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2008 RUSSIAN – GEORGIAN WAR IN THE CONTEXT OF THE
SOUTH OSSETIAN CONFLICT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR
SOUTH CAUCASIA

MASTER’S THESIS

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by
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For the victims of the 2008 Georgian – Russian War

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1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

2. The program of advanced study of which this thesis is a part has been comprised of: courses in International Relations, including international relations theory, and thematic courses such as Turkey, and Central Asia/ Caucasus.

i) Research Methods. The thesis incorporates research methods taught on both undergraduate and on graduate levels by the thesis advisor during the course of study. See below.

ii) Sources examined in this thesis include articles from scholarly journals, other articles such as essays, newspaper articles and policy papers; books on international relations and international law, history of Russia, Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, recent conflicts in particular; dissertation style guides of Turkish universities and international universities as well as many relevant reports published by non-governmental and international organizations.

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ABSTRACT

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2008 RUSSIAN – GEORGIAN WAR IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SOUTH OSSETIAN CONFLICT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH CAUCASIA

This thesis analyzes the implications of the 2008 Georgian - Russian War for the South Caucasus. At first glance, the war was a small-scale confrontation that was fought over South Ossetia, a small mountainous region with no significant strategic value. However, both sides had some the motives and reasons to fight a war. This five-day war has had significant results that meant much more than Georgia. The war brought about a big rift in the Western – Russian relations, and it has had implications for both South Caucasus and international politics over the region. With this war Kremlin had an opportunity to counter the Western attempts of penetrating into the Russia's 'sphere of influence'. It could also be argued that Russia was defending itself against Western containment efforts with this war. For Georgian administration that had very close relations with the West, war and the post-war situation were big disillusionment as they could not get adequate support that they had expected from the US and the EU. Therefore, the 2008 war also revealed the limits of the external actors particularly the EU and the USA in the geopolitical rivalry over the Caucasus and their incompetence to contribute to the solution of the regional conflicts in the region. In addition, Russian recognition of independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and increasing Russian military presence in the region after the war brought about a disturbing question whether a new kind of Russian imperialism is emerging. In this regard, other regional states, Azerbaijan and Armenia have made some adjustments in their foreign policies vis-à-vis their relations with Russia and the Western powers after the war. The war has had implications not only for the security of Georgia but also for Azerbaijan and Armenia. Ethnic conflicts of the regional countries seem to remain unsolved for many years to come, and they are likely to generate new sources of insecurity in the post-Soviet locale. Finally, the crisis is also closely linked with the energy issue. It is an unquestionable fact that the Western attention to the region is directly related with the energy resources. South Caucasus is an alternative transit energy route for the European countries which decreases their dependency on Russian energy. The new framework after the war would compel the western powers to redefine their policies for the region, and along with this, review their relations with Moscow.

Key words: Georgia, Russia, South Ossetia, South Caucasia, Regional Conflicts, EU, USA, energy

KISA ÖZET

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Mayıs 2013

GÜNEY OSETYA SORUNU BAĞLAMINDA 2008 RUSYA- GÜRCİSTAN SAVAŞI VE GÜNEY KAFKASYA'YA ETKİLERİ

Bu yüksek lisans tezinde 2008 yılında meydana gelen Gürcistan – Rusya savaşının Güney Kafkasya'ya etkileri incelenmektedir. İlk bakışta, bu savaş her iki taraf için de çok stratejik öneme haiz olmayan küçük bir dağlık bölge için yapılmış gibi görünebilir. Ancak iki tarafı da savaşıma iten bazı sebepler ve güdüler vardı. Bu beş gün süren kısa savaşın Gürcistan sınırlarını aşan önemli neticeleri oldu. Bu savaş Batı ve Rusya ilişkilerinde derin bir çatlak oluşturdu ve hem Güney Kafkasya'ya hem de bölge ile alakalı uluslararası siyasete etkileri oldu. Bu savaşla Kremlin Batı'nın Rusya'nın 'etki alanına' nüfuz etme girişimlerine karşılık verme imkanını elde etmiş oldu. Rusya'nın bu savaşla Batı'nın çevreleme çabalarına karşı kendisini savunmakta olduğu da ileri sürülebilir. Batı ile çok yakın ilişkileri olan Gürcistan yönetimi için savaş ve sonrası dönem Batı'dan umdukları yeterli desteği alamadıkları için büyük bir hayal kırıklığı oldu. Dolayısıyla, 2008 savaşı özellikle AB ve ABD gibi bölge dışı aktörlerin Kafkaslar üzerine olan jeopolitik rekabetteki limitlerini ve bölgedeki çatışmaların çözümüne sağlayabilecekleri katkıların yetersizliğini ortaya koydu. Ayrıca Rusya'nın savaştan sonra Güney Osetya ve Abhazya'nın bağımsızlıklarını tanınması ve bölgede artan askeri varlığı acaba yeni bir tür Rus Emperyalizmi mi doğuyor endişesine yol açtı. Bu bağlamda, bölgenin diğer ülkeleri olan Azerbaycan ve Ermenistan, savaştan sonra Rusya ve Batı ile olan ilişkileriyle alakalı dış politikalarında bazı değişikliklere gittiler. Savaşın sadece Gürcistan'ın değil ayrıca Azerbaycan ve Ermenistan'ın da güvenliğini ilgilendiren sonuçları oldu. Bölge ülkelerindeki etnik problemler daha uzun yıllar çözümsüz kalacak ve Sovyetler sonrası çevrede yeni çatışma kaynakları üretecek gibi görünüyor. Son olarak bu kriz enerji meseleleriyle yakından bağlıdır. Yadsınamaz bir gerçektir ki Batı'nın bölgeye olan ilgisi enerji kaynakları ile doğrudan ilintilidir. Güney Kafkasya Avrupa ülkelerinin Rusya'ya olan enerji bağımlılığını azaltacak alternatif bir enerji geçiş güzergâhıdır. Savaş sonrası bu yeni durum batılı güçleri bölgeyle alakalı politikalarını yeniden tanımlamaya ve bunun yanında Moskova ile olan ilişkilerini gözden geçirmeye zorlayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gürcistan, Rusya, Güney Osetya, Güney Kafkasya, Bölgesel çatışmalar, AB, ABD, enerji

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BTC	Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline
BTE	Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum gas pipeline
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EU	European Union
EUMM	European Union Monitoring Mission
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IDP	Internally Displaces Person
IIFFMCG	Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia
MNNA	Major non-NATO ally
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SOCAR	State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic
TPAO	Turkish Petroleum Corporation
UK	The United Kingdom
UN	The United Nations
UNM	United Nationalist Movement (Mikheil Saakashvili’s party)
UNOMIG	The United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
US	The United States
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics
WWII	World War 2

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INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the iron curtain in early 1990s brought about significant changes in the international system whose implications are still observed. This momentous event marked the end of bipolar system which divided the world into two rival camps, which is considered to have many positive effects by many scholars. On the other hand, it also disturbed the balance in many places both in and outside the Soviet Union territory. Instability and regional conflicts are common features of a considerable part of post-Soviet environment.

With the end of the Soviet Union fifteen new states joined the international community. It has been more than two decades since they gained their independence; however, they are still struggling with many problems in their state formation process. These immature states have faced many challenges such as corruption, ethnic conflicts, economic and political problems most of which were hereditary from the communist era. Caucasia, which is a cradle to many nations, has been the most noticeable region with such problems in the post-Soviet period. Caucasia has always been an area of conflicts in history. In this region, authoritarian Soviet rule helped ethnic enmities remain frozen or at least at a low level causing no significant conflicts. This relatively peaceful period suddenly came to an end with the dissolution of the communist regime. Since the chaotic final days of Soviet era, the region has been hosting bloody armed conflicts in several areas of the region.

Georgia is probably the most inauspicious country which has suffered from such ethnic conflicts since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Its two autonomous regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia declared and fought for their independence and have existed as de facto states with the support of Russian Federation up until today. Russia, which considers the region as its sphere of influence, has always manipulated these two regional conflicts for its ends and used them as tools to control Georgian governments. Russia was often blamed by Georgia for assisting and supporting the secessionist of administrations Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Ironically, Russia was the main negotiator and the peace-keeper in these two regions.

The developments led to a war between Russia and Georgia in the August of 2008. On August 8, Russian army marched across the border into Georgia. The night before, Georgian armed forces had retaliated to attacks by South Ossetian secessionists, an ethnic minority in northern Georgia, by bombing civilian districts of the region's capital city, Tskhinvali. Georgian administration was determined to re-control the territory by military means. Georgian administration's move threatened the fragile status quo and turned the frozen conflict into a war, which had unpleasant outcomes for Georgia. Moscow intervened in the conflicts without delay. There had been small-scale Russian armed forces in South Ossetia as peacekeepers, which started its mission 15 years earlier after a cease-fire agreement negotiated by Russia. That seven Russian peace keepers were killed during Georgian attack gave Russia an excuse for intervention. Russia, which had been the backer of the secessionist government of the autonomous republic for more than a decade, responded with a full-scale incursion, which was not very much anticipated by the Georgian leadership. Russian army targeted key military and transport centers throughout Georgia. The war lasted five days and ended after the mediation efforts of French president N. Sarkozy. The problems became more complicated when Russia recognized the independence of two regions after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war.

Map 1.



Source: Fischer Weltatlas, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2009

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss the consequences of the five-day Georgian-Russian war which took place in the August of 2008. At first sight, the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008, which was fought over South Ossetia, a 17km² mountainous region with a population of about 70,000 with insignificant strategic value to both sides, may seem like a small-scale armed conflict of little importance. However, it is not the case at all. This five-day confrontation has had momentous results. Some scholars argue that this war meant much more than Georgia.¹ The war created a big fault line in the relations between the West and Russia. Moreover, it has had implications for both the Caucasus region and world politics. The focus of the study will be on the implications of the war on the international politics over the South Caucasia and the adjustments of the policies of the states which are directly or indirectly involved in or concerned with the crisis.

This thesis is an attempt to answer the following research questions: What were the motives and reasons of the two countries that caused them to fight a war? What will be consequences of the war for the region and the international politics? The consequences of the war are still being discussed among academic circles of international relations. The following are some of the apparent effects. It brought relations between Russian Federation and the USA to their lowest level since the gloomy decades of the Cold War. With this war Russia had a chance to stand up against American policies in the region which they aren't pleased with and had an opportunity to confront up until then. For pro-American Georgian leadership, the situation was a grave disappointment as they thought they represented and followed American values and policies in the region. In this connection, another question that this thesis will attempt to answer is whether there are and will be any changes in the pro-Western and pro-American policies of the Georgian administration.

The thesis also analyzes possible foreign policy changes of the other regional countries Azerbaijan and Armenia after the war. For the former Soviet republics of South Caucasia, including Central Asian states, the war was evaluated as a warning,

¹ Ronald Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4.

which shows that Russia is ready to use its hard power in the case it feels its dominance in its sphere of influence is shaken. Regarding this fact, the thesis analyzes the capacity of the external actors especially the EU, and the USA to apply their policies and to contribute to the solution of the regional conflicts in the region.

Another issue discussed in the research is the implications of this war for the security of the regional countries. Russian recognition of independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia after the war has brought the Caucasus again on the Eurasian security agenda. Regional conflicts of South Caucasus seem to remain unsolved for years to come, which is a serious threat against the Western interests in the region. It is obvious that continuation of the long-lasting regional problems in the region is against the interests of European Union and the USA. In addition, the crisis worsened after the war is now more likely to generate new sources of insecurity in the post-Soviet locale, which is considered as its backyard by the Russian Federation. Russian military interference in the regional conflicts brought about a disturbing question whether a new sort of Russian imperialism is emerging.

Last but not least, the crisis is also connected with the energy routes. It is an undeniable fact that the interest of the West in the region is closely linked with the energy issues since the region is alternative transit route for European countries which decreases their dependencies on Russia. The new framework forces the West to restructure its policy for the region, and along with this, its relations with Moscow.

Methodology & the Structure of the Thesis

The research will look at primary data from sources like reports, statements of officials, public sphere debate journals, country-specific statistics, and etc. Literature review will include surveys about the issue as well as academic assessments of them by several observers. In addition, secondary sources such as generalizations, analysis, public debates, synthesis, interpretation, or evaluation of the information from primary sources concerning the issue by the experts and observers will be used to support the arguments.

The thesis consists of four chapters. In the first chapter of the study, there is a brief theoretical part which assesses whether international relations theory is useful

to explain the war. Two branches of structural realism: offensive and defensive realism are employed to analyze the cause of the conflict. In addition to realist theory, geopolitics – which is often related to realist thinking – is presented to help us understand why this region is so important in world politics and the reasons of the war in connection with its geopolitical significance.

The second chapter is dedicated to the conflict in August 2008. First of all, the roots of the South Ossetian - Georgian conflict, the war and the cease-fire process are given briefly which aims to give the reader an insight into a better understanding the conflict. This chapter further includes Russian arguments for intervention and the legality of the war, as well. Georgian counter-arguments of the war are also given. The legality of Russian and Georgian actions during the war is evaluated according to international law.

In the third chapter, consequences of the war on South Caucasia are discussed. First of all, implications of the war for Russian approach towards Caucasia and the Georgian – Russian relations are analyzed. The role of pro-Western policies of Georgia in the conflict cannot be denied; therefore the effects of the war on the relations of Georgia with the West are discussed in the second part of this chapter. It is obvious that the war had also effects on the other South Caucasian countries Azerbaijan and Armenia's foreign policies as they have close relations with both Russia and Georgia. Whether there are any changes in their foreign policy orientations is another subject of this chapter. Final part of the section is dedicated to the impacts of the war on the energy policies of the internal and external actors in South Caucasia.

To sum up, the conclusion part is mainly allocated for the interpretation and evaluation of the consequences of the war. I plan to relate the recent political events which have been taking place in the region and the international arena with the topic of the paper.

CHAPTER I

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Structural Realism

In order to understand the behavior of the states in the events of international relations using theories can be very helpful in finding the reasons of the conflict between Russia and Georgia. Structural realism is probably the most convenient theory which offers plausible explanations to the reasons of this five-day war. Two schools of structural realism, offensive and defensive realism will be comparatively presented. The core of both schools of realist approach concerns power and security dilemma in international relations. Yet, these schools of IR theories put forward some dissimilar ways to understand Russian-Georgian conflict. It is important to note that both perspectives explaining the war have strengths and weaknesses.

1.1.1. Offensive Realism

According to offensive realists, the structure of the international system offers incentives for expansion and power maximization. Offensive realists argue that states always pursue policies to maximize their power, and their goal is to become a regional hegemon when they have the opportunity.² According to offensive realists, the nature of the international system is anarchic which offers incentives for expansion. “The structure of the systems forces states which seek only to be secure nonetheless to act aggressively toward each other.”³ Offensive realists argue that the main motive of the states in their policies is survival because stronger states have more chance to survive. As a result they try to improve their relative power in any opportunity. And great powers often behave aggressively towards other states for more power as Mearsheimer argues “Great powers behave aggressively not because they want to or because they possess some inner drive to dominate, but because they have to seek more power if they maximize their odds of survival.”⁴ Therefore,

² John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Powers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001),7.

³John Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, W.W. Norton & Co Ltd, 2002), 3., 21., 34.

⁴ Ibid., 21.

according an offensive realist, countries like Russia look for domination over their neighbors or even invade their territory to maximize their relative power.

The 2008 Georgian-Russian war seems to have proven the assumptions of offensive realists. Russian studies scholars tend to explain Russian foreign policy with offensive realist approach. In fact, there is a reason behind this tendency. Russia's concrete actions in the last two decades in the region caused this way of studying its foreign policy. Taking into consideration Kremlin's close connections with the separatist administrations of the autonomous republics in Georgia, and its support to Armenia, one of the key actors in Nagorno- Karabakh conflict, many IR scholars argue that Russia is following a policy to preserve and improve its hegemony and influence in the region.

Another evidence for realist interpretation of Russian foreign policy is the fact that Russia has always been unwilling to withdraw its military units in South Caucasia, particularly from Georgia, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is known that Russian military forces in several bases in the region intervened in the regional conflicts of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh in many cases, which made these conflicts more problematic. This fact supports the view that Russia sees the continuation of the status quo for its interests as Baev argues that the continuation of insecurity and conflicts in the region is desirable for Russian interests.⁵

According to the core ideas of offensive realists mentioned above, we can expect Russia to follow a policy of controlling or taking over Georgia by all means available. According to some Georgian politicians Russia is an expansionist state pursuing to dominate South Caucasia⁶. The motives of Russia in its policy towards Georgia could be the following. It could be argued that Russia's first aim is to destroy external actors' capability to penetrate the Northern Caucasia, which has always been a problematic region prone to external manipulation due to its ethnic

⁵ Pavel Baev, "Useful War", *Russian and Eurasia Review*, 14:1 (2002).

⁶ "Georgia's Acting President Says Country Will Survive Current Turmoil", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, November 27, 2007, accessed September 16, 2012, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1079202.html>

composition. It could also be claimed that taking the control of energy transportation from the Caspian Sea to Europe by making Georgia insecure as a transit energy corridor is another policy pursued by Russia. For this end, either destabilizing or overthrowing uncooperative Tbilisi administration is probably a primary goal of Russia.

Despite the facts mentioned above, offensive perspective has some deficiencies in explaining the case. To illustrate, one could ask why Russia imposed non-use of force agreement concerning the regional conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia on Georgia earlier. The reason could not be Russia's inadequacy to use its military force taking the incomparable military capacities of Russia and Georgia into consideration. In other words, Russia could have waged war on Georgia earlier taking into consideration that it had all the material conditions available. As a result, it could be argued that Russia reacted against Georgian aggression only for the security and defensive reasons as Russian administration argued to legitimize their use of force against Georgia.

There is another weakness of the offensive explanation. Russia did not capture the Georgian capital and overthrow Saakashvili regime during the war although it had the power and military capacity. If Russia had pursued a totally realist policy, it should have overthrown uncooperative Saakashvili administration to guarantee total dominance over Georgia.

Thirdly, Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence soon after the war. Russia could have annexed these two small pieces of land, but abstained from pursuing more expansionist policies. The offensive perspective is deficient in fine distinction and a sense of proportion and, it tends to ignore the effect of international developments on Russian foreign policy by calling Russia as essentially imperialist and anti-Western.

1.1.2. Defensive Realism

Defensive realism offers a more conceivable interpretation of the Russian-Georgian conflict. Defensive realists argue that the nature of the international system encourages states to pursue expansionist policies but only in certain conditions. For defensive realists, states' primary concern is to maintain their position in the system rather than increasing their power as they will face balancing responses from their rivals. Therefore, too much power is not beneficial for states.⁷ For this reason, states try to preserve status quo. Unlike offensive realists, defensive realists focus on security and survival to understand state behavior. They assert that states usually use more balancing or bandwagoning than war to take action when they face security dilemmas. To identify primary motivating variables, defensive realists describe misperceptions and predispositions that may prevent an accurate understanding of indications stemming from the anarchical international system.⁸

In the light of above mentioned brief summary of defensive realist perspective, it could be argued that Russian policies in Caucasia serve its security purposes. According to them, despite its use of power, Russia is on defense, not on offense. Russia is trying to prevent a bigger war along its borders. According to the policy makers in Kremlin, Georgia's membership in NATO is seen as a potential threat to Russia's security; therefore it must be prevented. In defensive perspective, Russia took action against Western power maximization attempt using Georgia as a proxy after the Velvet Revolution in Georgia in 2004.

In order to understand Russia's motivations in line with defensive realist approach, we can find a great deal of statements made by the country's officials which explain their reaction to Georgia for security objectives⁹. Secondly, the fact that Russia did not go as far as to invade all the Georgian territory and overthrow Saakashvili supports defensive explanation of the Russian – Georgian war. Russian

⁷ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 21.

⁸ Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, 30:2 (1978); Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 32.

⁹ "Sergei Lavrov: America Must Choose Between Georgia and Russia", *Wall Street Journal*, August 20, 2008; "Dmitry Medvedev: Why I had to recognize Georgia's breakaway regions", *Financial Times*, August 26, 2008.

officials were aware of the fact that they would face punishment of several forms from the international society if they had gone further. Therefore, it could be argued that the structure of the current international system does not permit Russia to pursue expansionist objectives.

