clashing over Abkhazia", *International Crisis Group*, 5 June 2008.

conflict by overestimating its army's ability to face Russia and the level of willingness of the US and the EU to confront Russia with force. As indicated earlier, the latter group resorted to diplomacy other than to force to diffuse the crisis. As observed, the war resulted in hundreds of casualties for Georgia while it was facing military challenge from Russia and in the process it increased her dependency on the US and the EU. Perhaps, there is no gainsaying that the war dismantled the territorial integrity of Georgia as Russia recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states. Despite the fact that the decision of Russia was criticized by the western states, the Russian troops continue to remain in South Ossetia and Abkhazia as Russia alleged that Georgia carried out human genocide during its invasion of South Ossetia on 7 August 2008. There is now a growing realization that it will not be easier for Georgia to regain her control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Besieged by such wretchedness, Georgia also had to face difficulty in persuading some NATO members that it is ready for a Membership Action Plan (MAP). Georgia is also likely to face the energy related problems. Oil produced in Azerbaijan is transported by the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, the Baku-Supsa pipeline and railcars to Georgian ports. The Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline takes gas produced in Azerbaijan to the Turkish city of Erzurum. Georgia also imports gas from Russia and transits Russian-sourced gas to Armenia.⁴⁶ It may be mentioned that Georgia is used as the transit route of energy in the Caucasus region. (See Map 2). If Georgia fails to ensure Russian consent for these pipelines, Georgia can no longer serve as a key energy transit route. Strategically, Russia can block these routes. Georgia imports about 12 percent of its electricity from Russia and Armenia, and much of its electricity network is owned by the Russian companies.⁴⁷ Hence, Georgia has to face difficulties in this regard. The economy of Georgia has been greatly damaged by the Russian military attacks and time is needed to overcome the shock. There is also the speculation that the incumbent government may have to face challenges internally, in particular from its oppositions. This, in the process, is likely to veer Georgia towards a kind of instability at home.

⁴⁶"Russia vs Georgia: The Fallout", *op. cit.*

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

The Russian attack is considered as a turning point for Russia's relations with both its neighbours and the broader international community. Russia thinks that it should exercise a decisive influence on global process.⁴⁸ However, despite the strengthening of Russian position in the regional and international levels, thanks to the Georgian conflict, the US energy interest in the Caucasus region may challenge Russia in the future. Many of the US ambitions in the region are as yet unknown and many are suspicious about a possible US re-activism in the region. In that case, Russia may have to face difficulties in the future as its economy is still not in a sustainable position. Despite real GDP growth that has averaged 7 per cent in the years 2000-2007, Russia is a small economy compared to those of the US, the EU, Japan or China.⁴⁹ It is overtly dependent on oil and gas production, which in 2007 made up two thirds of export revenues and over 15 percent of GDP. Oil alone provided about 29 percent of government revenue. Hence, it will not be easy for Russia to bypass the US and the EU for economic reasons. The EU's market is by far the most important destination for Russian exports. Companies from the EU are the main investors in Russia. Russian import from the EU was 113.199 billion US dollars, while Russian export to the EU was 1825.607 billion US dollars in the year 2007. The EU's investment in Russia is 21.626 billion US dollars while Russian investment in the EU is 1.271 billion US dollars in the same year.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the US Foreign Development Investment (FDI) in Russia was 2.3 billion US dollar in the year 2007.⁵¹ Hence, Russia is not a self

⁴⁸Ivanov, "Where is Russia heading? New vision of pan-European security", Paper presented at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, 10 February 2008., available at: www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?sprache=en&id=217, accessed on 16 August 2008.

⁴⁹Charles Clover, "Investors quit Russia after Georgia war", *Financial Times*, 21 August 2008.

⁵⁰"Europe External Relations: Russia", available at: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/russia/index_en.htm, accessed 02 October 2008.

⁵¹"Foreign Direct Investment in Russia - A Survey of CEO's 2008" available at: http://www.fuac.ru/files/fiac_survey_2008_eng.pdf, accessed on 02 September 2008.

dependent country by herself. It needs strong relations with both the US and EU for its economic development in various fields.