1.2. Geopolitics

Geopolitics has become a popular theory in the last few decades. It is extensively used in the analyses of the academic circles of political science and international relations. Geopolitics offers valuable explanations to understand the 2008 Russian – Georgian war. In order to comprehend the geopolitical account of Russian – Georgian war, we first need to remember what geopolitics entails as a theory. The term Geopolitics was first coined by Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén in early 20th century.¹⁰

Geopolitics basically analyzes the implications of geography of countries for their security and foreign policy. It refers generally to the relationship between territory and politics on local or international level. The connection between security politics and the material conditions of a given territory is the core of the geopolitics. A country's foreign policy and its power are shaped by its geography according to geopolitical perspective. However, geopolitics does not only take into consideration the geographical features of a region or a country. Halford Mackinder, Nicholas Spykman, Alfred Mahan, Friedrich Ratzel and others developed and broadened the scope of geopolitics further than simple geographical features as in a contemporary definition of geopolitics by Evans and Newnham: "Particularly, it is a method of foreign policy analysis, which seeks to understand, explain and predict international political behavior primarily in terms of geographical variables. Those geographical variables generally refer to: geographic location of the country or countries in question, size of the countries involved, climate of the region the

¹⁰ Geoffrey Parker, *Western geopolitical thought in the twentieth century* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 55.

countries are in, topography of the region, demography, natural resources and technological development.”¹¹

Geopolitical theory has the key concepts of heartland, rimland and buffer zones which denotes strategic zones in the world map. Heartland theory was developed by Mackinder who argued that geography is the prime determinant of a country's foreign policy. Mackinder partitioned the world into three areas: heartland, inner crescent and outer crescent. In Mackinder's theory, Heartland, corresponding to Eurasia, which includes Caucasus region and most of which is controlled by Russia, is the pivotal area of world politics. He argued that the power that controls the heartland has all the material conditions to become the global hegemon. According to Mackinder's theory the power controlling Eurasia rules the heartland, and who rules the heartland commands the world island.¹²

Later Nicholas Spykman suggested an alternative heartland to Mackinder's which he called 'rimland' based on Mackinder's thesis. Rimland refers to Western Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific Rim. The common point of Mackinder and Spykman's arguments was that geographical variables are the most important factor of being a regional or global hegemon.

Geopolitics emerged as a predisposed theory during the days of global rivalry in early 20th century. Geopolitics used to be more an ideology than an international relations theory. The theory of geopolitics was blamed for trying to justify the imperialist policies of the Western countries arguing that Western civilization is superior to others in terms of its economic, socio-cultural and political systems. Expansionism was regarded as an indispensable condition of being a world power.¹³ Later, it lost its credibility in the post WWII period because of its abuse by the Hitler regime's foreign policy.¹⁴ The term geopolitics was not as popular as it used to be for several decades. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became once again popular

¹¹ Graham Evans & Jeffrey Newnham, *The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 123.

¹² Halford Mackinder, *Democratic ideals and reality: A study in the politics of reconstruction* (New York: Holt, 1942), 150.

¹³ Gearoid O Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics* (London: Routledge, 1996), 37 – 48.

¹⁴ Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics: a very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 31.

as a term to refer to a new Great Game in Eurasia.¹⁵ The term geopolitics is frequently employed in academic papers about world politics. Geopolitics is often considered an indispensable part of realist theory of international relations.¹⁶ Anarchic character of international system as in the realist perspective can alleviate or aggravate as a result of geographic features. It is important to note that such features are not static today due to fast changes in world politics and scientific innovations, especially in the area of telecommunications and military technology. Non-material features such as perceptions of the political elites and the intellectuals also comprise the strategic importance of regions. Therefore, new geopolitics is not simply about raw geographic characteristics of a given region.

1.2.1. Distinct Geopolitical Features of the Caucasus

The Caucasus has unique geopolitical conditions due to its geography and diverse ethnic composition. The region is divided into two parts as North and South Caucasia according to their geographical and ethnical features. There are strong economic and socio-cultural relations between two parts of the region despite this geographical division.

The Caucasus has always had high level of conflict potential due to its varied ethnic composition. Moreover, it is a region where Christian and Islamic worlds confronted each other in several occasions in history. Thus, it can accurately be called one of the most problematic and unstable regions of the world. That almost all of the regional conflicts started in the post-Soviet period are in this region proves this view. Many complicated factors play role in region's ethnic problems, which makes conflict resolution efforts futile. The fact that many ethnic entities live in a very proximity to each other in such relatively small areas makes the situation even worse in many cases. The ethnic conflicts in the region have deep historical roots which makes them very difficult resolve. During the Soviet period, clashes between the ethnic groups were prevented either by giving each of them regional autonomies or

¹⁵ Eric Walberg, *Postmodern Imperialism: Geopolitics and the Great Games* (Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press, 2011), 12.

¹⁶ Jonathan Haslam, *No Virtue Like Necessity: Realist Thought in International Relations Since Machiavelli* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 6.

by authoritarian policies. However, they were just frozen until an indefinite time, which turned out to be the collapse of the Soviet Union in early 90s. This historical event considerably changed the geopolitics of the Caucasus.

1.2.2. Geopolitical Significance of the South Caucasus

The geopolitical significance of the Caucasus region has noticeably increased in the last two decades. The region doesn't have importance for only the regional powers neighboring the region, but it also attracts the attention of the great powers, namely the USA, EU, and China. However, their geographic features determine their policy options towards the region. Due to their proximity to the region, Russia, Turkey and Iran seem to have a relative advantage over other actors that are interested in the region.

Caucasus is a geostrategically important place where the interests of many powers conflict. Its rich oil and natural gas sources in Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea along with its value as a transit energy route make the region geopolitically very important. Despite not having significant energy resources, Georgia is a key country in South Caucasus as it serves as way of access to open seas for landlocked Caspian region which includes very rich energy resources of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

1.2.2.1 Geopolitical Importance of Caucasus for Russia

The 2008 Russian – Georgian war showed that South Caucasus is such a geostrategical region for Russia that it can resort to military power, taking several risks. Russia wouldn't have been neutral in the south Ossetian – Georgian conflict as Georgia is located in such a region which can serve as a geographical lever to control Central Asia and the Caucasus. One of the priorities of Russian policy is to maintain its presence in this region whether military or political.

In relation to Mackinder's heartland theory, geopolitics played an important role in Russian history. A brief look at Russian history shows that its geography has always had an effect on Russian foreign policy. Because of its remoteness from warm seas, Russia pursued a policy of controlling or invading the areas adjacent to its

southern borders. Caucasus, due to its strategic location, has always been an important region for Russia.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, liberal ideas supporting integration with the Western world were dominant for a short period during Yeltsin's presidency. It seemed that Russia abandoned geopolitical thinking during this period. However, this period did not last long and Russia returned to its traditional policy based on geopolitical perspective. Eurasianist outlook, which is significantly influenced by geopolitical way of thinking, began to dominate Russian foreign policy starting from mid 90s.¹⁷ According to Eurasianists Russia has to establish an empire controlling the heartland in order to survive. Dugin, a prominent political thinker of the last two decades in Russia, argues that Russia needs to revive Russian empire in the heartland. To achieve this aim controlling Caucasus is crucial and delaying the resolution of the conflicts in the region is beneficial to Russian interests.¹⁸ His argument seems to have been accepted by the Russian political elites as Russia has always been a major actor in all the conflicts in Caucasus. Therefore, Russia is often blamed for its role in the long-lasting conflicts in the region.

Russia has always been a major actor in the Caucasus region. Until early 1990s, Russia ruled both north and south of the region for about three centuries. Russia lost control of an important part of this strategically important region when southern Caucasian republics Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia gained their independence after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. All the same, having controlled the region for a very long time, Russia has continued to have influence over the south Caucasian countries. Since the disintegration, Russian Federation has constantly acted to ensure that it possesses influence on the region. Regional countries' long years of existence as parts of both the Czarist Russia and the Soviet Union gives Russian Federation advantage over its rivals. There are still strong ties inherited from the past between Russia and the regional countries. For this reason, Russia can be called an insider in these states and it can easily exert influence over them. For this reason, Russia is the

¹⁷ Elgiz Pozdniakov, "Russia is a great power", *International Affairs (Moscow)* 39:1 (1993): 3-13.

¹⁸ Andrew H. Dawson & Rick Fawn, *The changing geopolitics of Eastern Europe* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 145.

most important player in the region that can never be ignored both by the regional and external states.

There are several reasons why South Caucasus is geostrategically important to Russia. First of all, South Caucasus is adjacent to North Caucasus which is a problematic part of Russian Federation. Controlling the southern border of this problematic region can make it easier for Russia to control the secessionist movements by securing the stability of the border as external support is crucial for secessionists in the North Caucasus. To illustrate, Chechen rebels often used Pankisi Valley in Georgian territory as a safe haven despite Russian warnings to Georgia.¹⁹

Secondly, South Caucasus region has geostrategic value for Russia because Turkey, a significant NATO member, is adjacent to the region, which makes it strategically important in terms of security concerns. Moreover, Georgia's aspiration and endeavors to become a NATO member is a well known fact. Russian officials have made it clear several times that they are against Georgian NATO membership. Therefore, it could be argued that South Caucasus is considered a region that needs to be controlled by Russia for security reasons.

Another point is that controlling Georgia means the control of the flow of trade of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Moreover, it serves as an important air corridor from the United States and Europe to destinations in the Middle East and Asia, including Afghanistan.

The last but not least, Abkhazia, internationally recognized as part of Georgia, provides Moscow with an opportunity to expand its sea access after it lost most of its coastal border in Black Sea after the Soviet disintegration.

1.2.2.2 The Caucasus and the Interests of the Other Regional and World Powers

In current situation, Russia and the US are the leading actors of Caucasian geopolitics. Despite its geographic remoteness from the region, the US is active in the region due to its geostrategic importance. The South Caucasus is an area of strategic interests for the USA. Rich Caspian gas and oil resources and the region's importance as a transit route to Central Asia makes the region valuable for the US.

¹⁹ Ariel Cohen, "Moscow, Washington and Tbilisi Wrestle With Instability in the Pankisi", *Eurasia Insight* (2002), accessed October 23, 2012, http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav021902_pr.shtml

Current American geopolitics in the Caucasus is economically demonstrated, based on the Caspian energy resources. Transportation of the rich oil and natural gas in the region to the world energy market is a key issue that is in the center of geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the USA. To illustrate, the U.S. contributed to establishment of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline bypassing Russia which was regarded by Russia as an attempt to decrease its geopolitical influence in the region. The USA's close relationship with pro-American Georgian president Saakashvili also disturbs Russia. In a nutshell, South Caucasus is one of the important areas in the world for the USA to maintain global leadership.

Another actor in the region is the EU. The EU's role as the mediator in the 2008 Russian-Georgian war was not only for the sake of humanism and peace. South Caucasus is geostrategically important for the EU in order to decrease its dependence on Russian energy. A new development which will increase Russian control and influence in South Caucasus would augment the European dependence on Russian energy.

Turkey is another actor of the geopolitical game in the region. However, due to its limitations, it is not as influential as Russia and the USA in the region. Georgia is geostrategically important for Turkey to access Azerbaijan and the Central Asian countries which it has close cultural, historical and economic ties with. Turkey has managed to build a very close relationship with Georgia in the last decade. On the other hand, Turkey has close economic relationships with Russia that it would not easily risk losing. Its dependency on Russian natural gas is also another factor that limits Turkey in the region.

To sum up, there is a great geopolitical rivalry among the great powers of the world in the region which seems to last for a long time. Moscow seems to have an advantage over its rivals in this geopolitical competition. The war in 2008 clearly made it obvious that Russia still has significant means of influence in the region even two decades after the Soviet disintegration. Russian policies and actions will continue to define the future of the South Caucasus.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND OF THE

SOUTH OSSETIAN – GEORGIAN CONFLICT

2.1. Introduction

Historical narratives of the actors play an important role in the formation and continuation of the conflicts. Conflicting parties' mutual perception of each other's identity which evolves over the centuries plays a significant role in the formation, continuation and the resolution of conflicts. This chapter looks into the South Ossetian – Georgian conflict from a historical outlook. The origins of the South Ossetian-Georgian conflict will be explored starting from the early years of the Soviet Union and during its dissolution process. The chapter starts with a brief summary of the earliest records of the conflict between the two nations in history. After that, problems that appeared in the break-up process of the Soviet Union and later developments that led to the recent events are presented.

Another significant part of the chapter is dedicated to the history of the Russian – Georgian relations as Russia has been a key actor in this conflict since it started. It is often argued that South Ossetian-Georgian relations have been considerably influenced by Russian policies towards the region. The first part of this chapter aims to give a brief yet a clear picture of the gradual evolution of the hostility between the parties of the conflict. The following part is dedicated to evolution of the animosity between the two countries in the context of the South Ossetian problem. The third part is about the war that took place in August 2008 and the cease fire process. The chapter ends with an analysis of the war in terms of international law by presenting all actors' arguments about the legality of their actions and their allegations against one another during the war.

2.2. The Nature and the Level of the South Ossetian – Georgian Conflict

The Georgian-South Ossetian conflict is one of the regional conflicts that have continued in the Caucasus region since the disintegration of the USSR. South Ossetia has existed as a de facto independent entity with the support of Russia since Georgia became an independent state in 1990. The roots of the conflict date back to early 20th century. However, the current character of the conflict was shaped in the late 1980s when the USSR was on the brink of dissolution.

The Georgian-South Ossetian conflict was an intrastate conflict between a state and a sub-state – South Ossetia before the direct military intervention of The Russian Federation in 2008. Between 1991 and 1992, there was severe violence which resulted in over 1,000 civilian and military casualties from both sides. It was a low – level conflict throughout the 90's and in the early 2000's. In 2004, armed conflict broke out again between the Georgian and South Ossetian armed forces. The violence diminished after the signing of a cease-fire agreement in August 2004. In August 2008, violence erupted once again causing many military and civilian casualties. It turned into a regional state versus state conflict after Russian intervention upon Georgian military campaign over South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali. Currently, the conflict remains unsolved at a low threat level.

2.3. Who are Ossetians?

Ossetians are an ethnic group that inhabits the both sides of the border between Russia and Georgia. Ossetians live in North Ossetia, an autonomous republic in the Russian Federation, and in South Ossetia, which is an autonomous region in Georgia. They are ethnically and linguistically distinct from Georgians.²⁰ Ossets call themselves Iron and Ossetia Iriston. The South Ossetians claim that they are indigenous people of the region. They are thought to be of Persian origin from ancient Persian tribes the Scythians, the Sarmatans and the Aians.²¹ Ossetian

²⁰ Svante E. Cornell, "Autonomy and Conflict: Ethno territoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia", *Department of Peace and Conflict Research*, Report No. 61, (2001): 187.

²¹ Marietta König, "The Georgian-South Ossetian Conflict, in *Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH*, ed. OSCE Yearbook 2004, 237-249 (Baden-Baden: 2005): 239.

language is related to Persian and Pashto. Their previous homeland was the plains in south of the River Don. Mongol invasions forced them to move to south by and settled along the Georgian border in the second half of the 12th century. They have close ethnic kinship with the North Ossetians. However, they have also significant ethnic and cultural differences. Religion is not a factor in the South Ossetian – Georgian conflict. The majority of the South Ossetians are Eastern Orthodox Christians like Georgians. Overwhelming majority of the South Ossetians support the secession of the region from Georgia and joining North Ossetia.

Ossets formed 66 % of the total population in South Ossetia during the Soviet era. Georgians were the second largest ethnic group with a percentage of 29%. Russians, Armenians and Jews constituted the rest of the population. Only 40 % of the Ossetians in Georgia lived in The Autonomous Region of South Ossetia before the armed conflicts started; about 97,000 of the 165,000 Ossetians spread out all over Georgia. At present there are about 40,000 Ossetians living in Georgia as most of them have migrated to their northern neighbor North Ossetia in the Russian Federation.²²

2.4. History of the Georgian – South Ossetian Conflict:

Contrasting Views of History

The Georgian and Ossetian sides have contrasting historical perception on the causes of the conflict between them. According to South Ossetian resources, they were not under the Georgian sovereignty when they joined the Russian Empire in 1774 and Ossetia was not officially divided into north and south.²³

While South Ossetians argue that they are indigenous people of the region, common Georgian perspective is that Ossetians migrated to the region two or three centuries ago, and they inhabited the areas in northern part of the Caucasian

²² International Crisis Group, “Avoiding war in South Ossetia.”, Europe report No.159, (Brussels: 26 November, 2004), 5-6.

²³ The Republic of South Ossetia, *Documents, Chronicles, Concise Historical Information* (Tskhinvali: Yuznaya Alania, 2007), 50-52.

Mountains.²⁴ Despite the fact that Ossets constitute the majority of the population in the region, Georgians reject to call it South Ossetia and they officially use the names Samachablo or Shida Kartli.

2.4.1. South Ossetian – Georgian Relations in Early Years of the 20th Century

Georgia declared its independence in 1918 a year after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 taking the advantage of turmoil in Russia. Ossetians refused to be a part of Georgian Democratic Republic. They supported the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. There were several unsuccessful Ossetian uprisings against the Georgian administration from 1918 to 1920.²⁵ In 1920, a big Ossetian revolt was crushed violently by the People's Guard of the GDR.²⁶ Ossetian historians consider these atrocious events as an act of genocide claiming that about five thousand Ossetians were massacred by the Georgian forces.²⁷ Harsh suppression of the upheavals by the GDR laid the foundations of mistrust towards the Tbilisi administration among South Ossetians. On the other hand, Georgian view of these events is that the South Ossetians betrayed Georgians and this led to the invasion of Georgia by Bolsheviks in 1921. A year later, South Ossetia acquired the status of autonomous region which only granted cultural and social rights.²⁸ Georgians considered this decision as a reward to South Ossetians for their support. However, the South Ossetians argued that the foundation of this autonomous region was in name only. South Ossetians felt that they were socially and economically disadvantaged when compared to Georgian majority. South Ossetian argument is supported by historical facts. To illustrate, Ossetian geographical names were changed with the Georgian ones. In addition, in 1938 their alphabet was substituted by the Georgian alphabet and Georgian language became the language of instruction in education.²⁹

²⁴ Ghia Nodia, "Political Crisis in Georgia", *Current Politics and Economics of Europe*, 2:1/2 (1992):39.

²⁵ Antje Herrberg, "Conflict Resolution in Georgia: A Synthesis Analysis with A Legal Perspective", *Crisis Management Initiative*, accessed October 29, 2012, www.cmi.fi/files/Conflict_resolution_Georgia.pdf

²⁶ David Marshall Lang, *A Modern History of Georgia* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962), 228.

²⁷ Boris Chochiev, *Chronicle of Events of the Georgian Aggression 1988-92* (Tskhinvali: 1996), 126.

²⁸ Herrberg, "Conflict Resolution in Georgia: A Synthesis Analysis with A Legal Perspective," 10-11.

²⁹ The Republic of South Ossetia, *Documents, Chronicles, Concise Historical Information*, 54.

Despite all these unpleasant events that took place during the Soviet Union, there were almost no incidents of ethnic clashes between the two nations up until the last few years of the USSR. They had peaceful relations and there were a high rate of intermarriages.³⁰ A considerable Ossetian population lived in several parts of Georgia until end of communist era when the dead conflict between two nations was aroused from its ashes.

2.4.2. The Revival of the Conflict during the Dissolution of Soviet Union

The old hostilities started to flourish in the last years of the Soviet Union when Gorbachev was in power. With Gorbachev's reform policies there was a certain level of democratic atmosphere in the social life. Strict central authority of Moscow started to weaken. Issues that were once considered taboo started to be expressed and discussed. One of these issues was the rights of the minorities in the Soviet Union. Despite being unlawful, some groups organized establishing societies and unions.

The years of Soviet liberalization in the late 1980s gave rise to Georgian national movement. The movement acquired widespread support among Georgians in a short time. Zviad Gamsakhurdia was the most prominent figure of this movement. The movement's primary aim was the independence of Georgia. They considered themselves freedom fighters fighting the rule of a colonial power. Georgia's independence from 1918 to 1921 was their point of reference and they wanted the restitution of 1921 constitution. Their motto was 'Georgia for Georgians' and the movement started to direct against the minorities seeing them as artificial entities formed by Moscow which can be threat to Georgian independence movement.³¹ According to Gamsakhurdia's rhetoric minorities were troublesome remnants of the Soviet era, and the privileges granted to them should be curtailed.³²

After Georgia's declaration of independence, Zviad Gamsakhurdia's coalition of national movement won the elections and Gamsakhurdia became the president in

³⁰ Cornell, "Autonomy and Conflict: Ethno territoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia," 189.

³¹ Jonathan Aves, *Paths to National Independence in Georgia, 1987-1990* (London: School of Slavonic and east European Studies, University of London, 1991), 10-18.

³² Review of *Georgia : The Ignored History*, by Robert English. *The New York Review of Books* , June 10, 2008, accessed November 2, 2012, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2008/nov/06/georgia-the-ignored-history/>

1991. Gamsakhurdia's role in aggravating the South Ossetian conflict cannot be ignored. His radical nationalist policies during his office disturbed ethnic minorities and alienated them from Georgian rule. His assertive nationalism contributed a lot to shape consequent Georgian politics towards to regional conflicts in Georgia up to the present. They were treated as second class citizens. Gamsakhurdia even called them traitors and evil enemies and said that they would be driven out from Georgia.³³

South Ossetians like other minorities in Georgia were anxious about rising Georgian nationalism in the late 80s. As a reaction to Georgian national movement South Ossetian nationalist movement began to grow. In 1988, nationalist Ademon Nykhas movement was founded. It was not very popular among south Ossetian in the beginning. However, as a reaction to growing Georgian nationalism, it developed very rapidly. The events that took place in the following times worked in favor of Ademon Nykhas.

Mikhail Gorbachev's reform policies known as glasnost and perestroika encouraged South Ossetians to defend their cultural and social rights and self-governance. In November 1989, local parliament of South Ossetia made an application to the Supreme Soviet of Georgia for raising the status of Autonomous Region of South Ossetia to an autonomous republic. This demand was turned down by the Supreme Soviet of Georgia. Subsequently, South Ossetian regional parliament proclaimed state sovereignty on 20 September 1990.

Gamsakhurdia supporters responded to South Ossetian appeal and declaration of independence with anger. Gamsakhurdia blamed Ossets of being 'unappreciative guests' of Georgia' and claimed that Ossets are originally from the North Caucasus. They organized demonstrations in South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali on 23 November. Demonstrators denounced South Ossetians as 'traitors' and 'puppets of Moscow'. There were confrontations between the Georgian and Ossetian

³³ Stuart Kaufman, *Modern hatreds: The symbolic politics of ethnic war* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), 96.

demonstrators, and major clashes were prevented by the Soviet security forces.³⁴ After this demonstration, the first militia group was formed by Ademon Nykas.

Further measures taken by the Georgian parliament even worsened the situation. To illustrate, it adopted a law which made Georgian the only official language, which was considered obviously discriminatory by the minorities. Later in August 1990, it adopted a law which prohibited regional parties from taking part in general elections. South Ossetian regional parliament considered this law a political move to exclude Ademon Nykhas from the elections.³⁵ Consequently, South Ossetia boycotted the elections, and on September 20, 1990, declared its autonomy as a part of the Soviet Union. In December 1990, there were elections for the local parliament in South Ossetia. However, the Georgian parliament did not recognize the elections and as a response, it abolished the autonomy of South Ossetia.³⁶ A few weeks days later, Georgian government announced a state of emergency for the region and imposed an economic blockade that would last about two years. Gas and electricity supplies of the region were cut off and civilian population had hard times without heating and insufficient food.³⁷

Armed clashes started between South Ossetian paramilitary and the Georgian armed forces. In April 1991 additional Soviet troops were deployed in the region to stop the armed conflict, but they were not successful in preventing it. In fact, they took side with the Ossets. After the disintegration of the USSR, Soviet army left a considerable amount of weapons to the South Ossetians, which helped them a great deal against the Georgian forces. Two sides fought a violent war committing frequent war crimes against the civilian population. The armed conflict reportedly caused the deaths of about 4,000 people, and thousands of civilians from both sides had to leave

³⁴ Rachel Denber, "Bloodshed in the Caucasus: violations of humanitarian law and human rights in the Georgia-South Ossetia conflict", *Human Rights Watch* (1992): 7.

³⁵ Aves, *Paths to National Independence in Georgia*, 46.

³⁶ Christopher Zurcher, *The post Soviet wars: rebellion, ethnic conflict and nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 125.

³⁷ Elizabeth Fuller, "South Ossetia: Analysis of a Permanent Crisis", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty Report on the USSR*, No,7, February15, 1991, 22.

their homes and became refugees.³⁸ Combatting continued until the cease-fire agreement on 24 June 1992.

In January 1991 Gorbachev issued a decree revoking both the South Ossetian regional parliament's decision to declare independence from Georgia and the Georgian Supreme Soviet's abolition of South Ossetia's autonomy.

In March 1991, there was a referendum to vote the preserving the Soviet Union in USSR. Gamsakhurdia declared that Georgian citizens would not vote in the referendum. Despite Tbilisi's decision, South Ossetians participated in the referendum and voted overwhelmingly in favor of preserving the Soviet Union. In the same month of 1991, in an alternative referendum 90% of the Georgians were on the side of independence. In January 1992, following the dissolution of the USSR, a new referendum was held in South Ossetia in which over 90% of the voters supported secession from Georgia and joining with North Ossetia. On 29 May 1992, the South Ossetia declared its independence from Georgia.³⁹ Neither Georgia nor Russian Federation recognized the South Ossetian referendum and declaration of independence.

2.4.3. A new Era in Georgia - Eduard Shevardnadze's Presidency

In January 1992, a coup d'état took place in Tbilisi and Zviad Gamsakhurdia had to leave the office. Eduard Shevardnadze was invited by the coup leaders to take over the presidency. South Ossetia and Georgia signed a ceasefire agreement with the participation of representatives of Moscow and North Ossetia on 24 June 1992.⁴⁰ According to the terms of the agreement a multiparty peacekeeping force including Georgian, Ossetian and Russian units was established. The mission of the peacekeeping force was to supervise the ceasefire, to observe the pulling out of the armed forces, and the disarmament of small irregular armed groups. Russia took on

³⁸ U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests*, by Jim Nichol, CRS Report RL34618 (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, September 22, 2008), 4.

³⁹ Tamaz Diasamidze, *Regional Conflicts in Georgia (The Autonomous Oblast' of South Ossetia, The Autonomous SSR of Abkhazia 1989-2008)* (Tbilisi: Regionalism Research Centre, 2008), 120.

⁴⁰ The 1992 Sochi Agreement between the Republic of Georgia and the Russian Federation.

the position of the only guarantor of peace in the conflict and held de facto command of the peacekeeping force.

With the changing regime in Tbilisi, the Georgian approach toward the conflict changed and diplomacy gained supremacy. A resolution of the conflict seemed possible during Shevardnadze's period. In mid-1990s the conflict was frozen and there were almost no incidents of violence between the parties. There was considerable progress in the peace process. In 2000, Russia and Georgia signed a treaty on the rehabilitation of the region. South Ossetian - Georgian relations gradually improved and a lot of progress was achieved in trust-building.⁴¹

To sum up, there was a gradual progress in the resolution of the conflict during Shevardnadze's period (1992-2003).

2.4.4. The Rose Revolution & The Regime Change in Tbilisi

The regime change after the Rose Revolution in the fall of 2003 was a turning point for the South Ossetian conflict. Mikhail Saakashvili, the main figure of the revolution, was elected president getting 92% of the electoral votes. Having gained of such an overwhelming public support, Saakashvili took radical steps in solving country's long-lasting problems. One of his priorities was the resolution of the regional conflicts in Georgia. After he took office, Saakashvili declared that re-establishing territorial integrity of the country was his main aim. New government departments were formed and a ministry that would solely work on reintegration of the separatist regions was established. Saakashvili's policy was to reunite the country by peaceful means. He offered the separatist regions economic incentives, and guarantees of the "broadest autonomy".⁴²

His first target was the Autonomous Republic of Adjara. It did not take long for the Saakashvili administration to solve the problem as this conflict did not have an ethnic character. It was due to a power struggle between Tbilisi and Aslan

⁴¹ Dov Lynch, *Engaging Eurasia's Separatist States: Unresolved Conflicts and de Facto States* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2004), 31.

⁴² "Speech of President of Georgia Mikhail Saakashvili at the 59th Session of the UN General Assembly on September 21, 2004," accessed December 12, 2012, <http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/59/statements/geoeng040921.pdf>

Abashidze, the president of the autonomous region. It is interesting to note that Russia mediated between the parties and it prevented bloodshed. Having gained confidence after the resolution of Adjara, Saakashvili directed his focus on South Ossetia.

Taking into consideration the normalization of interrelations that started in mid 1990s, the solution of the South Ossetian problem did not seem impossible. In the beginning, using force was not option for the resolution of the conflict for the Saakashvili administration. Saakashvili once stated that South Ossetia would be gradually reintegrated without any gunshots.⁴³ At this time Tbilisi was using new tactics to influence Ossets. Georgia's rhetoric radically changed. The name South Ossetia, previously rejected by the Georgian government, started to be used in official statements. In addition, television broadcasts in Ossetian language were introduced. Saakashvili even saluted Ossets in their language on Georgian Independence Day. With such incentives, the Georgian government anticipated that the South Ossetians would be reintegrated with Georgia.⁴⁴

2.4.5. The 2004 Crisis

The year 2004 was a defining moment for the future of the South Ossetian conflict. Saakashvili administration began to increase pressure on de facto government of South Ossetia by increasing border controls and carrying out extensive anti-smuggling operations in the conflict area.

In South Ossetia there are certain groups that have no interest in the resolution of the conflict. These groups have always tried to impede the resolution of the conflict.⁴⁵ Smuggling is the main source of income of the South Ossetians as there aren't any valuable strategic resources in South Ossetia. De facto government of South Ossetia, some criminal gangs, corrupt officials and commanders of the peacekeeping force benefited from illegal trade of goods between Russia and

⁴³ "Georgia talks tough with Russia over South Ossetia: South Ossetia will be reintegrated gradually," *Civil Georgia*, July, 11 2004.

⁴⁴ Giorgi Sepashvili, "Saakashvili Sends Reconciliatory Signals to South Ossetia," *Civil Georgia*, June 1, 2004.

⁴⁵ Domitilla Sagramoso, "The UN, the OSCE and NATO," in *The South Caucasus: a challenge for the EU*, ed. Dov Lynch, *Chaillot Paper* 65, (December, 2003): 78.

Georgia.⁴⁶ In May 2004, Georgian government decided to close the Ergneti Market which was the center of smuggling in order to deprive separatist South Ossetian government off its primary income and to restore Tbilisi's control in the region. In spring 2004, Georgian government carried out anti-smuggling operations Georgia with armed units in the area. However, the operation did not bring about the result that the Georgian government expected. Even though the operation was aimed at smuggling, Ossetians perceived them as a military intervention.⁴⁷ Moreover, it caused a series of armed clashes.⁴⁸ Small scale armed clashes between the parties caused casualties from both sides, most of who were civilians. In July 2004, a ceasefire mediated by Russia was signed between the parties.

As a result, the events of 2004 increased the support for the de facto South Ossetian government which did not have strong support among the Ossetian society at the time.⁴⁹ Mutual relations that had been gradually improving since the ceasefire in 1992 between two parties were damaged. Georgian government's miscalculation helped nothing but augment the resistance among the South Ossetians against reintegration with Georgia.

2.4.6. Efforts for Peace after the 2004 Crisis

After 2004 crisis, there were several attempts of the Georgian administration for the resolution of the conflict, none of which produced tangible results due to mutual mistrust and lack of political will. To illustrate, in September 2004 Saakashvili offered a three-phase peace plan.⁵⁰ A month later, Eduard Kokoity, the president of South Ossetia, declined the peace plan stating that they are Russian

⁴⁶ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from national awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed transition in the Former Soviet Union* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2005),122.

⁴⁷ Nino Khutsidze, "Government comes under fire from opposition over South Ossetia", *Civil Georgia*, September 17, 2004.

⁴⁸ Kim Murphy, "In Caucasus, Frozen Conflicts Are Still Hot: Disputes Stoked After the Soviet Breakup Wreak Misery and Instability Years Later", *Los Angeles Times*, September 13,2004.

⁴⁹ Oksana Antonenko, "Further conflict on the cards for troubled South Ossetia", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 17:1, (2005): 28-31.

⁵⁰ Georgian Government Georgia Update Service, "The Georgian-South Ossetian peace plan developed by the Government of Georgia", accessed December 16, 2012, <http://georgiaupdate.gov.ge/en/tagliavini/15c7ac9f9e93192bc30fbaecc87c70b/2103f7fc4a93a8aa797f4dd0c3cf0c63/8561c4da15720ffe9208288a81069a8f>

citizens.⁵¹ The following year Tbilisi declared a roadmap for the settlement of the conflict. The plan offered a broader autonomy than that of North Ossetia for South Ossetia and representation in the central government.⁵² A similar plan was proposed by the central government in a conference held in Batumi in the same year. In October 2005, Georgia introduced an action plan to OSCE. As a response to these peace plans, in November 2006 South Ossetian administration held a referendum to reaffirm their determination for their independence from Georgia. The result was in favor of independence with 99% of the votes. Georgian government, OSCE, the USA did not recognize this referendum. In March 2007, a further peace plan was introduced by Tbilisi. It offered a transitional administration in the region. Nonetheless, all these efforts were turned down by the South Ossetian administration and no further peace efforts were made since that day forward.

In all these attempts Tbilisi tried to internationalize the conflict in order to break Russian domination over the conflict but it was not successful in doing so.

2.4.7. Increasing Russian Intervention in the Conflict (2004-2008)

In South Ossetian – Georgian conflict, the influential role played by Russia marked the period from 2004 to the present day. Russia has always been an active player in the South Ossetian conflict with an important role as a mediator in the ceasefire and as a peacekeeper. Georgians have been critical of Russian influence over their country since they became independent.⁵³ Georgian side is convinced that Russia has never been an impartial mediator in the South Ossetian conflict.⁵⁴ Secessionist movements of Abkhazia and South Ossetia would not have succeeded if Russian had not aided them militarily. In fact, Georgians mostly see Russia as a

⁵¹ U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, “Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Political Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests”, by Jim Nichol, CRS Report RL33453 (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, July 31, 2007), 17.

⁵² Website of President of Georgia, “Initiative of the Georgian Government with Respect to the Peaceful Resolution of the Conflict in South Ossetia”, accessed December 16, 2012, <http://www.president.gov.ge/?l=E&m=0&sm=5>

⁵³ The Council of European Union, “Report of Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFFMCG)”, by Heidi Tagliavini, (Brussels, 2009), accessed October 18, 2012, http://www.ceiig.ch/pdf/IIFFMCG_Volume_II.pdf

⁵⁴ John Mackinlay and Evgeni Sharov, “Russian peacekeeping operations in Georgia”, in *Regional peacekeeping: the paradox of Russian peacekeeping*, eds. John Mackinlay and Peter Cross (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2003), 63–87.

provocateur of the regional conflicts in Georgia since the very beginning including Tsarist and Soviet periods. On the other hand, South Ossetians have always considered Russia a guarantor of their existence.⁵⁵ After the 2004 crisis, a considerable change in Russian policy toward the conflict has been observed.

During this period, Russian role in the conflict increased more than ever. Since the beginning of the conflict, South Ossetia had improved close economic and social relations with North Ossetia and Russia. Support among south Ossetians for the integration with the Russian Federation increased after the 2004 crisis. South Ossetian de facto government's primary goal seems to unite with their ethnic brethren North Ossetians and be a part of Russia rather than reintegrate into Georgia. The South Ossetian administration rejected all the resolution proposals of the Georgian side although they were offered generous concessions. South Ossetia has increasingly become politically and economically aligned with Russia, which Georgia considers a violation of its sovereignty. Russian became one of the official languages, and Russian ruble the valid currency in the region. During this period, Russia granted passports to a lot of South Ossetians. Today, 95% of the population has Russian passports. In addition, Russia made considerable investment for the infrastructure of South Ossetia. To illustrate, in 2006 a natural gas pipeline connecting South Ossetia to Russia was laid, which would end its dependence on Georgian energy.⁵⁶

In order to understand the causes of 2008 Russian – Georgian war and foresee its future implications for the region, it is essential that we take a look at Russian – Georgian relations since the beginning of the South Ossetian conflict.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Fuller, "Georgia: Issue of Russian peacekeepers heats up", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, July 19, 2006, accessed January 3, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1069946.html>

⁵⁶ "Russia launches South Ossetia gas pipeline construction", *Civil Georgia Daily News Online*, October 27, 2006, accessed January 3, 2013, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13964>

2.5. A Brief History of Georgian – Russian Relations

2.5.1. Georgian – Russian Relations in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Era

The history of close Georgian – Russian relations goes back to the second half of the 18th Century when the borders of the Tsarist Russia reached the South Caucasus. Georgian Kingdom was threatened by Ottoman and Persian attacks. King Erekle II, pleaded Russian Empire for protection. With the Treaty of Georgievsk in 1783, Georgia went under Russian protection. Later in 1801, Georgia was annexed by the Russian Empire. Negative sentiments of Georgians against Russians began with this event. Russia viewed this annexation as a “humanitarian mission” to protect a Christian nation against its Islamic enemies.⁵⁷ Although this period had some positive effects and benefits for Georgians, they, on the whole, considered it a threat to their nation and a period of russification. Georgian nationalism emerged as a reaction to Russian occupation in the second half of the 19th century.⁵⁸

Russian rule ended in Georgia with the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917. In 1918, Georgia declared its independence as the Democratic Republic of Georgia. Then communism was not very popular in Georgia and the elites of this new state aimed to establish close relations with the West while keeping relations with Russia. However, the new state did not last long and in 1921 Red army invaded Georgia, and Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic was founded on 25 February 1921. In 1922, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia unified to establish Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. In 1936 this federation was dissolved and Georgia was incorporated into the USSR. As mentioned earlier in the previous chapter, Georgians blamed South Ossetians for their role helping Bolsheviks to invade Georgia and establish a communist regime. This invasion could be interpreted as a second incident of humiliation of Georgian national pride after the Tsarist Russia’s invasion.

During Soviet period, autonomous territorial entities of Abkhazia, Adjara and the South Ossetia were created in Georgia. Georgian intellectuals thought these were artificial territorial structures that were politically formed by Moscow in order to

⁵⁷ Vasili Klyuchevski, *Ruskaya Historia* (Rostovna-Donu: Kniga Tretja, 2000), 437-440.

⁵⁸ Bruno Coppeters and Michel Huysseune (eds.), *Secession, History and the Social Sciences* (Brussels: VUB University Press, 2002), 91.

reduce Georgian authority in its own homeland. Since the Soviet period came to an end in 1991, Georgia has had to cope with regional conflicts which were inherited from the communist era. All these historical events caused a negative perception of Russia in the eyes of Georgians.

2.5.2. Georgian – Russian Relations in the Post-Soviet Era

The collapse of the USSR started a new era in Russian – Georgian relations. In the early years of the new period (1991-1993) Russia followed a pro-Western foreign policy. The West was not “an enemy” anymore and integration with the West was the goal of the Russian administration. However, this honeymoon period did not last long and the Eurasianist perspective, which is deeply influenced by geopolitics, began to direct Russian foreign policy. Russia accepted a foreign policy called “Near Abroad” which claimed former Soviet territory, mainly Caucasus and Central Asia, as its sphere of interest.⁵⁹ According to this foreign policy, Russia pursued a more assertive foreign policy considering itself the rightful successor of the Soviet era. Russia has not encountered much difficulty in the implementation of its near abroad policy as it has inherited many assets from the Soviet legacy.

Russian near abroad policy has intensely affected Georgian - Russian relations up until present day. With three regional conflicts, Georgia was one of the targets of new Russian policy. Georgia has never been willing to accept Russian influence and this has caused friction between the two countries.

During the presidency of Zviad Gamsakhurdia relations between Russia and Georgia were at a very low level. Gamsakhurdia, who was a prominent figure of Georgian nationalism at the time, had strong anti-Russian attitude which was shared by the majority of the Georgian elite. After Eduard Shevardnadze came to power relations began to improve in the beginning; however, deteriorated again upon Georgia’s West-oriented policies.

In order to maintain its influence over the post-Soviet newly independent countries, Russia created an organization under the name of Commonwealth of

⁵⁹ Mohiaddin Mesbahi, “Russian Foreign Policy and Security in Central Asia And the Caucasus”, *Central Asian Survey* 12: 2 (1993): 181-215.

Independent States (CIS). Initially Georgia abstained from joining this organization. In October 1993, in return for Russian military support to crush an uprising started by the former president Zviad Gamsakhurdia's supporters, Eduard Shevardnadze accepted to join CIS and gave consent to Russian military bases in Georgian territory. According to Georgian political elites, Russia once again exploited the regional conflicts in Georgia for its geopolitical ends.

Russian military presence in Georgian territory caused problems between the two states. Georgia demanded withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia several times the first of which was in 1993. A number of agreements were signed between the parties. However, the implementation of the agreements was often postponed by Russia. Finally, in 1999 border troops left Georgia and the withdrawal of the other Russian troops in several military bases all over Georgia, except for the Abkhazia and South Ossetia peacekeeping missions, was completed in 2007.