The Russia-Georgia war heralds the inception of a new power game in the region. The independence of Serbia, the expansion of NATO and the presence of the US has made the region a subject of discussion and debate in international politics in recent times. The energy interest of the US and the West may lead many countries of the region to gain influence and strength in the coming day. That might even bring conflicts in the region. It is believed that the Russian treaty with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, signed on 17 September 2008, might rearrange the Caucasus map. In the treaty, Russia promised economic, military and diplomatic support for the countries. It may give both the countries the opportunities to be free from the control of Georgia.⁵² As a result, the Russian influence in the region is likely to be on its ascendancy in the future.

Extra-regional Implications

The Russia-Georgia war generated global concern in view of the very importance of the region. Outside the European continent, it was a general belief that the US was the real player behind the Georgian attack on South Ossetia on 7 August 2008. The international community sees the present government of Georgia as a US lackey for serving the interest of the US. Many analysts are of the opinion that the US efforts to control the resources of the region, in particular oil and gas, will not go unchallenged as Russia is equally interested in such strategic resources. In this regard, the recent war may be considered as a Russian protest to the US presence in the region.

As indicated earlier, after the fall of Soviet Union, the United States deliberately took advantage of a weakened Russia to incorporate its former allies and even some former Soviet republics

⁵² The Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed the documents with South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity and Abkhaz President Sergei Bagapsh, formalizing Russia's recognition of the regions as independent countries: Nicaragua is the only other country that has bestowed such recognition on the republics.

into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance. The US even sought and won access to military bases in former Soviet republics in Central Asia. While the collapse of economic and military power of Russia facilitated the US inroad into the Caucasus as well as in the global arena, Russia under Putin is not willing to be a silent spectator of unchallenged US policies in the international arena. By now, Russia contradicts with the US in different areas like US invasion in Iraq and the US policy towards Iran. However, for few analysts, the expectation of Russian rise is taken with caution. They argue that Russia going competitive with the US pre-mature for the reason that Russia is a weak state in respect of economy and military when compared with the ones of the US. It has no power to challenge the US or NATO in the global arena and its attack on Georgia has been a mere resistance for ensuring its energy security with backdated, archaic and uncompetitive arms and ammunitions.

Meanwhile, the strengthening of relations between Russia and China, and the organizations like Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), are increasing the positions of Russia and China respectively and diverting them into some form of an alliance. The US policy, therefore, puts more emphasis in order to contain China. To what extent Russia and China will challenge the US in the new system remains to be seen as Sino-US relations are competitive but not conflicting. In a complex spiral of Indo-China relations, the historic Indo-Russia relations, Russia-US relations on the issue of Global War on Terror, the Russian policy towards Iran and its correct relations with European countries, one is yet to be sure about the exact nature and configuration of future alliance and counter-alliance systems in globe.

As mentioned earlier, the US proposals in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have been challenged by Russia and China on the issue of Georgia-Russia war. China and Russia also differ with the policy of the US on the issue of Iran and Darfur (Sudan). Hence, it seems that the UNSC is divided in two blocs. The Russia-Georgian war has sharpened the division. It seems that the proposals of the USA would not be unchallenged in the UNSC. However, the US may try to include new members in the UNSC for strengthening its position. On the other hand, NATO's policy for extension to the

former Soviet regions will be challenged by Russia, after the war. The SCO and CSTO may find new objectives for strengthening its position. Russia and China may use the organizations for containing US presence in the region.

The Georgian conflict is not insulated from oil politics. It is held by many that the main cause behind the Georgia-Russia war is the fight for controlling global energy. The increasing demand of energy may divide the world into two blocs under the leadership of the US and Russia. Some European countries are not willing to talk more against Russia on the issue of Georgia, considering their energy interests. However, it is not clear as to how the US will deal with Russia on the issues of energy of the Caucasus regions. Hence, the latest Georgia-Russia war may not be the last war in the region. This is because, in the eyes of the US, energy is too important a resource to be left in the region at Russian mercy, likewise Russia feels oil and gas as important resources in its hands to be used as trump card in any bargaining with the West in the future. There is, therefore, the need to control such resources. It may be mentioned that the importance of the natural resources of the Caucasus are known throughout the world. Hence, the Russia-Georgia war could influence the other regions like the EU, Middle East and the Asian powers like China and India.