Increasing Georgian relations with the West after mid-1990s affected Georgian–Russian relations. Construction of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipelines increased Georgia's geostrategic importance. These alternative pipelines and the future projects obviously challenge Russian monopoly over marketing Caspian energy resources to the world markets. Georgia's military relations with the West intensified after late 90s. In 1999, it joined the Council of Europe, started relations with NATO. Georgia's desire to join NATO was first expressed during Shevardnadze's presidency. Close relation of Georgia with the USA after 9/ 11 also disturbed Russia. Georgia became an important partner of the US in the region especially in the military field. All these developments in its sphere of interest upset Russia and deteriorated its relations with Georgia.

2.5.3. Georgian – Russian Relations during Saakashvili's Presidency

The 2004 Rose Revolution brought President Saakashvili to power. Georgian – Russian relations worsened gradually after the regime change in Tbilisi. Saakashvili's new rhetoric towards the regional conflicts of Georgia and his pro-Western policies strained Russian – Georgian relations which had already been bad.

In the early days of Saakashvili, there was hope for the improvement of relations between the two countries. Russia's mediation role in preventing the bloodshed in 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia was promising for the restoration of the relations. Upon the regime change in Tbilisi, Vladimir Putin stated his optimism for improving relations with the imminent Georgian administration.⁶⁰

In the first year of Saakashvili's presidency, Russian – Georgian relations considerably developed compared to past. Economic relations especially in the energy sector increased. Russian eased the issuing of visas to Georgian citizens. The most significant sign of the new era was Russian assistance to the resolution of Adjara crisis in May 2004. Saakashvili's one of the first priorities was to restore Georgia's territorial integrity. After he came to power, his first target was the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, which had been ruled by Aslan Abashidze rejecting the control of the central government since the Soviet break-up. In fact, he was able to maintain his authoritarian regime in this tiny but geostrategically important piece of land with Russian support. There was a possibility of armed conflict when Saakashvili asked Abashidze to leave his position. Russia convinced Abashidze to resign and granted him asylum. With this move, Russia both prevented a possible bloodshed and increased optimism for the resolution of the other regional conflicts in Georgia by peaceful means.

However, this period of good relations did not last long. There are several reasons why the positive atmosphere in mutual relation ended. First of all, despite the positive change in Russian policy to win the new administration, Georgia's Western-orientated foreign policy continued. The new Georgian administration was determined to improve relations with the USA, NATO and the EU. Georgia became one of the highest beneficiaries of American financial and military aid.⁶¹ Georgia contributed to American missions in Afghanistan and Iraq by sending troops. As a result, Russian attitude towards Georgia significantly changed at the end of 2004

⁶⁰ Jean-Christophe Peuch, "Russia, US Redistribute Pawns on Caucasus Chessboard after a Year of Change", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, December 29, 2003, accessed January 5, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1105344.html>

⁶¹ "Report of IIFFMCG", 15.

when Georgia took radical steps to solve South Ossetian conflict.⁶² In South Ossetia, Russia did not follow the same constructive policy it had pursued in Adjara crisis.

Saakashvili made it clear in his many speeches that he wouldn't accept the status quo in South Ossetia. Georgian administration made an important policy change and decided to internationalize the conflict by involving the EU and the USA, portraying it as a Russian-Georgian one. They wanted international community to question the role for Russia as the peacekeeper of the conflict. Consequently, on 18 July 2004 the Georgian Parliament made a declaration which demanded the withdrawal of the Russian peace-keeping mission from the region.⁶³ From this date forward, friction between the two countries gradually increased, which eventually resulted in war in August 2008.

2.5.3.1. Increasing Friction after 2004 Summer

Russia renounced its new friendly policy towards Georgia having noticed it would not be able to prevent the new Georgian administration from following policies that went against Russian interests in the region. Russia decided to play the regional conflicts card once again. Russia had long been accused by Georgia for manipulating the conflicts for its interests. The events that took place after 2004 confirm this argument.

Georgian aggressive operation to restore the central control in South Ossetia in 2004 summer was the beginning of the new period in Russian – Georgian relations. As an immediate reaction to Tbilisi's operation in South Ossetia, Russia suspended talks with Georgia and stopped giving visas to Georgian citizens.

A series of events deteriorated Russian – Georgian relations even further. Here are some of the major ones. Russian backing to the separatist administration of the region and its policy of granting passports to South Ossetians increasingly continued. Georgians thought Russia was following a two-faced policy: while fighting

⁶² Christopher J. Chivers, "Georgia's New Leader Baffles U.S. and Russia Alike", *New York Times*, August 17, 2004.

⁶³ Vladimir Socor, "Georgian parliament calls for replacing Russian peacekeepers with international police contingent", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 3:140 (2006).

separatists at home, it was apparently encouraging them in Georgia.⁶⁴ Georgia often accused Russia for violating Georgian airspace and carrying out terrorist operations including bombings in Georgian territory. In February 2006, Georgian parliament adopted a resolution which demanded removal of Russian peacekeeping force in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. As a reaction, Russia closed its border to Georgia and prevented Georgian exports, which was detrimental to Georgian economy.

The spy scandal of 2006 was a very important event that seriously damaged the hope for the restoration of mutual relations. In September 2006, four Russian citizens were accused of spying for Russian intelligence and arrested by Georgian authorities. Upon this development, Russia reduced its diplomatic relations with Georgia to a minimum level by calling its ambassador from Georgia. Russia retaliated by severing all means of transport to Georgia and deporting 119 Georgian citizens from Russia. Russian energy cartel Gazprom announced the plan for increasing the price of natural gas exported to Georgia in the middle of the winter and threatened to stop the delivery of gas if previous Georgian debts were not paid. Upon Russian retaliatory actions, Saakashvili accused Russia of blackmailing and being xenophobic.⁶⁵

Tension in Russian - Georgian relations continued all through 2007. Georgian accusations about airspace violations continued. Russian and Georgian presidents met in June 2008. In this meeting, Saakashvili reiterated Georgia's demands for the withdrawal of Russian peacekeeping forces and substitution of them with an international one. However, Russia and the administrations of break-away regions did not accept this demand.

Russia sent 1500 additional troops to Abkhazia in April 2008, which was harshly condemned by Tbilisi. Both South Ossetia and Abkhazia carried on lobbying for integration with Russian Federation. However, their demands were not accepted by Kremlin as such an action would damage the reliability of Russia as a peacekeeper in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Yet, president Putin issued a decree

⁶⁴ "Georgian President Faults Russia For Interference," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, November 23, 2004, accessed January 8, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1056015.html>

⁶⁵ "Unprovoked Onslaught", *Wall Street Journal*, October 12, 2006.

starting direct relations with the two separatist regions of Georgia, which was also perceived by Georgia as a violation of its territorial rights.

2.5.3.2. Dawn of the War – The Summer of 2008

Beginning from the early 2008, violence and provocations started to escalate between Georgia and South Ossetia, which finally led to the war in August of 2008. In June and July, the frequency of minor armed clashes increased. Cases of assaults on civilians and government officials became more frequent. To illustrate, on July 3, an Ossetian police chief was killed in a bomb explosion and Dmitri Sanakoyev, who is the head of the pro-Georgian government in SO, escaped injury by a roadside mine. Armed forces of the both sides often harassed each other with recurring gunfire. In early summer, the friction between the parties significantly increased and they accused each other of getting prepared for a war. Georgian army attacked civilian areas including outer parts of Tskhinvali and several villages supposedly as a retaliation to South Ossetian attacks. Georgian operations continued until administration of South Ossetia appealed to Russia for protection against Georgian aggression. Upon Ossetian appeal, Russia asked both sides to end hostility and proposed a new peace plan which was submitted to UN.

On July 8, 2008, four Russian war planes flew over the disputed region, which was harshly condemned by Tbilisi stating that it was an act of aggression and violation of its sovereignty.⁶⁶ Russia responded to Georgian statement by explaining the reason of the violation as a preventative measure against a possible Georgian aggression in South Ossetia.⁶⁷

In the second half of July, an annual military exercise led by the United States Army was carried out near Tbilisi. About 2 000 troops from the USA, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine joined the exercise.⁶⁸ After a few days, the Russian

⁶⁶ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Statement accessed January 8, 2013, http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=59&info_id=6975

⁶⁷ Press and Information Department of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, “Commentary on the situation in South Ossetia”, July 10, 2008, accessed February 18, 2013, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/CCF2BD3D05F81BB1C325748200449D3D

⁶⁸ United States Army Official Homepage, “Security cooperation exercise Immediate Response 2008 begins with official ceremony in Republic of Georgia”, July 17, 2008, accessed February 18, 2013, http://www.army.mil/article/10953/Security_cooperation_exercise_Immediate_Response_2008_begins_with_official_ceremony_in_Republic_of_G/

army held an extensive military exercise named Kavkaz 2008 along its border with Georgia which included its land, naval and air forces. According to official statements, about 8000 soldiers attended the exercise.⁶⁹ There is no evidence whether this exercise was a response to the one in Georgia; however it could be concluded that it was probably a kind of warning to Georgian side in case they resorted to force in South Ossetia.

In early August, the situation in South Ossetia deteriorated due to provocations of both sides. Incidents of bombings and minor armed clashes increased injuring or claiming lives of dozens of civilians and officials. Increasing Georgian military activity in the regional border and the evacuation of the civilian population in South Ossetia by the local administration signaled that a major conflict was imminent.

On August 7, just one day prior to the war, representatives of the all parties had diplomatic efforts for peace which had no result. In the evening of the same day, president Saakashvili made a public statement on television which announced that Georgia unilaterally ceased fire and called for peace talks.⁷⁰ However the cease-fire only lasted a few hours and claiming that South Ossetians restarted shelling of the Georgian villages near Tskhinvali, Georgian army resumed its attacks at around 11 p.m.⁷¹ General Kurashvili, the commander of the Georgian troops in South Ossetia, stated that the Georgian government had decided to “re-establish constitutional order” in the breakaway region in response to the South Ossetian bombardment.⁷²

⁶⁹ “Russia, Georgia Hold Military Exercises amidst Tensions”, *The Moscow News*, July 18, 2008, accessed February 18, 2013, <http://themoscownews.com/news/20080718/55338376.html>

⁷⁰ “Saakashvili Appeals for Peace in Televised Address”, *Civil Georgia Daily News Online*, accessed February 19, 2013, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18931>

⁷¹ Christopher J. Chivers and Ellen Barry, “Georgia Claims on Russia War Called Into Question”, *New York Times*, November 7, 2008.

⁷² Irakli Metreveli, “Georgia Launches Attack on Rebel Region: Interior Ministry,” *Agence France Presse*, August 7, 2008.

2.5.4. The Five-Day War: August 7th – 12th 2008

Beginning from the early August, about 10000-12000 Georgian troops and heavy weaponry including tanks and missiles had been moved to the certain locations near Tskhinvali.⁷³ Despite the non-use of force agreement, Georgian forces began to open fire at the targets in Tskhinvali at the night of August 7. In the following morning, Georgian forces launched a large-scale attack on Tskhinvali and took control of most of the city in the beginning of the attack. Georgian bombardment and land attacks caused a considerable number of civilian and military casualties including ten Russian peacekeepers. Russia responded promptly a few hours after the Georgian attacks, and Russian troops crossed the border through the Roki Tunnel into South Ossetia.⁷⁴ Georgian forces could not withstand comparatively-superior Russian forces and had to declare a unilateral ceasefire⁷⁵ and retreated from their positions in South Ossetia to Mskheta which is a small town near Tbilisi.

Russian forces did not stop when they managed to take control in South Ossetia and continued its advancement deep into the central Georgia invading several villages, towns and city of Gori on August 12. Most Georgian civilian casualties were here. Most of the city dwellers had to flee to safer places. South Ossetian militias were fighting alongside with the Russian forces. There were some reports of serious war crimes committed by these militias.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, several Georgian military and strategic targets were being bombarded by Russian air forces throughout Georgia including some targets near capital Tbilisi. A second front was opened by Abkhaz and Russian forces in Western Georgia. They crossed ceasefire line of 1994 and several towns including the port of Poti near the Black Sea were occupied and many military targets were destroyed by Abkhaz and Russian forces easily without facing much resistance.

⁷³ Chivers and Barry, "Georgia Claims on Russia War Called Into Question."

⁷⁴ Gordon Mi., Hahn , "The Making of Georgian-Russian Five-Day August War: A Chronology, June-August 8, 2008" , *Russia: Other Points of View*, accessed February 20, 2013, <http://www.russiaotherpointsofview.com/gordon-hahns-underground-.html>

⁷⁵ "Georgia Announces Ceasefire, Pulls Out Troops", *Civil Georgia Daily News Online*, August 10, 2008, accessed February 20, 2013, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19025&search=>;

⁷⁶ "Report of IIFMCG", 217.

Five-day war had tremendous results for Georgia. The impacts of the war on Georgia will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. The following are the overall immediate outcomes of the war for Georgia. Most the military targets were destroyed during the war. Besides civilian and military casualties, there was a high economic cost of the war due to the damaged infrastructure, residential areas, industrial sites and roads. In addition, thousands of people became internally displaced. The immediate cost of the war is estimated at about 1 billion US dollars by the Georgian Government.⁷⁷ This amount may seem insignificant to some; however it is relatively high for such a small country's economy.

2.5.4.1. Ceasefire

Russian military campaign lasted five days and ended on 12 August. Russian president Medvedev announced that their operation aiming to coerce the “aggressor” was successful and that it was over.⁷⁸ The mediation efforts of EU represented by former French President Nicolas Sarkozy played an important role in ending the war. Sarkozy visited both capitals and the two parties accepted a 6-point peace plan on August 12. The agreement included the following terms: ending hostility bilaterally, the withdrawal of the fighting units to their pre-war positions, permitting humanitarian relief efforts and allowing the return of internally displaced people, and pulling out of Russian soldiers from Georgian territory except for the peacekeeping unit patrolling along the South Ossetian – Georgian border. The agreement also envisaged internationalization of the peacekeeping mission and peace efforts in the region. On the same day, right after the signing of the arrangement Russian President Medvedev said that he ordered to end the operation. However, Russian and South Ossetian forces reportedly continued their advances for some time after the ceasefire and invaded some Georgian areas outside the official borders of South Ossetia. On

⁷⁷ “Georgia PM: War caused \$1 billion in damage”, *USA Today*, August 27, 2008, accessed February 21, 2013, http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-08-27-Georgia-damage_N.htm;

⁷⁸ “Russia's president says operation in Georgia over”, *Rianovosti*, August 12, 2008, accessed February 21, 2013 <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080812/115978044.html>

14 August, the agreement was also signed by the Abkhazian and South Ossetian leaders, Sergei Bagapsh and Eduard Kokoity.⁷⁹

Russia withdrew most of its troops from Georgian territory, except for the South Ossetia and Abkhazia, very slowly and gradually in the face of calls and warnings of the US and the EU. This withdrawal lasted more than three months and ended on December 9th, 2008 when the last few Russian check points were dismantled. Russian compliance with the agreement is questionable. It was reported that Russia did not fully observe the terms of the ceasefire agreement.⁸⁰ To illustrate, Russia officially announced that additional Russian troops would be deployed in South Ossetia and Abkhazia according to bilateral agreements signed with these two “independent states”.⁸¹ Russia also set up air defense systems in both regions, which was criticized by France and the UK. On October 9, the Russia publicly announced that its last troops left their positions along the borders of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.⁸²

2.6. August 2008 War from the Perspectives of Both Sides

Georgia and Russia had contrasting points of view about the war. Both sides claimed that their military actions were legitimate according to the international law. Their arguments cannot be expected to be objective due to the hostility between them. However, this doesn't mean that they were all unfounded; both parties had some reasonable arguments to legitimize their positions. It is essential that they be discussed and evaluated impartially.

⁷⁹ President of Russia Official Web Portal, “Dmitry Medvedev met with President of South Ossetia Eduard Kokoity and President of Abkhazia Sergei Bagapsh”, August 14, 2008, accessed February 21, 2013, <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/news/2008/08/205312.shtml>

⁸⁰ David L. Phillips, “Implementation Review: Six-Point Ceasefire Agreement Between Russia And Georgia”, *The National Committee On American Foreign Policy & Columbia University ISHR*, (August 2011), accessed February 21, 2013, <http://ncafp.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Implementation-Review-Russia-and-Georgia-Aug20111.pdf>

⁸¹ Luke Harding, “Russian troops to stay in Abkhazia and South Ossetia”, *The Guardian*, September 9, 2008, accessed February 21, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/sep/09/georgia.russia>

⁸² The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Press Release, accessed March 5, 2013, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/04ABEF7ADD27CBFBC32574DD005AA32B;

2.6.1. Georgian Perspective of the War

It is not a matter of discussion that Georgia was the party that initiated the war. However, Georgia did not consider its attack on South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali which started at the night of August 7, 2008 a war. It was rather seen by Georgia government as an internal operation to restore central government's control over its own territory which has been illegally taken away from Georgia by the insurgent administration of South Ossetia with the assistance of Russia. In the beginning of the operation, General Mamuka Kurashvili, the commanding officer of the Georgian troops of peacekeeping forces in the region, openly announced that their operation aimed to re-establish 'constitutional order' in South Ossetia.⁸³ Although this statement was later rebutted by Tbilisi stating that the operation was in fact against Russian occupation, it revealed Georgian administration's the real intention.

According to the answers given to the international fact finding mission's questions after the war, Georgian government explained their reason for launching a full-scale military operation to South Ossetian capital. The operation had a defensive nature which aimed at protecting its citizens and peacekeeping personnel in the region whose security was threatened by secessionist armed groups and impeding the advancement of Russian troops that were passing through the Roki Tunnel inside South Ossetia.⁸⁴ According to this explanation, Georgian operation in South Ossetia was a preventative attack that was carried out for security purposes. Nevertheless, the Georgian shelling of Tskhinvali with heavy weaponry cannot be presented as a preventive operation.

Georgian administration probably did not anticipate such an immense reaction from Russia when they decided to launch the military operation in South Ossetia that commenced on August 7, 2008. Upon Russian interference and having to withdraw from South Ossetia suffering great losses as a result of it, Georgia changed its rhetoric. According to the Georgian side, they were in fact fighting a

⁸³ "Georgia Decided to Restore Constitutional Order in S.Ossetia", *Civil Georgia Daily News Online*, August 8, 2008, accessed March 12, 2013, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18941&search=Kurashvili>;

⁸⁴ "Report of IIFMCG", Vol.I, 20.

Russian incursion which had been planned long before August 2008. Georgia claimed that Russia positioned considerable amount of troops in South Ossetia and trained local rebels and provided them with weapons prior to the war in order to occupy Georgian territory. All these allegations were later denied by Russia. In fact, several reports, including some of Russian sources, shows that there were military preparations and training by the Russian and local secessionist forces before the war.⁸⁵

Georgian president Saakashvili appeared in international media and presented Georgian nation as a victim of an imperial power which was invading its small neighbor. Saakashvili even argued that Georgia was being punished by Russia because it was defending Western values in the region. He argued that the war is about the future of freedom in Europe, and it would mark the end of Western influence on any of the former Soviet republics.⁸⁶ Saakashvili explained the reasons for Russian military operation in Georgia in a classical geopolitical framework. According to him Russia was pursuing the following goals: taking over the natural resources; terrorization; and overthrowing Georgian government. Europe's dependence on Russian energy encouraged Moscow to show aggression to Georgia: Saakashvili finally remarks: "They need control of energy routes. They need sea ports. They need transportation infrastructure. And primarily, they want to get rid of us".⁸⁷

To sum up, Georgian side asserted that their military actions were against the Russian incursion that took place in its own territory and that they had to carry out the operation in order to protect its citizens who were under attack by the Ossetian militias; therefore, their use of force was essential and legal under international law as Georgia used its right to self-defense.

⁸⁵ Anna Smolchenko, "Russia prepared for Georgia war, trained 'militiamen: Putin", *AFP*, August 8, 2012.

⁸⁶ "Mikhail Saakashvili: Georgian President: Moscow picked fight", *CNN International*, August 11, 2008, accessed March 06, 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/europe/08/11/georgia.oped/index.html>

⁸⁷ Anne Barnard, "Georgia and Russia Nearing All-out War", *The New York Times*, August 10, 2008, accessed March 06, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/10/world/europe/10georgia.html?pagewanted=print&_r=0,

2.6.2. Russian Arguments for Intervention and the Legality of the War

Russia refers to the five-day war as peace enforcement operation, whereas Georgian side depicts it as an invasion of their country by its big neighbor. Russia used the argument of humanitarian intervention. Regarding this issue, On August 8, 2008 Russian President Medvedev stated that traditionally Russia had been, and would continue to be a protector of the Caucasian peoples.⁸⁸ Russian side justified its military intervention in Georgia by the intention to stop an allegedly ongoing genocide of the Ossetian population by the Georgian forces as well as to protect Russian citizens residing in South Ossetia and the Russian peacekeeping force, deployed in South Ossetia in accordance with the Sochi Agreement of 1992. In this regard, the Russian side claimed that in the morning of 8 August 2008 two Russian peacekeepers were killed and five were wounded by the Georgian attacks on the peacekeepers' premises in Tskhinvali, which gave the right to the Russian leadership to take the decision of the movement of Russian troops into South Ossetia. Georgian side denied attacking Russian peacekeepers deliberately, arguing that their troops entering Tskhinvali were fired at from the Russian peacekeepers' compounds and that they had to respond.⁸⁹ Even if Russian claims were true, the task of the Russian military force in the region was confined to monitor the ceasefire not enforce peace.⁹⁰ Georgian attack to Russian peacekeeping force gave them the right to self-defense; however, the response far exceeded the limits of self-defense.

As far as the Russian accusations of genocide are concerned, they became less frequent in later months as the casualties among the Ossetian civilian population turned out to be much lower than it was initially claimed. Russian officials stated at the outset of the conflict that about 2 000 civilians had been killed in South Ossetia by the Georgian forces and eventually the figure of overall South Ossetian civilian loses in the course of the August 2008 conflict was reduced to 133 according to the

⁸⁸ Nichol, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests," 5.

⁸⁹ "Report of IIFFMCG", Vol.I, 21.

⁹⁰ Roy Allison, "Russia Resurgent? Moscow's campaign to coerce Georgia to peace", *International Affairs*, 86: 6, 1145-1171 (2008):1152.

report by Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, which was also confirmed by the Russian authorities.⁹¹

The legitimacy of use of force in the cases of humanitarian intervention, the protection of nationals abroad⁹² and security of peacekeepers is a contentious issue in international relations. Kremlin did not directly and officially state that they intervened due to humanitarian reasons. However, they accused Georgia of committing genocide against ethnic South Ossetians. As for the legality of humanitarian intervention, no state can take a unilaterally decision to have a military operation in another sovereign state's territory according to international and customary laws. Furthermore, war is no longer accepted as an instrument in international relations to settle disputes among states. According to the article 2(4) of UN Charter, which states:

*“All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations”.*⁹³

Use of force against a sovereign state and occupying its territory is strictly forbidden by international law. This is one of the key principles of international law. Use of force is permitted in a few exceptions such as self-defense and authorization of the Security Council, according to UN Charter Article 51⁹⁴ and the invitation of the state which is a victim of an attack. According to this prohibition of use of force, taking into consideration its extent and size, Russian military actions constitute a serious violation of this rule. Moreover, neither was Russian military operation authorized by the UN Security Council, nor did Georgia attack Russia, which would not give Russia a right to self-defense. Therefore, Russian incursion was not lawful under international law.

⁹¹ “Council of Europe rights official shocked by S.Ossetia destruction”, *Rianovosti*, August 24, 2008, accessed April 12, 2013, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20080824/116242409.html>

⁹² About 90% of the residents of South Ossetia were granted Russian citizenship. Russia justified its military intervention using the argument of protecting its nationals abroad.

⁹³ UN Charter I: Purposes And Principles, accessed April 12, 2013, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter1.shtml>

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

2.7. Reports on the Violations of International Law and Human Rights during the War

After the war, European Union set an independent international fact-finding mission to investigate the war. The mission group carried out its task conducting researches in the areas of conflict, and it carried out talks with all parties of the conflict. They made use of the reports of other NGOs or international organizations such as OSCE and Human Rights Watch (HRW).⁹⁵

The report holds all parties responsible for the break-up of the war. The report acknowledges that the Georgian side initiated the war with its attack on Tskhinvali. However, it came to a conclusion that Georgia was provoked to carry out a military operation by the South Ossetian and Russian sides.

The fact-finding mission also concluded that all conflicting parties breached several rules of international law during the war. Here are some of the findings of the commission:

As for the Georgian attack on Tskhinvali, which was claimed to have been carried out in order to protect Georgian officials and citizens in the region from South Ossetian militia attacks; the commission came to a decision that it was not proportionate as international law requires a state to use proportionate force when exercising its right to self-defense. Thus, Georgia had a right to self-defense against South Ossetian forces, but it is hardly considered Georgian response proportionate.

According to the report, there was a considerable amount of Russian force in the conflict region before the war, which was a violation of the Sochi Agreement 1992, the peacekeeping treaty. Nevertheless, this Russian breach of the agreement did not justify the Georgian attack on the Russian peacekeeping forces; it was contrary to international law. As a result, the Russian immediate response to the Georgian attack was justifiable under international law. However, the report also stated that there wasn't enough evidence about whether there was a deliberate Georgian attack on the Russian peacekeeping force or no. (The Georgian side denied an intentional attack.)

⁹⁵ "Report of IIFMCG", Vol.2, 297.

The report described the Russian military actions out of the conflict zone of South Ossetia as invasion. Russian attacks to Georgian military bases and civil infrastructure and the invasion of several towns around South Ossetia were regarded as exceeding the limits of defense. In addition, although there was no Georgian military attack in Abkhazia, a second front was opened by the Abkhaz forces with the help of Russian forces on the border of Abkhazia and Georgia during the war in order to capture some areas controlled by the Georgian army. This was also found illegal according to the international law by the commission.

The commission also revealed some incidents of ethnic cleansing of Georgians which were mainly carried out by South Ossetian militia.

Human Rights Watch was another NGO that released reports on the 2008 war. According HRW, all parties of the conflict committed severe war crimes causing civilian casualties and displacement of thousands of local residents. HRW reported that both Russian and Georgian armies used heavy weaponry during the war without discriminating civilians and; as a result caused many civilian casualties.⁹⁶ The report also blamed South Ossetian forces for committing war crimes such as raiding and arson on attacks Georgians' residential areas to make them flee, and for raping and kidnappings of Georgians. The report stated that displaced people were not allowed to return their homes.⁹⁷ Eduard Kokoity, the president of South Ossetia told Kommersant, Russian news agency, that they almost demolished everything and they would not allow Georgian refugees to come back.⁹⁸ Lastly, HRW report claimed that both sides used banned cluster bombs which caused civilian deaths.

Another organization that reported on the conflict of 2008 was Amnesty International. The report hold both sides responsible for violating international law. According to the report mostly civilians rather than military people suffered because of the war. The Amnesty International stated that Russian and Ossetian authorities

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2009- Events of 2008", (New York, 2009), 375-380. , accessed March 22, 2013, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/wr2009_web.pdf

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Georgia: International Groups Should Send Missions", August 16, 2008, accessed March 22, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/08/16/georgia-international-groups-should-send-missions>

⁹⁸ "Eduard Kokoity: We successfully demolished everything," *Kommersant*, August 15, 2008, accessed March 22, 2013, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1011783>

reported high number of civilian casualties to justify a military operation on Georgia.⁹⁹ Both countries appealed to international courts regarding their accusations to each other. The legal process is still going on as of 2013.

⁹⁹ Amnesty International, "Report: Civilians In The Line Of Fire - The Georgia-Russia Conflict 2008", (London, 2008), 6., accessed March 22, 2013, <http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=country&category=&publisher=AMNESTY&type=COUNTRYREP&coi=GEO&rid=&docid=4922c0b22&skip=0>

CHAPTER 3

IMPLICATIONS OF THE WAR FOR SOUTH CAUCASIA

3.1. Introduction

The 2008 war did not only have significant effects on the security of the South Caucasian countries, primarily Georgia, it has also had implications for the policies of the EU and the US towards the region. In fact, it is evident that the war and subsequent Russian recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia marked a turning point in post-cold war Eurasian politics. The war is likely to produce new sources of conflict and instability in the Caucasus. The war of 2008 raised the question whether Russia has turned back to the old days of cold war when it used to confront the West. With the war of 2008, Russia unequivocally challenged the Western assertiveness in South Caucasus, which it considers its sphere of influence. This puts the gains made by the West since the collapse of the Soviets, regarding its relations with Russia and post-Soviet states in Eurasia, in jeopardy.

The war was also a demonstration of the limitations of the other actors involved in the Caucasian politics, namely the US, the EU and Turkey, due to their geostrategic disadvantages against Russia. Russia and the West have contrasting interests and therefore different agendas for the region. This fact will not only have an impact on the near future of the regional countries, particularly Georgia, but it will also shape their future for many decades to come.

3.2. Implications of the War for Georgia

It is an undeniable fact that Georgia was the country to have been affected most by the war in the region. Georgians' great expectations for the resolution of the regional conflicts that it has been struggling with since the early days of its independence now seem to have dwindled to nothing. The hopes about restoring the territory integrity of the country are somewhat dashed for Georgia. Georgia has now a more vital problem than losing its two autonomous regions, which is the fact that the existence of Georgia as an independent and democratic state is in jeopardy. After

the velvet revolution in 2003, Georgia was supported and presented by the US and the EU as a model country for the wider region. Its swift political and economic development with Western aid increased the hopes for weakening the Russian influence in the region. Nonetheless, it seems that this Western project failed as a result of the 2008 war. Contrary to its prospects before August 7, 2008, Georgia suffered great losses due to the war. Georgia was the primary loser of the war for several reasons discussed below.

3.2.1. The Issue of Restoration of Georgian Territorial Integrity

The regional conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were state vs. sub-state conflicts before the war. Today, they are virtually transformed into a Russian - Georgian conflict. Russian control over the two regions is more effective than it was before the war. The fact that Russia recognized the two separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia soon after the war will obviously render the Georgian goal to re-control the two regions impossible, at least in the short run.

Russia would have annexed these two tiny regions into its territory; however, it did not do so because Russian policy makers probably envisaged reactions and punishment from international community in various forms, mainly political and economic. This could be explained by the defensive realist perspective which asserts that international system encourages states to pursue expansionist policies only in certain conditions and that states' primary concern is to maintain their positions in the system rather than increasing their power as they will face balancing responses from their rivals.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, it is highly improbable that Russia will retreat from its decision of recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia as it gained several geostrategical assets by this recognition. This means that Georgia's objective to restore its territorial integrity has been postponed to an indefinite time or has even become unattainable.

Moscow, with this recognition, changed its former policy concerning the regional conflicts in Georgia. Before the outbreak of the war, Russia respected and recognized the territorial integrity of Georgia. Even though Kremlin did not share

¹⁰⁰ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 21.

common viewpoint with Georgia regarding the resolution of the conflict, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were referred to as parts of Georgia by Kremlin.

On the other hand, Russian recognition of the independence of the two tiny regions, which are parts of Georgia according to international law, was not welcomed and accepted by the international community. Only Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru and Tuvalu recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The US, the EU and many other countries criticized and condemned Russia for not respecting the territorial integrity of Georgia.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, in spite of its influential role in Commonwealth of Independent States and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, none of the member countries has so far recognized the independence of the two regions.¹⁰²

Russia did not only recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but it also deployed additional troops in the two regions according to the terms of the alliance and cooperation agreements signed between the parties. Russia has now become the protector of the two regions against external attacks, namely those of Georgia. According to the terms of the agreement, Russia has been entitled to set up military bases in both regions. Russia has 7600 troops in the conflict areas of Georgia, which is twice as many as the figure before 2008 war.¹⁰³ In fact, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have no chance of surviving as independent states without Russian support. Even though they are de jure independent states according to Russia, they are in practice parts of Russian Federation, which is an overarching barrier for Georgia in the way of the resolution of the conflict.

Furthermore, Tbilisi lost additional areas in the two conflict regions as a result of the war. These areas were mostly populated by Georgians; they had to flee

¹⁰¹ “U.S. condemns Russia on South Ossetia and Abkhazia”, *Reuters*, August 26, 2008, accessed March 24, 2013, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2008/08/26/uk-georgia-ossetia-usa-idUKN2634612020080826>

¹⁰² “Leaders of OCST Condemned Georgia but Stopped Short of Recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Said They Would Decide on the Matter on Their Own”, *Newsru.com*, September 5, 2008, accessed March 24, 2013, <http://newsru.com/russia/05sep2008/sami.html>

¹⁰³ “EU Hurries to Deploy Beefed-Up Georgia Mission”, *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*, September 22, 2008, accessed March 24, 2013, http://www.rferl.org/content/EU_Hurries_To_Deploy_BeefedUp_Georgia_Mission/1202007.html

their homes and thus became IDPs. As a result, Georgia's competence as an efficient state can be questioned as it could not provide security to its nationals and maintain control all over its territory. This could be a source of instability and political chaos for Georgia. Considering the complexity of the problem that deteriorated by the war, it is certain that Georgia is not able deal with it without international support.

3.2.2. Destroyed Dialogue between the Parties of the Conflict

Another reason why the restoration of its territorial integrity is now almost an unattainable goal for Georgia is the fact that the war further deteriorated the relationship between Georgians and the local population in the conflict regions. Prior to the war, despite minor armed clashes, there was a direct channel of communication between the sides. The war destroyed the dialogue and the restitution of the direct talks is not likely.

The Georgian attack on August 7th, 2008 that shelled the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali in an indiscriminative manner leading to hundreds of civilian casualties as a result of this attack was a factor that contributed to the detestation of Georgian rule over the region among South Ossetians. This large-scale military operation resulted in nothing than increasing mistrust for Georgians among Ossetians. As a result of Saakashvili administration's military attitude toward the South Ossetian conflict, local population of the region is convinced that continuing to live under Georgian rule would put their safety at risk.

One of the Russian arguments for legitimizing its intervention in the conflict was the accusation of Georgia of committing genocide against the ethnic South Ossetians. This allegation was later refuted by the fact-finding mission which found out that it had been used for propaganda purposes by Russia.¹⁰⁴ Such charges played an important role in deepening the enmity between the parties of the conflict.

Even though Russia recognized the independence of South Ossetia, uniting with their ethnic brethren in North Ossetia under Russian Federation is more preferable for South Ossetians. Right after the war, Eduard Kokoity, the president of

¹⁰⁴ "Report of IIFMCG", Vol.1, 26.

South Ossetia, stated that they aimed merger with North Ossetia within the Russian Federation.¹⁰⁵ In fact, this option seems more rational than independence as South Ossetia possesses inadequate assets to continue its existence as a sovereign state. In fact, taking into consideration the fact that more than 90% of the locals have been granted Russian passports by Moscow, combined with the presence of a significant number of Russian troops in the region, it could be argued that South Ossetia has already become a de facto member of the Russian Federation.

Abkhazia, another secessionist region of Georgia, was recognized as an independent state by Russia soon after the war. Abkhazian militia forces fought along with Russian and South Ossetian forces and opened a second front during the war, although there was no Georgian military operation aimed at Abkhazia. In the five-day war, Abkhazian forces managed to capture some areas which were previously controlled by the Georgian forces. Unlike South Ossetians, Abkhaz people have strong determination for independence. On 25 August 2008, the day before Russian Federation recognized Abkhazia's independence, Abkhazian president Sergei Bagapsh spoke at the Russian Federation Council and stated: "It is hard to say what decision Russia's political leaders will make on our republics, but I can say for certain that Abkhazia and South Ossetia will never be part of Georgia."¹⁰⁶

All these considered, restoring the dialogue between the parties for the resolution of the conflict in the form of reintegration of these regions into Georgia does not seem viable. Georgian administration's mismanagement of the conflict and the miscalculations about the results of their military operation resulted in a total failure.

¹⁰⁵ "What is next for South Ossetia and Abkhazia?", *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*, August 26, 2008, accessed March 25, 2013, http://www.rferl.org/content/What_Next_South_Ossetia_Abkhazia/1194045.html

¹⁰⁶ "Russian upper house seeks independence for Georgian rebel regions", *Rianovosti*, August 25, accessed March 22, 2013, 2013 <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080825/116254039.html>

3.2.3. Destroyed Hopes of Georgia's NATO Membership

The 2008 war had also implications for the Georgian NATO membership plans. Since the beginning of independence, Georgia followed the policy of becoming a part of Europe and accordingly of joining its unions and institutions whether political, economic or military. A noticeable sign of this ambition can be seen in front of the Georgian Parliament: the flag of the Council of Europe accompanies the Georgian flag. One of the top priorities of this policy is NATO membership which is considered a guarantee of security against Russian threat and an effective way of restoring Georgian territorial integrity by Tbilisi.

Georgia and NATO relations officially started in 1994 when Georgia joined the NATO Partnership for Peace. In 1996, Georgia proposed its first membership plan, and in 1997 Georgian Parliament ratified the Status of Forces Agreement about the deployment of NATO forces in Georgia. In 1998, Georgia appointed a representative to NATO Headquarters in Brussels. Georgian army joined the first joint military exercise with NATO in 2001 which was held in Poti, Georgia.¹⁰⁷ Tbilisi intensified its relations with NATO to the extent of pursuing full membership after Saakashvili came to power as a result of peaceful revolution in 2003.

Georgia was very close to being a NATO member before the 2008 war. 77% of the Georgian citizens voted in favor of Georgia's joining NATO in a referendum held in January 5, 2008.¹⁰⁸ The results revealed strong support for NATO membership among Georgian public. At the Bucharest NATO summit, which was held a few months before the war, Georgia was given assurance for NATO membership on the condition that it met the requirements for membership.¹⁰⁹ However, some of the NATO members, led by Germany and France, were against

¹⁰⁷ NATO, "Evolution of NATO-Georgia relations", accessed April 20, 2013, <http://www.nato.int/issues/nato-georgia/evolution.html>

¹⁰⁸ "Plebiscite Results on NATO Membership", *Civil Georgia Daily News Online*, January 8, 2008, accessed April 20, 2013, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/category.php?id=90&result=plebiscite>

¹⁰⁹ "What NATO Summit Declaration Says on Georgia", *Civil Georgia Daily News Online*, April 8, 2008, accessed April 20, 2013, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17521>

Georgia's membership since they were worried about irritating Russia.¹¹⁰ They thought accepting a country with unresolved regional conflicts would be problematic. Thus, despite the US support, Georgia did not receive a positive response for membership in the near future. In fact, the US was not so persistent about Georgian membership even though it made promises to Georgia, which caused frustration in Tbilisi.¹¹¹

3.2.3.1. Russia's Opposition against NATO Enlargement

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, former members of the union and the states that were once members of the Warsaw Pact began to have close relations with the Western organizations and unions, particularly NATO and the EU. NATO enlargement was particularly disturbing for Kremlin. It was considered a security threat from Russian perspective. Georgian aspiration for NATO membership obviously disturbed Moscow since Georgia as a NATO member in such a geostrategically important region along its borders would have negative impact on Russian influence on the Caucasus. Russia openly declared its opposition when Georgia was given the promise of membership at the 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit. As a reaction to the promise given to Georgia, a few days after the summit, Yuri Baluyevsky, the General-in-Chief of Russian army, stated that "Russia will take steps aimed at ensuring its interests along its borders. These will not only be military steps, but also steps of a different nature."¹¹² In fact, Russian leadership has been too often declaring worries about Georgia – NATO rapprochement. To illustrate Putin once stated "The expansion of NATO infrastructure towards our borders is causing us concern."¹¹³ Likewise, Medvedev declared that Russia would prevent Georgian

¹¹⁰"NATO Expansion Defeat: France and Germany Thwart Bush's Plans", *Der Spiegel*, April 3, 2008, accessed April 20, 2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/nato-expansion-defeat-france-and-germany-thwart-bush-s-plans-a-545078.html>

¹¹¹ Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War, How the Kremlin Menaces Both Russia and the West* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008), 190-191.

¹¹² "Russia army vows steps if Georgia and Ukraine join NATO", *Reuters*, April 11, 2008, accessed April 20, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/04/11/us-russia-nato-steps-idUSL1143027920080411>

¹¹³ "Russia worried by NATO expansion near its border", *Reuters*, Apr 27, 2011, accessed April 20, 2013 <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/27/oukwd-uk-russia-nato-idAFTRE73Q3GH20110427>

membership to NATO at all costs.¹¹⁴ The fact that Russia has not been able to prevent NATO's expansion which reached its borders increases Kremlin's opposition to Georgian membership. Many of the former socialist states such as Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Poland became members to NATO, and Russian western borders now neighbor NATO.

Caucasus, as mentioned earlier, has a significant geostrategic value for Russia. Georgia's acceptance to NATO would mean losing another front for Russia against NATO considering the fact that Moscow was not able to prevent NATO enlargement in Eastern Europe. Therefore, Russia views Georgia as a revisionist state that can disturb the balance in the region, which Russia views in its 'sphere of influence' due to its Eurasianist foreign policy. Georgia as a model country developing swiftly under Western security guarantees and support in the post-Soviet arena is likely to shatter Russian authority and influence. Prevalent realist thinking in Kremlin based on geopolitical assumptions obliges Russian leadership to pursue realist policies in Russia's relations with the West. Defensive realism gives a credible explanation of Russian policy in the Caucasus against NATO expansion. According to this theory, Kremlin feels its security being threatened by NATO. Therefore, in 2008 Russia was defending itself against a potential attempt of Western expansion which would not be in favor of Russian security and interests.