Furthermore, some analysts argue that the conflict in the Caucasus may increase the importance of the Middle East in the international arena. The global powers will try to ensure control in the region for ensuring smooth flow of energy. The US is not willing to leave over Iraq for continuing its enormous control over its oil resources. The oil reserved countries will have to face more pressure. The US might be more concerned about Iran. Russia may differ from the West on Iran issue in the UNSC. Russia is thinking to extend its naval base in Syria. This might bring in a new power game. Israel will be more important for the US in the Middle East. That will make the region more unstable and conflict prone. Some Israeli analysts think that Israel is heading towards a strategic environment in which Russia may play a more important role, from the Black Sea to

Afghanistan and western China.⁵³ This, they think, will be a challenge for Israel in the coming days.

As a member of SCO, China now is a player in the Caucasus region. The strengthening of Sino-Russian relations created a new ground for their similar position in the UNSC. In the UNSC on the issue of Georgia, the two countries spoke from a similar position. On the issue of Darfur, the policy of China contradicts with the policy of the US. However, the Georgian crisis may bring Russia and China closer to each other. But it might not affect Sino-US relations. India is a close partner for Russia since Cold War. The Indo-US partnership is a remarkable development in the foreign policy of India. Hence, the conflict between Russia and the West may lead India to a balanced foreign policy, securing its strategic interests. Its rising demand for energy may lead the country to neutral positions about the Caucasus issues.

Although, the Russia-Georgia war has challenged the US interests in the Caucasus region, any remark like 'an inception of a new global system has taken place' is to be made with caution. The war increased Russian control in the Caucasus region. Russia ensured its control in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The other countries of the region now have to rethink about their relations with the US and the west. The war divided EU for taking actions against Russia. It may affect the US policy in the region. It remains to be seen as to how the US will refashion its relations with the countries of Europe. The interest of energy may lead the US for further actions, but it will be more diplomatic in nature than the military ones. The US has now seen a tough Russia who gained sympathy in several parts of the world out of the recent Georgian crisis. As a result, the West under the aegis of US leadership is now expected to pursue a more cautious, logical and constructive policy vis-à-vis Russia.

Conclusion

While it is true that the Russia-Georgia war has challenged the US position and interests in the Caucasus region, it is premature to

⁵³ Dr. Aaron Lerner, "The Russian-Georgian War: Implications for the Middle East", *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, Institute for Contemporary Affairs, Vol. 8, No. 6, 15 August 2008.

forecast the beginning, if any, of a new global system: The war has, however, increased Russian control in the Caucasus region and ensured Russia's control in South Ossetia and Abkhazia respectively. In this respect, the other countries of the region have to rethink about their future relations with the US, the West and Russia. The Russian-Georgian war indicates that the US power may be deteriorating in the face of its lengthy and open-ended commitments in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Global War on Terror which are leading to a global overstretch.⁵⁴ The formidable challenge for the US would be to face a divided Europe and in that direction the policies and strategies of the US are not yet clear. Of concern to all the parties would be the oil issue. It is oil that is expected to decide the future of Caucasus as well as the power configuration in the region with its impact on the international system in the coming days. While the US might try to influence Russia by diplomatic instruments and take the opportunity of Russian dependency on the West, the fact remains that it will not be easy for the West to take tough action against Russia at the moment. As evidenced, the war has brought support for Russia as a reaction of the international community against unbridled US hegemony in the world. There has been a close understanding between China and Russia in the UNSC. The SCO and CSTO of which Russia is a member will have its relevance in the future international political system.

The recent crisis in Georgia has shown its substantial security implications for Russia, the US, the West and Georgia. The new peace paradigm should take into consideration the security sensitivities of the parties involved. As a result, the most rationale solution to the Georgian crisis would be through diplomacy. If Georgia succeeds in re-imposing its sovereignty over South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the face of Russian opposition, it will be a huge setback to Moscow's influence in the region. Similarly, a defeat for Georgia could signal a setback for the US led West in the region. The imperative, therefore, is to avoid any risk of a future armed conflagration in the region by avoiding all provocative activities in a volatile region like the Caucasus. In the circumstances, diplomacy, negotiation, dialogue and consultation seem to remain the last card to play by all the concerned parties.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*