The 2008 war was a Russian demonstration of challenge against the European security structure that had been built since the early 1990s. Russia confirmed that it will not allow further expansion of NATO along its borders. Russian use of hard power against Georgia was not a warning only to Georgia, but also to Ukraine, another candidate country, NATO, and the US.

¹¹⁴ "Medvedev warns NATO over Georgia Membership", *Civil Georgia Daily News Online*, September 12, 2008, accessed March 23, 2013, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19490>

3.2.4. A Brief Overview of Impact of the War on Georgian Economy

The war also caused considerable damage to Georgian economy. A significant amount of military equipment was destroyed during the war. Georgian Defense Ministry reported that Georgia's material losses are worth \$250 million.¹¹⁵ This officially announced figure was probably higher as it must have been deliberately reduced for political reasons. In addition to military losses, the non-military infrastructure of the country, including the energy, water and transportation utilities, was given substantial harm by the Russian forces. Rebuilding the army and repairing the damaged infrastructure have certainly had and will continue to have a negative effect on the economy, which is already beset by many problems.

Secondly, several thousands of Georgian nationals had to flee their homes because of the war. According to the Georgian government figures, there are 268,415 internally displaced persons (IDP) in Georgia, about 10,000 of whom have become IDPs as a result of the war in 2008 (dated December 2012).¹¹⁶ Most of them cannot return to their homes although it has been a long time since the war ended, as South Ossetian authorities do not allow them to return. In fact, even if they were allowed, they wouldn't be able to, because their properties were looted and destroyed by the South Ossetian militia or expropriated by the regional government. The financial cost of IDPs is an extra burden for the country's budget. Social problems related to this issue are also another possible source of instability for the country.

Finally, the attraction of the country for foreign investors undoubtedly diminished, which further contributed to the previously mentioned economic problems. The war with Russia had a negative effect on Georgia's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). A year before the war, the country had its all-highest foreign investment in its history with 69.3% yearly growth.¹¹⁷ This trend continued in the

¹¹⁵ Koba Liklikadze, "Lessons And Losses Of Georgia's Five-Day War With Russia", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 5:185 (September 2008).

¹¹⁶ Internal Displacement Monitoring Center Report, "Internal displacement in Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia" (Geneva, 2012), 44., accessed March 29, 2013, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/europe>

¹¹⁷ National Statistics Office of Georgia, "Foreign Direct Investments", accessed March 29, 2013, http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=140&lang=eng

first half of 2008. However, FDI inflow has had a mostly declining character since the 2008 war.

3.2.4.1. The Effect of the War on Georgia's Economic Relations with its Neighbors

One effect of the 2008 war is that Georgia has become closer to its neighbors, especially with Turkey and Azerbaijan. This rapprochement was mainly observed in economic fields. Georgian government has been looking for ways to improve its economic relations with its neighbors in order to recover the losses from the war and from the Russian trade embargo on Georgian products.

3.2.4.1.2. Georgia – Turkey Economic Relations after the War

The significance of Turkish partnership has considerably increased for Georgia after 2008 crisis. Turkish – Georgian relations have been always good since Georgia gained its independence. Relations considerably improved after AK Party government in Turkey and Saakashvili in Georgia came to power. Interruption of economic relations with Russia as a result of the South Ossetian conflict after 2006 accelerated the trade volume with Turkey, and Turkey has replaced Russia's number one position in Georgian market. Turkey is also the second biggest investor in Georgia after the USA.¹¹⁸ Bilateral trade volume between the two countries has reached to 1.4 billion \$ as of 2013.¹¹⁹ There is interdependence between Turkey and Georgia. Turkey is aware of the necessity for stability in the region in order to maintain its economic and political relations. Another fact that makes the region geostrategically important to Turkey is the BTC and BTE (Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum) pipelines. Both Turkey and Georgia have mutual interest in the construction of additional projected pipelines. In addition, Turkey needs Georgia as a transit route in order to improve its commercial relations with Azerbaijan and Central Asia. However, continuation of these relations depends on the security of Georgia.

¹¹⁸ Justyna GŁOGOWSKA, "Turkey and Georgia: Strategic Connections", *Bilgesam*, March 2012, accessed April 23, 2013,

http://www.bilgesam.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=497:turkey-and-geo

¹¹⁹ Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Relations between Turkey and Georgia", accessed April 23, 2013, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-georgia.en.mfa>

Therefore, for Georgia, having close relations with Turkey is of high importance not only for economic but also for political and security reasons. This has indeed become more evident after the 2008 war.

3.2.4.1.3. Georgia – Azerbaijan Economic Relations

Georgian – Azerbaijani economic relations also boosted after 2008. Georgian government made natural gas agreements with Azerbaijan to liberate the country from dependence on Russian gas. According to this deal, Georgia will supply over 80% of its natural gas need from Azerbaijan. In addition, the volume of trade between the countries considerably increased after 2008. Azerbaijan is now the second biggest trade partner of Georgia.¹²⁰

3.2.4.1.4. Georgia – Armenia Economic Relations

Armenia ranks the lowest among Georgian neighbors in term of economic relations. In fact, Armenia, as a close ally of Russia in the region, needs Georgia as a transit route to reach Black Sea coast. Despite Armenia's pro-Russian stance, Georgian – Armenian relations were not badly affected as a result of the war since Yerevan followed a careful policy not to irritate Tbilisi during the 2008 crisis. After a brief interruption, the trade between the countries resumed and continued as usual. There has not been much growth in the trade volume between the two countries since 2008 compared to the period before the war.¹²¹ The only significant development after the war is the protocol that was signed between Georgian and Armenian governments on the construction of a highway connecting Yerevan to Batumi which will facilitate the trade between the countries.¹²² It was surprising that Moscow did not oppose recent Armenian-Georgian agreements. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said during a visit to Yerevan: "I hope that these agreements will prevent a

¹²⁰ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, "Relations between Georgia and the Republic of Azerbaijan", accessed April 22, 2013 http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?sec_id=265&lang_id=ENG

¹²¹ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, "Relations between Georgia and Republic of Armenia", accessed April 22, 2013, http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?sec_id=363&lang_id=ENG

¹²² The Government of the Republic of Armenia Website, "The Construction of the North-South Road will Allow the Citizens to Reach Batumi in a More Rapid and Convenient Way", November 19, 2011, accessed April 22, 2013, <http://www.gov.am/en/news/item/5986/>

repetition of the situation during the Caucasian crisis that resulted in artificial obstacles on Georgian territory to the traffic of goods to Armenia; I think these agreements will contribute to the economic development of our ally (Armenia).”¹²³

In conclusion, the war compelled Georgia to improve its relations with its neighbors in order to avoid Russian efforts to damage Georgian economy. Turkey and Azerbaijan have become beneficiaries of this new reality

3.3. Georgian - Russian Relations after the 2008 War

Fifteen new independent states joined the international society after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These new states have struggled with many difficulties which were both inherited from the communist era and the outcome of those troubles of the transitional period. In this new period, ruling elites of the Soviet period continued their positions in administration in almost all of these countries. However, due to several reasons such as corruption, ethnic conflicts, inexperience of the ruling elites about the new political conditions and inadequate economic resources, they failed to present good management, and this caused widespread discontent among the populations of the very nations. Beginning from the early 2000s, opposition movements began to flourish and “color revolutions” started to change the political environment in some of the post-Soviet countries, such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. Western-supported leaders replaced the pro-Russian ones. Kremlin never welcomed the “color revolutions” as it views this development as a threat to its hegemony in its sphere of influence.¹²⁴

Georgia was the first country to go through such revolutions. It later inspired the revolutions in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. After 2003 parliamentary elections in Georgia, opposition parties did not recognize the election results claiming that there had been considerable amount of electoral fraud. Accordingly, extensive demonstrations were held, which resulted in the fall of Eduard Shevardnadze.

¹²³ “Russia ‘Not Worried’ About Armenia’s NATO, Georgia Ties”, *The Georgian Times*, October 7, 2008, accessed April 24, 2013, <http://www.geotimes.ge/index.php?newsid=12872&lang=eng>

¹²⁴ Robert Coalsen, “Russia: Why the Kremlin likes the CIA”, *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, October 1, 2007, accessed April 24, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/Article/1078841.html>

Mikhail Saakashvili, who was openly supported by the US, was the key figure of the so-called Rose Revolution and was elected the president soon after the revolution. Since the early days of his office, Russian – Georgian relations that were already problematic deteriorated day by day which eventually led to a war.

Russian motive in intervening in the South Ossetian-Georgian conflict was not confined to the reasons that Russia declared such as protecting its nationals and stopping “genocide”, but it had geostrategic goals that went far beyond that. Russian leadership’s statements prove that they aimed at punishing pro-American Georgian administration and even removing it from power. By punishing Georgia, Russia wanted to prove Russia’s status as a potential global power.¹²⁵

3.3.1. Frozen Georgian – Russian Relations

The war produced a new reality in the Russian – Georgian relations, which forced Georgia to revise its stance against Russia and its policies regarding its regional conflicts. The two countries are now formally adversaries and there is no direct diplomatic relations between them. Kremlin explicitly declared that on no account would they ever have talks with Saakashvili administration. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that “they will not negotiate with Saakashvili as he is a US project.”¹²⁶ However, Russian leadership stated that they do not have problems with the Georgians and they are ready to deepen relations, but not with Saakashvili regime. At a press conference after meeting South Korean foreign minister, Lavrov stated “We do not associate the Georgian people with this character (Saakashvili) and are ready to develop business, pragmatic and mutually beneficial ties in different fields with Georgians but not with Mikhail Saakashvili,” and he added “Saakashvili is Georgia’s anomaly.”¹²⁷ These statements obviously indicate that Kremlin desires a regime change in Georgia, and thus cause suspicions that Russia could be taking measures to make this take place. As a result of this approach, there was not even the

¹²⁵ Stephen Sestanovich, “What has Moscow done?”, *Foreign Affairs*, 87: 6 (2008): 12.

¹²⁶ “Lavrov: Saakashvili Is Not Sane As a Negotiator”, *Russia Profile.org*, August 15, 2008, accessed April 26, 2013, <http://www.russiaprofile.org/page.php?pageid=CDI+Russia+Profile+List&articleid=a1218816987>

¹²⁷ “Saakashvili is Georgia’s anomaly”, *Russia Today*, August 8, 2011, accessed April 26, 2013, <http://rt.com/politics/saakashvili-relations-lavrov-georgia/>

slightest hope for rapprochement between the two countries until a government change occurs in Tbilisi.

3.3.2. New Government and Attempts of Reconciliation

The result of the 2012 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia changed this atmosphere. Saakashvili's party lost the majority in the parliament and Georgian Dream Coalition led by Bidzina Ivanishvili won the elections gaining 54.3% of the electoral votes.¹²⁸ Ivanishvili formed the new government and became the prime minister. He is the richest person in Georgia. According to *Forbes* magazine's list of the world's billionaires, Ivanishvili's fortune is worth 5.3 billion US dollars as of March 2013.¹²⁹ The fact that Ivanishvili is a billionaire who made his fortune in Russia raised questions about him.¹³⁰ He was a Russian citizen before 2011. He resigned his Russian citizenship just before he entered politics. During his campaign he declared that he sold most of his assets in Russia.¹³¹ Owing to his past life as a businessman in Russia, Ivanishvili came to be known as a pro-Russian leader.¹³² His opponents often highlight his reliance on Russian leadership, which he needs to maintain to do business in Russia. However, this image could be an advantage for him to help normalize relations with Russia. In fact, Ivanishvili did not conceal his objective to repair Georgia's relations with Russia during his campaign.

Saakashvili's approach to Russia could not be sustainable, as it promised no improvements. Despite having been defeated in the war, Saakashvili managed to protect his post by getting widespread support from the Georgian public with his

¹²⁸ "Georgia's president admits defeat in elections", *RTÉ News*, October 2, 2012, accessed April 13, 2013, <http://www.rte.ie/news/2012/1002/339958-georgia-election/>

¹²⁹ "The World's Billionaires", *Forbes*, March 2013, accessed April 13, 2013, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/bidzina-ivanishvili/>

¹³⁰ Wendell Steavenson, "The good oligarch", *Prospect Magazine*, July 21, 2010, accessed April 13, 2013, <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/bidzina-ivanishvili-georgia-billionaire-philanthropist/>

¹³¹ Luke Harding, "Bidzina Ivanishvili: the eccentric billionaire chasing Georgia's leadership", *The Guardian*, October 1, 2012, accessed April 13, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/oct/01/bidzina-ivanishvili-profile-georgia>

¹³² "Pro-Russian coalition wins Georgia Elections", *Europolitics*, October 3, 2012, accessed April 13, 2013, <http://europolitics.eis-vt-prod-web01.cyberadm.net/externa-policies/pro-russian-coalition-wins-georgia-elections-art343579-44.html>

harsh anti-Russian rhetoric. However, Georgians were weary of the “Kremlin is Georgia’s foe” slogan of Saakashvili which made the resolution of the prolonged conflicts of South Ossetia and Abkhazia more complicated and which also had a negative impact on the economy due to interrupted trade with Russia. Russia was the main market for the Georgian agricultural products prior to the 2006 spy crisis. Soon after this event, Russia put a ban on the import of Georgian products allegedly for health reasons. In fact, the aim was to harm Georgian economy. Therefore, Georgian citizens embraced Ivanishvili’s promise to repair relations with Russia. Georgian population’s aspiration for resolution could explain Ivanishvili’s unexpected success in the elections.

As the head of the new government, Ivanishvili started to send signals to Russia proving his intention to restore relations with Russia. Ivanishvili government created a Special Representative to carry out talks with Russia to normalize relations. Zurab Abashidze, former Georgian ambassador to Russia, was assigned to this post.¹³³ The first official talks between the two states after the war took place on December 14, 2012 when Abashidze and Grigory Karasin, Russian deputy foreign minister, met in Geneva.¹³⁴ Although there were no concrete results for the resolution of the problems, it was significant that dialogue between the two countries resumed after the war. The issues discussed were confined to economic relations and the visa regime of Russia towards Georgian citizens. The contentious issues of the regional conflicts were deliberately left out during the meeting. Ivanishvili stated that he is making progress on one of his campaign promises: repairing Georgia’s relations with Russia.¹³⁵

There is not a common understanding between the government and the opposition parties on what kind of foreign policy Georgia should follow. Moreover,

¹³³ “Zurab Abashidze appointed Ivanishvili’s personal representative on Russia”, *Georgia Times*, January 11, 2012, accessed April 12, 2013, <http://www.georgiatimes.info/en/news/82553.html>

¹³⁴ “Georgia and Russia met in Geneva”, *Georgia Times*, December 17, 2012, accessed April 12, 2013, <http://www.georgiatimes.info/en/news/84396.html>

¹³⁵ Olesya Vartanyan and Ellen Barry, “Georgian Sees Closer Ties with Russia”, *The New York Times*, February 5, 2013, accessed April 12, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/06/world/europe/georgias-ivanishvili-sees-warming-with-russia.html?_r=0

there is a great political tension between Saakashvili's party UNM and the new government due to the investigations on the previous administration and the detention of former officials and ministers. Ivanishvili even demanded the resignation of president Saakashvili.¹³⁶ This strained political situation makes it difficult for the government and the opposition to have a consensus on policies regarding the regional conflicts and the relations with Russia. Yet, Ivanishvili government announced a 14-point plan on the new foreign policy of Georgia in order to have a public consensus on foreign policy issues. The opposition parties declared that they were against some of the articles claiming that they are either against the interest of the country or they mean making concessions to Russia.¹³⁷

3.3.2.1. Future of Georgian – Russian Reconciliation Efforts

Despite the efforts of the new Georgian government, it is an undeniable fact that the war made the confrontation between the two countries sharper but at the same time less vague. Georgia's allegations of veiled Russian annexation of Georgian territories before the war turned out to be a reality. Before August 2008, Georgia was questioning the Russian role as a peacekeeper in the conflict regions as it was suspicious of Russian impartiality. Now, this suspicion turned into a fact and can no longer be denied by neither Russia nor the international society. Thus, Russia is no longer a peacekeeper and mediator in the regional conflicts of Georgia in the eyes of Georgians. On the contrary, from Georgian point of view, Russia is an enemy country which continues to occupy Georgian territories. Georgian administration asserts that Georgia will never cooperate with Russia unless Russian troops leave Georgian territory.

Georgia is in a very difficult position regarding the resolution of the regional conflicts and the restoration of relations with Russia. Having gained an advantageous position after the war which it could make use of in order to coerce Georgia to make compromises and to hamper its relations with the West, including Georgia's NATO

¹³⁶ Anna Nemtsova, "Georgia's Political Standoff Deepens", *Foreign Policy*, February 11, 2013, accessed April 14, 2013, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/02/11/georgias_political_standoff_deepens

¹³⁷ Fikret Ertan, "Gürcistan'ın 14 maddelik dış politika tasarısı", *Zaman*, February 28, 2013.

membership, Russia is tempted to consider maintaining the status quo suitable for its geostrategic interests. It could be argued that Russia will continue to keep its troops in the two regions of Georgia to guarantee that this pressure on Georgia continues blatantly, which gives Russia an opportunity in the great game of Eurasia.

To sum up, the current situation seems to promise no prospects for resolution. Extremely self-assured, Moscow is looking for ways to entrench its position in the conflict regions in order to lessen the chances of Georgia to re-control them by either use of force or diplomacy. In response, Georgia is not inclined to make any compromises which could start the normalization process. The efforts of Georgia's new administration could be considered as signs of melting the frozen relations with Russia. However, they are far too insufficient to solve the major problems of the two countries. In addition, the fact that Georgian attempts have been paid very little attention by Kremlin reduces the hopes for reconciliation. The process of restoring relations will probably continue; however, it will be time-consuming and difficult since there are so many controversial issues to overcome such as Georgia's desire for NATO membership and Russia's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

3.4. Implications for the Russian Approach towards South Caucasus

3.4.1. Significant Russian policy change towards the Caucasus

The 2008 war marked a significant change in Russian policy towards the Caucasus. Up until the war, Russia had made use of various means except for its hard power to exert influence on the South Caucasian states. However, Russia was not very successful in obtaining its political goal in the region with these instruments. One of the reasons for this failure was that Russia did not have much to offer to these new independent states in the early post-Soviet period because it was struggling with its own problems of the transitional period. Another reason can be explained by the realist assumption that weaker states seek balancing against a regional hegemon.¹³⁸ These new independent states have always tried to balance Russian influence by having close relations with the world powers since they gained their independence.

American, European and Turkish economic, military and political activity has been increasing against Russian interests in the region since early 1990s, especially in Georgia and Azerbaijan. Regional states' aspiration to integrate with the West and the world played an important role in this process. Moscow is aware of the fact that South Caucasian countries' growing collaboration with the West will eventually foster their integration with the Western institutions, which is detrimental to its interests. The 2008 war gave Russia the opportunity to change the balance of power in its favor again.

Russian for the first time waged a war against one of the ex-Soviet republics. With its use of power, Russia made it clear it will not hesitate to resort to hard power to protect its interest in the region. For their part, Western powers are not able to contain Russian influence in the Caucasus that Russia considered its sphere of influence. Russia gave a message to the West, mainly to the USA, that Russia is able to counter against Western influence in the region assertively and that the West could do little in response. This is not a hidden agenda for Moscow. The principles of this new policy were publicly declared on several occasions. To illustrate, Medvedev

¹³⁸Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 21.

once stated that “the former Soviet republics are in the sphere of Russia’s privileged interests”¹³⁹ Its use of hard power against Georgia ignoring probable negative consequences confirmed that maintaining its presence in the region is of high priority for Russia. In consequence of the war, Russia strengthened its military presence in the region by weakening Georgian military power and recognizing the independence of two autonomous regions.

3.4.2 Changed Russian Policy towards regional conflicts

The August 2008 war was also a turning point for the Russian policy toward the regional conflicts in the region. Until 2008, Russia tried to keep the regional conflicts in South Caucasus in suspense in order to exploit them for its interests. Moscow did not allow these regional conflicts to turn into wars but maintained them at low-intensity. In fact, Russia has the capacity to resolve these conflicts, as it possesses all the means to influence the parties of the conflict. However, it never had made use of this power to bring peace to the disputed regions of Caucasus. With the war in 2008, Russia left its traditional policy and for the first time it directly intervened into a conflict taking side openly with the secessionists against a post-Soviet republic. It was suspected that Russia provided support to secessionist administrations in Georgia; however, this support was not officially declared and it was given in disguise using its peacekeeping forces in the two conflict regions of Georgia.¹⁴⁰

One of the reasons for this policy was the fear of spillover effect of such direct support on the secessionist movements in the North Caucasian autonomous republics of the Russian Federation, such as the ones in Chechnya and Dagestan. Taking these ethnic problems into consideration, Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia’s independence is a paradox. There is now a bizarre situation: While South Ossetians have gained their independence, their brethren in North Ossetia continue

¹³⁹ Paul Reynolds, “New Russian world order: the five principles”, *BBC*, September 1, 2008, accessed March 15, 2013, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7591610.stm>

¹⁴⁰ Nicu Popescu, “‘Outsourcing’ de facto Statehood: Russia and the Secessionist Entities in Georgia and Moldova”, *CEPS Policy Brief*, No.109 (2006): 2.

to be under Russian rule. Thus, the August war has a potential to destabilize the situation in the Northern Caucasian Republics which are under Russian rule. Russian recognition of the independence of the two autonomous republics of Georgia may serve as a precedent for the secessionist movements, which is dangerous for the Russian Federation itself. However, this situation is unlikely to create a significant threat to Russia in the short run.

3.4.3. Destroyed Image of Russia as a Peacemaker

Russian military intervention in the South Ossetian conflict also destroyed Russia's role as a reliable mediator and peacekeeper in the regional conflicts of the post-Soviet locale. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow has maintained the role of mediation in many conflicts in the post-Soviet republics such as Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Transnistria conflict between Moldova and Ukraine. Russian military intervention in the South Ossetian conflict was a manifestation of realist power expansionism of Russia, which was explained in the first chapter. Henceforth, the countries which are parties of these conflicts will probably question the credibility of Russia since they might suspect that they are being used by Kremlin for its geopolitical goals.

Being aware of this perceived image, Russia began to take more active role in the resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Starting from November 2008, a series of talks have been carried out by Azerbaijani and Armenian presidents under the mediation of Russian president Medvedev.¹⁴¹ With this move, Russia aimed at maintaining its role as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict since its reliability as a peace broker is doubted especially by Azerbaijan. There is a similarity between Georgia and Azerbaijan in that both countries have discredited Russia as an impartial mediator in their regional conflicts. Georgian mistrust for Russia as a peacekeeper turned out to be right. Azerbaijan is right to be worried that it might have the same fate with Georgia. Close Russian – Armenian military relations and the existence of Russian bases in Armenia give Azerbaijan good reason for such

¹⁴¹ President of Russia Official Web Portal, "Declaration between the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia and the Russian Federation", accessed April 23, 2013, <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/11/208708.shtml>

suspicion. Therefore, Russia must have initiated a new peace for the resolution of the conflict in order to repair its damaged image.

To sum up, the August 2008 war showed that Russian policy towards the region has become more assertive. This was because of the changing geostrategic factors such as increasing Western influence in the region. Changing Russian approach may have an impact on Azerbaijan and Armenia.

3.5. Effects of the War on the Relations of Georgia with the West

It is a well-known fact that Georgia has always aspired to be a part of Euro-Atlantic world since the day it gained its independence. The relations with the West intensified after Saakashvili came to power as a result of a US-supported civil upheaval. Saakashvili pursued pro-Western and American policies at the expense of aggravating relationships with Russia. The USA assisted the new Georgian administration in many areas. For example, American military assistance to Georgia has been worth about \$2 billion in the last 15 years.¹⁴² The US and the EU continued to support Saakashvili's regime despite criticisms about his failure to keep promises for democratic reforms and becoming despotic. Georgia also received the unconditional support of the USA in the process of its aspired NATO membership.

Having been elected with an overwhelming majority in the elections and gotten absolute Western support, Saakashvili took radical steps for the resolution of long-lasting regional ethnic conflicts in Georgia. He was determined to solve them during his term of office, which was a very ambitious and difficult goal to achieve.¹⁴³ However, Russian peacemaking monopoly over the regional conflicts in Georgia was an obstacle to his goal. Thus, Saakashvili sought to save the conflict resolution process in South Ossetia and Abkhazia from Russian monopoly by trying to internationalize them with the US and the EU support. Nevertheless, this was not a realistic goal, as Russia would never give consent to such a Western intervention in

¹⁴² Ariel Cohen and Robert E. Hamilton, "The Russian Military and The Georgia War: Lessons and Implications", *Strategic Studies Institute* (June 2011): 72.

¹⁴³ Ghia Nodia, "Georgia's policy towards Russia and the Conflict Regions: Options now", *Russian Analytical Digest*, Vol. 66 (November 2009): 6.

its sphere of interest. Ignoring such a reality, Saakashvili anticipated that the West would intervene and as a result, Russia would have to abandon its traditional policy in the conflict regions. As was expected, the status quo in the region did not change in favor of Tbilisi.

3.5.1. Failure of Western Policies in Georgia

In fact, the Caucasian regional conflicts have never been top priority in Western agenda. The US and EU recognized Russian domination in the conflict regions; however, they could have required an international peace-making mechanism and administration of South Ossetia and Abkhazia before the conflicts got more complicated.

As result of the provocative events of summer 2008, Saakashvili administration decided to use military power to solve South Ossetian conflict. Saakashvili probably anticipated a risk of war with Russia in case of a military operation to South Ossetia, but he must have thought the West would intervene in such a situation. However, he was mistaken; both the US and the EU failed to send a warning sign to Georgian president that they would not take the risk of defending Georgia in case of a war with Russia. Moreover, the US did nothing to stop Saakashvili from carrying out such a risky operation. American diplomats who were present in Georgia at the time of the conflict were probably informed about the Saakashvili's decision of military attack on South Ossetia. The US failed to predict Russian incursion in the face of several signs. In addition, both the US and the EU were unable to develop a realistic approach to respond to Russian ambitions and consequent belligerence.

The result of the war was a total frustration for Georgia. The US and the EU could not risk a war for the sake of Georgia; they did nothing more than condemning Russian aggression, calling for a peaceful solution and negotiations for ceasefire. After the ceasefire agreement, Russia did not fully observe the ceasefire terms. Russian troops are still just 50 km away from the capital Tbilisi, and displaced Georgian citizens are still not able to return to their homes in violation of the terms of the agreement. The EU and the US have been unable to force Russia to comply

with the terms of the agreement since August 2008. In fact, they lack instruments to do this.

Imposing economic sanctions on Russia would be an obliging alternative; however, European countries were not able to agree since they foresaw such sanctions might have counterproductive results for Europe. The EU countries, particularly those who have close economic relations with Russia thought that it would be unrealistic to jeopardize relations with Russia for Georgia at the outset of the Russian intervention. However, when Russian army began to occupy Georgian territory out of South Ossetia, approached capital Tbilisi and eventually recognized the independence of the conflict regions following the war, the EU declared that “there would no business as usual with Russia until Russian troops had fully pulled out of Georgia,”¹⁴⁴ Yet, the EU did not stand firm behind this statement of threat. Russian troops are still in the internationally recognized territory of Georgia (as of 2013), but the EU has not taken any concrete steps, whether economic or political, to force Russia to withdraw its troops from Georgia. The USA’s situation is not much more different from that of the EU’s.

As a result, one of the most important implications of the war was the declining prestige of the West. Russia literally occupied the territories of a country which is member of the Council of Europe, OSCE, and a candidate to NATO, ignoring the principles of international law. The apparently inadequate and reluctant response to this belligerence towards Georgia revealed the limits of the Western powers in the geopolitical rivalry in the region. Moreover, this lethargic attitude of the West caused disappointment and a loss of confidence for the West in Georgia. Strong disillusionment due to lack of Western support during the 2008 crisis is a widespread sentiment among Georgian population. Common public opinion is that the West was not able to respond to Russian assault, and just made diplomatic maneuvers rather than taking action to solve the problem.¹⁴⁵ However, not having another appropriate

¹⁴⁴ “No more business as usual”, *The Economist*, August 19, 2008, accessed March 20, 2013, http://www.economist.com/world/europe/displayStory.cfm?story_id=11955660&source=features_box_main

¹⁴⁵ Tamar Khidasheli, “Georgia’s European Way”, *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, Vol.3, 95-108 (2011): 101.

option to balance against the Russian threat, Tbilisi did not retreat from its traditional pro-Western course.

3.5.2. The USA – Georgian Relations after the War

It would have been unrealistic to expect a military intervention from the USA in the Georgian – Russian war. However, Washington could have prevented the outbreak of the war had it shaped its policies towards the region more circumspectly taking Russian factor into consideration. Being aware of the fact that a military solution was not a possible option to deter Russia from stopping bullying Georgia, the USA has since made use of all means available to confirm that it stood firm behind its close ally in the region. Improved relations between the US and Georgia were a consequence of the 2008 war.

The US was one of the countries which harshly criticized Russian military operation in Georgia. President George Bush condemned Russia and demanded that Russia immediately withdraw its troops from Georgian territory.¹⁴⁶ American government warned Russia of a significant long-term impact on their relations if Russia did not stop its disproportionate military operations.¹⁴⁷ US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice also played an active role in the ceasefire agreement process. US army began to deliver urgent humanitarian aid to Georgia a day after the ceasefire.¹⁴⁸

After the war was over, Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence on August 26, 2008. The US administration also harshly criticized this recognition calling it an irresponsible decision. Russia increased its support to Abkhazia and South Ossetia after its recognition of them. Russia became the guarantor of security in the two regions according to agreements signed. Similarly,

¹⁴⁶ “Bush condemns 'bullying' Russia”, *BBC News*, August 15, 2008, accessed April 24, 2013, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7563452.stm>

¹⁴⁷ The White House Press Briefing by Press Secretary Dana Perino and Senior Director for East Asian Affairs Dennis Wilder and Deputy National Security Advisor Ambassador Jim Jeffrey, August 10, 2008, accessed April 24, 2013, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/press_briefings.php?year=2008

¹⁴⁸ “Bush says US Military will deliver humanitarian aid to Georgia”, *The Guardian*, August 13, 2008, accessed April 24, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/aug/13/georgebush.georgia>

the US enhanced support to Georgia by signing agreements with Georgia.¹⁴⁹ The US support was not only in financial form. Secretary Rice announced a \$1 billion aid plan for Georgia during her visit to Tbilisi September 3, 2008. The US government also made commitments to Georgia for the reconstruction of its damaged infrastructure and military aid for the security of Georgia.¹⁵⁰ For example, the Pentagon pledged to aid Georgia to reconstruct its military.¹⁵¹ During his visit to Tbilisi on September 4, 2008, Vice President Cheney said: “We will help your people to heal this nation’s wounds, to rebuild this economy, and to ensure Georgia’s democracy, independence and further integration with the West.”¹⁵²

On 9 January 2009, the two countries signed a pact on democracy, defense, commercial, financial and educational issues. The declared aims of the agreement are the following: “a) deepening Georgian integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions, b) initiation of a program of improved security cooperation to enhance Georgian defense, c) strengthening Georgian candidature for NATO.”¹⁵³ Both countries also signed a contract and carried out joint military exercises in Georgia.¹⁵⁴

During President Barack Obama’s term, American support for Georgia slightly decreased due to Obama’s new Russian policy. This new policy was called a “reset in the relationships” by Vice President Biden.¹⁵⁵ The aim of this policy is restore the US – Russia relations that deteriorated during G. Bush’s presidency mainly due to

¹⁴⁹ Robert Coalson, “Russia Steps Up Cooperation With Breakaway Georgian Regions”, *Eurasia Insight*, May 2, 2009, accessed April 20 2013, http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp050209_pr.shtml

¹⁵⁰ American Government Archive, “United States Leads Surge of Donors Rebuilding Georgia”, October 22, 2008, accessed April 20, 2013, <http://www.america.gov/st/peacesec-english/2008/October/20081022161130idybeekcm0.8901178.html?CP.rss=true>

¹⁵¹ “Pentagon set on mission to rebuild Georgian military”, *Yahoo News*, September 9, 2008, accessed April 20, 2013, http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20080909/pl_afp/georgiarussiaconflictusmilitary_080909200602

¹⁵² The White House Office of the Vice President, “Remarks by Vice President Cheney and President Saakashvili of Georgia After Meeting”, September 4, 2008

¹⁵³ “United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership”, *Civil Georgia Daily News Online*, January 9, 2009, accessed April 20, 2013, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=20249>

¹⁵⁴ Giorgi Lomsadze, “Georgia: Contemplating War And Peace On A Make Believe Isle”, *Eurasia Insight*, June 4, 2009, accessed April 20, 2013, http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav060409b_pr.shtml

¹⁵⁵ Speech by US Vice President Joe Biden, International Security Conference, Munich, February 7, 2009.

the 2008 Georgian – Russian war. New American administration believes that both countries could identify areas of mutual interest that they could cooperate. This policy has been fairly successful. Russia and the USA have cooperated on several international issues such as arms control, and Iran and Afghanistan problems. As a result of this rapprochement, anti-American sentiments among Russian public decreased.¹⁵⁶

On the other hand, Obama's new Russian policy has had a negative impact on Georgia. Obama's Russia-first policy led to disregard of Russian misdeeds in Georgia. Obama administration seems less committed to Georgian NATO membership than the previous American administration, which Tbilisi is very worried about. Despite this change in American policy, Washington does not disregard Georgia completely. To illustrate, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed US support for Georgia's NATO membership along with other candidates during a NATO summit in Chicago on May 21, 2012.¹⁵⁷ In addition, the US aid to Georgia has steadily increased in the last five years.¹⁵⁸

All these developments after the war indicated that the US strengthened its alliance with Georgia in order to restore its damaged image in its geopolitical rivalry in the region against Russia. Washington must be aware of the fact that its international prestige will deteriorate even further if Russian influence rises in the region, and as a result, regional countries might be hesitant to collaborate with the US because of Russian pressure. In fact, their geopolitical conditions and geographic proximity to Russia is a prime determinant in regional countries' foreign policy choices. Therefore, Russia is one-step ahead of the USA in the rivalry.

¹⁵⁶ Peter Sawczak, "Obama's Russia Policy: The Wages and Pitfalls of the Reset", (paper presented at the Biennial Conference of the Australasian Association for Communist and Post-Communist Studies, Canberra, 3-4 February 2011), 1.

¹⁵⁷ "Clinton Says NATO Membership Should Grow At Next Summit", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, May 21, 2012, accessed April 20, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/nato-should-grow-at-next-summit-says-clinton/24588476.html>

¹⁵⁸ USAID-GEORGIA, "Georgia Country Profile", accessed April 20, 2013, <http://georgia.usaid.gov/about/country-profile>

3.5.3. Georgia – EU Relations after 2008 War

The 2008 war had an impact on Saakashvili administration's foreign policy approach. Relations with the US and NATO outweighed the relations with the EU before the war. The foreign policy documents published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia indicate this fact. In the Foreign Policy Strategy 2006-09, becoming NATO member was mentioned as a primary goal of Georgian Foreign Policy. The EU membership was not envisaged although integration with Europe was mentioned as one of the foreign policy goals.¹⁵⁹

The war changed the conditions and Tbilisi began to give more emphasis on its relations with the EU and NATO after 2008. Georgia concluded that NATO membership had turned into an impractical objective as result of the Russian occupation of its territories. Thus, Georgian leadership began to consider the EU as the sole option for guaranteeing Georgia's security and territorial integrity.

After the Russian recognition of the two secessionist regions, monitoring missions of OSCE and UNOMIG ended since they were not able to carry out their tasks any longer.¹⁶⁰ At present, EUMM (European Union Monitoring Mission) is the only international organization which observes the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Georgia expects that the EU will take on more active role in the resolution of the regional conflicts.

Georgian relations with the EU have been improving in other fields as well. In addition to the regional conflict matters, cooperation programs are carried out in the areas of political and socio-economic reforms and institutional building. Reform programs are in progress in the sectors of agriculture, justice, regional development, finance.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, accessed April 21, 2013, http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=geo&sec_id=8

¹⁶⁰ Vladimir Socor, "OSCE RIP in Georgia", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 6:12 (July 2009), accessed April 21, 2013, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35201

¹⁶¹ European Commission, "Development & Cooperation – Europeaid – Georgia", accessed April 21, 2013, http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/country-cooperation/georgia/georgia_en.htm

3.5.4. NATO – Georgia Relations after 2008 War

Despite its diminished hopes of becoming a NATO member after 2008 war, Georgia does not renounce its efforts for membership. Relations with NATO have continued. As a sign of solidarity, NATO took a number of steps to help Georgia after the war. First, NATO froze its relations with Russia condemning Russian occupation of Georgian territories and requested Russia to comply with the terms of the six-point ceasefire agreement.¹⁶² A NATO – Georgia commission was formed to strengthen relationship. North Atlantic Council convened in Georgian capital Tbilisi in September 2008.¹⁶³ This could be interpreted as an expression of NATO support for Georgia. However, this show of solidarity did not meet the expectations of Georgia since alliance members decided not to grant membership to Georgia. A few months after this disappointing decision for Georgia, NATO took another controversial step and decided to resume frozen relations with Moscow although the demands of NATO about the compliance with the terms of the ceasefire agreement were not fulfilled.¹⁶⁴ NATO had to take this decision as it needed Russian cooperation in other parts of the world such as Afghanistan. This incidence proves the fact that pragmatism of realist thinking prevails in international relations.

Georgia is still hopeful that it will eventually become a NATO member. Some experts believe that NATO's rejection of granting membership plan to Georgia in 2008 encouraged Kremlin to punish Georgia using hard power, and Russian aggression justified Georgian membership to NATO.¹⁶⁵ Russian relentless attitude might stimulate NATO members to stand firm against Kremlin's policies and support Georgian membership. In fact, German Chancellor Angela Merkel had given a sign of this option after meeting Medvedev for ceasefire agreement on August 12, 2008.

¹⁶²“NATO terms Russia's use of force 'disproportionate’”, *Los Angeles Times*, August 20, 2008, accessed April 22, 2013, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/aug/20/world/fg-georgia20>

¹⁶³NATO, “Visit to Georgia by the North Atlantic Council”, September 12, 2008, accessed April 22, 2013, <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/2008/0809-georgia/0808-nac.htm>

¹⁶⁴“NATO, Russia to resume military relationship”, *CNN International*, June 27, 2009, accessed April 22, 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/06/27/nato.russia/>

¹⁶⁵ Maddox Bronwen, “NATO should press on and give Georgia membership”, *The Times*, August 11, 2008.

She stated that the promise given to Georgia in Bucharest Summit was still valid.¹⁶⁶ However, Germany and France had required resolution of Georgia's internal conflicts before its NATO membership.

On December 7, 2011, NATO gave Georgia the status of "aspirant country".¹⁶⁷ As of 2013, there is not an agreement among NATO members on Georgia's membership.

3.5.5. Limits to Western Leverage towards Russia

The EU and the US have mutual interests in South Caucasus. While formulating policies to attain their goals in the region, they need to take their relations with Russia into consideration as both may overlap. Thus, Western instruments to control Russia in the region have always been and will continue to be limited.

It is known to all that EU is dependent on Russia energy. Therefore, the feasibility of containment of Russia with economic sanctions is uncertain bearing in mind that Russia is a permanent member of UN Security Council and possesses nuclear weapons.¹⁶⁸ Considering its pros and cons, countering Russia for the sake of Georgia is not a rational option for the EU states. German and French opposition against Georgian membership at Bucharest NATO in 2008 was a manifestation of this thinking. This perspective fits one of the main assumptions of realist theory which states that all states are rational actors pursuing their self-interest.

On the other hand, Russia has also strategic relations with the US and the EU since it has economic and financial links with Western markets. Considerable amount of its revenues come from its natural gas sales to Europe. Russia's using energy card may backfire in case Europe manages to find alternative energy supplies

¹⁶⁶ "Merkel, Medvedev Clash Over Russia's War in Sochi Talks", *Deutsche Welle*, August 15, 2008, accessed April 8, 2013, <http://www.dw.de/merkel-medvedev-clash-over-russias-war-in-sochi-talks/a-3567243-1>

¹⁶⁷ NATO, "Press Release (2011) 145", December 7, 2011, accessed April 8, 2013, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_81943.htm?mode=pressrelease

¹⁶⁸ Ariel Cohen, "Europe's Strategic Dependence on Russian Energy", *The Heritage Foundation* (November 5, 2007), accessed April 23, 2013, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/bg2083.cfm>

to minimize its dependency on Russian energy. In this case, Russian economy would be badly affected. Moreover, Russia relies on Western countries for new technologies for its energy, financial, and military sectors.¹⁶⁹

All things considered, the West has inadequate leverage to get involved in the Georgian-Russian problem and Kremlin can easily close its eyes to Western warnings.

3.6. Impacts of the War on Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

The 2008 war had also implications for the other South Caucasian states as it produced a new situation that has the capacity to disturb the balance and stability in the region. The 2008 war created challenges to regional countries, which will shape their future foreign policies. There is a new geopolitical reality in the Caucasus region.

Azerbaijan is probably the second most affected country by the war. Russia has always been a key country that Azerbaijan needs to take into consideration when shaping its foreign policy. In fact, like its neighbors Georgia and Armenia, Azerbaijan has reasons to fear Russia. Therefore, like most of the post-Soviet countries Azerbaijan took a neutral stance and refrained from taking side with one of the parties of the conflict.

Moscow views the entire Caucasus as geostrategically important for its aim of maintaining its great power status. After South Caucasian countries gained independence from Moscow, Russia has followed the policy of 'controlled instability' in these three states using their ethnic conflicts and disputed regions between them. With this policy, Russia has maintained its influence in the region and used it as a tool to reach its political and economic goals.¹⁷⁰ Like Georgia, Azerbaijan has such vulnerability against realist foreign policies of Kremlin due to its long-lasting dispute with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh and the ethnic problem of Lezgins in its northern border with Russian Federation. In fact, being

¹⁶⁹ Ariel Cohen, "Dealing with Russia", *Ariel Cohen & Associates*, September 9, 2008, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://arielcohen.com/dealing-with-russia>

¹⁷⁰ Kavus Abushov, "Policing the Near Abroad: Russian Foreign Policy in the South Caucasus," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 63:2 (June 2009): 187.

aware of this fact, Azerbaijan has followed a balanced foreign policy since Haydar Aliyev came to power in 1993. The main objectives of Azerbaijan's foreign policy are the following: protecting its independence, resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and collaborating with regional powers as a key partner.¹⁷¹

3.6.1. Lessons for the Azerbaijani Administration

Russian military attack on Georgia could be interpreted as a warning message for Azerbaijan. The case of Georgia could teach some lessons to Baku about two issues: its relations with the West and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

To start with, Azerbaijan and Georgia are similar in that both countries' relations with the West have been growing noticeably lately. Azerbaijan has formed close relations with the West in the last two decades owing to its attractiveness stemming from its rich energy resources. For its part, Georgia attracted external actors because of its geostrategic location as a transit route for Caspian energy resources. One could derive a result looking at his analogy. Despite Tbilisi's extremely pro-Western foreign policy, Western powers were not able to prevent Russia from using hard power against Georgia as they lacked adequate means. An implication of the 2008 war was that Baku witnessed the fact that having close relations with Western powers is not a security guarantee against Russia.

A state's primary concerns are survival and security; and it seeks to preserve status quo in order to maintain its position in the international system.¹⁷² This assumption of defensive realism is a good explanation of Azerbaijan's current policy. The 2008 war indicated that disregarding Moscow's interests in the region could lead to destabilization of the status quo, causing a security dilemma. Therefore, it is quite reasonable for Azerbaijan to prioritize maintaining good relations with Russia, which is a regional hegemon, for security reasons. Baku may be pressurized by Russia, or even become the next victim of Russian belligerence if Kremlin considers that Azerbaijan has become too pro-Western. Thus, Azerbaijan is following a very

¹⁷¹ Anar Valiyev, "Finlandization or Strategy of Keeping the Balance?, Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy Since The Russian-Georgian War", *Eurasia Policy Memo* 112 (2010): 1.

¹⁷² Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma"

controlled foreign policy to balance the actors in the region. Azerbaijani political analyst Anar Valiyev calls this foreign policy “‘silent diplomacy’ by which Baku is gradually developing Azerbaijan’s role in the region using contradictions between powers”.¹⁷³

Azerbaijan now faces Russian revisionism. Passive stance of the West against Russian aggression toward Georgia forced Azerbaijan to revise its relations with the West like all other regional countries. Baku is questioning the merit of improving relations with the West after witnessing inadequate support of the West to Georgia against Russian military assault. This new reality may force Azerbaijan to come closer to Russia. Actually, it is undeniably much easier for authoritarian Azerbaijani regime to collaborate with Kremlin than Western powers in the political, economic and military fields, as the West demands political and economic reforms in order to improve relations.

Another significant implication of the Georgian – Russian war for Azerbaijan concerns the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Georgia’s unsuccessful attempt to resolve South Ossetian conflict would certainly have an impact on Azerbaijan’s policy regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Military solution to this conflict has become almost impossible as an option for Azerbaijani side. As a result of its increasing revenues from petroleum and natural gas export, Azerbaijani government managed to modernize and improve its military. Azerbaijan has been steadily increasing its military budget. In his address to graduates of National Higher Military College, on June 25, 2012, President İlham Aliyev stated, “Military expenditure is our biggest budget item. Over the past few years our military spending has increased more than 20 times. The current armed forces budget of \$3.6 billion, which is [sic] 50 percent more than Armenia’s total expenditure.”¹⁷⁴ This shows that Azerbaijani leadership does not reject a military solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, the Georgian military defeat in South Ossetia is a discouraging precedent for Baku.

¹⁷³ Valiyev, “Finlandization or Strategy of Keeping the Balance?”

¹⁷⁴ President of Azerbaijan Official Website, “İlham Aliyev’s speech at the ceremony of the Haydar Aliyev Military School”, June 25, 2012, accessed April 25, 2013, <http://en.president.az/articles/5306>

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a prime determinant of Azerbaijani internal politics due to its tremendous effects on the society. Today, 20% percent of Azerbaijan's territory is under Armenian occupation and the conflict caused about 1 million Azerbaijanis to become IDPs. It is also a complicated regional conflict to resolve. Conflicting interests of the regional and world powers that have interests in the Caucasus region make the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem difficult. Huseynov argues "It (Nagorno-Karabakh conflict) is unique in a sense that it has always been a conflict that cannot be solved exclusively on an intra state level and requires combination of intra-state measures with inter-state and supra-state measures."¹⁷⁵ Russia is one of these actors which have assumed the role of the main mediator between the parties since the early years of the conflict. Due to its pragmatic inconsistent policies, Azerbaijan is particularly suspicious of reliability of Russia as a mediator in the conflict.¹⁷⁶ In addition, Russia's close relations with Armenia especially in the military field increase Azerbaijan's suspicions for Russia. To illustrate, Armenia signed military agreements during Russian President Medvedev's visit to Armenia in September 2010. The agreement extended the duration of Russian military base in Gumru until 2044. In return, Russia offered Armenia military aid and modernization of its army.¹⁷⁷ In the press conference following the signing of the treaty, Armenia's President Sarkisyan said "Our relations are those of strategic allies, and this reflects our peoples' feelings and meets the demands of Armenia's and - I hope – Russia's real national interests."¹⁷⁸ To put it briefly, Armenian – Russian alliance continues to be firm and strategic.

Armenia's close alliance with Russia was a deterrent for Azerbaijan to take a military action in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict also before August 2008. Russian-Georgian war in 2008, however, confirmed this fact. Baku probably recognizes how

¹⁷⁵ Tabib Huseynov, "Mountainous Karabakh: Conflict Resolution through Power-Sharing and Regional Integration", *Peace Studies Journal*, No. 6 (2005): 2.

¹⁷⁶ Bahar BAŞER, "Third Party Mediation in Nagorno Karabakh: Part of the Cure or Part of the Disease?" *OAKA*, 3:5, 86-114. (2008): 97.

¹⁷⁷ "Russia, Armenia strengthen military ties", *Russia Today*, August 22, 2010, accessed April 25, 2013, <http://rt.com/politics/medvedev-armenia-military-security/>

¹⁷⁸ President of Russia Official Web Portal, "Joint news conference following Russian-Armenian talks", August 22, 2010, accessed April 25, 2013, <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/810/print>

a military clash with Russia's ally may result in. In this regard, Russia implicitly warned Azerbaijan that in case of an armed hostility it would intervene in the conflict as Armenia is a member of a Russian-led CSTO.¹⁷⁹

In a nutshell, in this new context, Azerbaijan will probably maintain its balanced policy regarding its relations with Russia and the West. Russian influence on Azerbaijan with respect to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has increased since the 2008 war. Baku's position in the Karabakh conflict is more difficult today. Continuation of this conflict has a negative effect on Azerbaijan's goal to intensify relations with the West. Azerbaijani ruling elites are aware of the fact that their country's security depends on maintaining good relations with Kremlin. As a result, they abstain from involving in intricate Caucasian politics in order not to irritate any of the partners with whom they have strategic relations. They have been successful in implementing this policy to date.

3.7. Impacts of War on Armenia's Foreign Policy

3.7.1. Georgia's significance for Armenia

Armenia is one of the most affected countries by the war. As a landlocked country with limited resources, Armenia is the least developed country in the region. Its relations with Georgia are of vital importance for Armenia as its borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey are closed due to its long-lasting problems, which has had a negative effect on the economy of the country since it gained its independence. Azerbaijani and Turkish embargo obliges Armenia to have good relations with Georgia in view of the fact that it is the only transit country for Armenia to reach the ports of Black Sea and is an important trade partner. Armenia considers Georgia a crucial route that links the country to the world.¹⁸⁰ About 70% of the Armenian

¹⁷⁹ Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov at Joint Press Conference of Foreign Ministers from CSTO Member States, Moscow, September 4, 2008.

¹⁸⁰ Hovannes Shoghikian, "Armenia claims huge losses from Georgian crisis", *Armenialiberty*, September 3, 2008, accessed April 25, 2013, <http://www.armenialiberty.org/armeniareport/report/en/2008/09/78A3F6D5-0F3E-4908-911D-B91CE3CD6312.ASP>

foreign trade is carried out from Georgia's Black Sea ports.¹⁸¹ Therefore, Armenia suffered some losses from the war as a result of the interrupted trade during the war.

3.7.2. A Brief Overview of the Features of Armenian Foreign Policy

Russia has always had influential role in Armenian foreign policy. Its dependence on Russia is mainly caused by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. If it were not for the Russian interference, Armenia would not be able to maintain its non-compromising foreign policy regarding its relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan for which it has a deep and incessant fear and mistrust. Moreover, Russian bases in its territory are a kind of guarantee of security for Armenia.

The Armenian Diaspora living mainly in the US and France has also a significant role in shaping the Armenian foreign policy. Diaspora's effective lobbying activities in the US and France produce not only political but also financial benefits for Armenia. Armenia receives considerable amount of financial support from both France and the US. To illustrate, Armenia was the second country that received the largest American aid per capita after Israel in 2005- a total of more than \$1.6 billion since 1992.¹⁸² Furthermore, Armenia has always tried to maintain good relations with the US in order to get financial aid and support for its so-called allegations of genocide which Armenia has been traditionally using as a foreign policy instrument against Turkey.

3.7.3. Armenian Foreign Policy during the 2008 War

All these factor mentioned above forces Armenia to follow a balanced foreign policy. Armenian case proves the defensive realist perspective, which argues that security and survival define the behavior of states and that their concern is to preserve status quo to maintain their position in the system by balancing or bandwagoning. As a result, not to irritate any of the conflicting countries that it needs

¹⁸¹ Ashley Corinne Killough, "Armenia in Need of an Alternative Export-Import Route", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 5:195 (2008).

¹⁸² Michael Mainville, "Second-Largest Recipients of U.S. Aid, Armenians Fight To Get Ahead", *The Sun* (New York), August 9, 2005, accessed April 25, 2013, <http://www.nysun.com/foreign/second-largest-recipients-of-us-aid-armenians/18286/>

to have good relations with, namely Russia and Georgia, Armenia adopted a controlled balanced policy during the Russian-Georgian crisis of 2008 and took a neutral stance, notwithstanding its loss from the war which was estimated at about \$670 million. During the Russian-Georgian war, Yerevan called the parties to resolve the conflict peacefully. Armenia's dependence on Georgia made Armenian government follow a more controlled policy so as not to infuriate Tbilisi. Armenian economy could have been damaged more had Yerevan not followed a constructive foreign policy regarding its relations with Georgia. Yet, a day after the war was over, Armenian president Sarkisyan called Russian president Medvedev to praise Russia's efforts to bring 'stability' to the region.¹⁸³ On the other hand, Yerevan did not recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia despite the pressure coming from Kremlin.

3.7.4. Armenian Foreign Policy after the 2008 Georgian – Russian War

After the 2008 Georgian – Russian conflict, Yerevan seems to have understood the necessity to diversify its options to in order to access the world as a landlocked country. In order to achieve this goal, Armenian president Sarkisyan started to put emphasis on normalizing relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan. However, normalizing relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan was not an easy task for the Armenian government. Yerevan declared that that they had no preconditions to start talks to normalize the relations and they are anticipating the same attitude from Turkey.¹⁸⁴ On the other hand, contradicting its own declaration, Armenian administration highlighted their prerequisite of recognition of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians' right to self-determination by Azerbaijan. In addition, Yerevan demanded that Azerbaijan leave the territory between Nagorno-Karabakh and

¹⁸³ Hovannes Shoghikyan, "Russia seeks Armenian recognition of Georgian regions", *Armenia Liberty*, September 3, 2008, accessed April 25, 2013, <http://www.armenialiberty.org/armeniareport/report/en/2008/09/93D9ECA8-7301-4920-BF20-9056B6124D20.ASP>

¹⁸⁴ "Armenian Foreign Minister Urges Turkey to Reopen Border", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, November 24, 2008, accessed April 27, 2013, http://www.rferl.org/content/Armenian_Foreign_Minister_Urges_Turkey_To_Reopen_Border/1352501.html

Armenia so that two entities would have a land border.¹⁸⁵ These were not realistic demands to be accepted by Azerbaijan and Turkey.

There was a short period of ‘attempts of rapprochement’ between Turkey and Armenia soon after the 2008 war, which was also called ‘football diplomacy’ in September 2008. Some analysts argue that the US and the EU forced Armenia to start normalizing relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan in order to decrease Russian influence on Armenia.¹⁸⁶ To normalize relations, the two countries reached an agreement in April 2009 which envisaged beginning diplomatic relations and the lifting of the Turkish embargo against Armenia. Foreign Ministers of the two countries signed protocols on these issues in August 2009 which would be ratified by the parliaments of the two sides. The protocol states:

*“implement a dialogue on the historical dimension with the aim to restore mutual confidence between the two nations, including an impartial scientific examination of the historical records and archives to define existing problems and formulate recommendations,”*¹⁸⁷

Rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey produced no tangible results also because of Azerbaijan’s skepticism. Baku thought Turkey was forcing Azerbaijan to make concessions to Armenia for the resolution of the Karabakh conflict.¹⁸⁸ Azerbaijan harshly criticized Turkey’s attempt as the protocols did not mention the resolution of Karabakh conflict as a precondition to normalize relations with Yerevan. As a reaction to Turkey’s efforts, Azerbaijan took a number of measures to prevent this initiative such as playing the energy card. Due to mainly Azerbaijan’s opposition and domestic political developments in Turkey, there was

¹⁸⁵ “Russia to Host Talks Between Armenian, Azerbaijani President”, *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, November 1, 2008, accessed April 27, 2013, http://www.rferl.org/content/Russia_To_Host_Talks_Between_Armenian_Azerbaijani_Presidents/1337251.html

¹⁸⁶ Kamer Kasim, “Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia Triangle”, *Journal of Turkish Weekly*, May 27, 2009, accessed March 27, 2013, <http://www.turkishweekly.net/columnist/3153/turkeyazerbaijanarmeniatriangle.html>

¹⁸⁷ Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Protocol on Development of Relations Between The Republic of Turkey and The Republic of Armenia”, accessed April 27, 2013, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/protocol-on-development-of-relations-between-the-republic-of-turkey-and-the-republic-of-armenia.en.mfa>

¹⁸⁸ Alman Mir-Ismael, “Responding to Georgia Crisis, Turkey Seeks New Caucasus Security Initiative”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 5:161 (2008).

not any progress about the protocols. On April 22, 2010, the Armenian side declared that they decided to halt the process as Turkey failed to ratify the agreement in a reasonable time.¹⁸⁹

There was in all this an implication of the 2008 war which worked in favor of Armenia. Georgia's unsuccessful attempt to resolve its regional conflicts by military means can be a discouraging example for Azerbaijani leadership. Compared to its rival Azerbaijan, Armenia's economy is much weaker. Therefore, Armenia is not able to allocate as much money for defense budget as Azerbaijan. In case of an armed clash, Armenian army would probably have difficulty confronting Azerbaijani army. For this reason, Armenian administration hopes that Azerbaijan understands that a military solution to the conflict is not realistic after the developments that took place in August 2008.

Finally, after Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, there were claims that Armenia would follow the same path like Russia for Karabakh Armenians and recognize their independence. However, President Sarkisyan refuted such rumors during one of his election campaign speeches in January 2013. He stated that such a decision would finish the peace negotiations and then an armed conflict would be inevitable.¹⁹⁰

3.8. Implications for the Energy Policies in South Caucasia

One of the most important factors that defined South Caucasian and Caspian politics has been the energy issue since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Caspian region has always been an area of geopolitical rivalry among world powers because of its rich energy resources. Russian monopoly over the energy resources of the region ended in the post-Soviet period and the other world and regional powers, the US, the EU, China, Turkey, etc., started to have a share in the energy pie. International oil companies projected the construction of alternative pipelines to

¹⁸⁹ "Armenia Suspends Normalization of Ties with Turkey", *BBC News*, April 22, 2010.

¹⁹⁰ "Licentious Behavior of Azerbaijani Authorities is First of All Harming Them: President of Armenia", *Armenpress News Agency*, January 21, 2013, accessed April 23, 2013, <http://armenpress.am/eng/news>; CEDR, January 22, 2013, Doc. No:CEP-950061

transport the petroleum and natural gas to world markets circumventing Russian territory so that European dependency on Russian energy would be reduced.

Azerbaijan with its rich oil and natural resources and Georgia as a transit country for the transportation of these resources are two geostrategically important countries in the South Caucasus. The two countries also will serve as a transit route for the Caspian energy resources if the planned pipeline projects connecting the two sides of the Caspian Sea are realized. Exclusion of Armenia due to its problems with Turkey and Azerbaijan increased the importance of Georgia as the only route for the pipelines that would transfer oil and natural gas to Western markets circumventing Russia and Iran. These developments in the region are obviously against Russian interests. It is often argued that the main Russian motive in its war in Georgia was to undermine the security of Georgia as a transit route for energy resources.¹⁹¹ Therefore, it is inevitable that the 2008 war has had implications for the current and future energy issues in the region.

3.8.1. Existing Pipelines in the Region

Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) is the main pipeline with the highest capacity in the region. BTC is a 1,768 kilometer crude oil pipeline with a capacity of more than one million barrels of oil a day which started to function on 25 May 2005. It carries Baku petroleum to the port of Ceyhan, a Mediterranean port in Turkey, via Georgian territory.¹⁹² In addition, there is also Baku – Tbilisi – Erzurum (BTE) natural gas pipeline (also known as South Caucasus Pipeline) which started its deliveries in 2006. It follows the same route as BTC. It was built to supply Georgia and Turkey with natural gas. In the long term, this pipeline will supply natural gas to the projected Southern Gas Corridor pipelines, such as Nabucco Pipeline, Turkey–Greece pipeline and Greece–Italy pipeline¹⁹³ BTC oil pipeline and BTE natural gas

¹⁹¹ Tornike Sharashenidze, “Interpreting the Tension in Georgian–Russian Relations”, *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, No. 41, (September 2012):1.

¹⁹² BP, “BTC Loads 1000th Tanker at Ceyhan”, accessed April 26, 2013.
<http://www.bp.com/genericarticle.do?categoryId=2012968&contentId=7058707>

¹⁹³ “Supsa Pipeline”, Wikipedia, accessed April 26, 2013,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baku%E2%80%93Supsa_Pipeline

pipeline have substantially altered the economy of the South Caucasus region, and laid the basis of a new intercontinental energy architecture.

Baku-Novorossiysk oil pipeline is the pipeline that transports Azerbaijani oil to Russia, which is an alternative to the BTC. Compared to BTC, Baku-Novorossiysk oil pipeline has considerably a low capacity. (5 million tons a year)¹⁹⁴ Baku – Supsa is another oil pipeline which has a considerably low capacity compared to BTC. Its capacity is 145,000 barrels per day. It transfers Baku oils to the Black Sea through Georgian territory. It was constructed after agreement between Azerbaijan and Georgia presidents in 1996, and began to function in 1999.¹⁹⁵



Source: <http://oilrelations.weebly.com/national-influence.html>

3.8.2. Immediate effects of the 2008 Conflict on the current Pipelines

In 2008 war, Russian forces cautiously avoided giving damage to Baku-Supsa and BTC pipelines. Russian vigilance was probably due to the sensitivity of the energy issue, which is a key element shaping the relations of states. A Russian sabotage on the pipelines would have had unpleasant consequences for Russia. It would have caused severe problems in its relations with the West, particularly with the EU. Although there were no attacks on the pipelines crossing through the

¹⁹⁴ “Baku-Novorossiysk Pipeline”, Wikipedia, accessed April 26, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baku-Novorossiysk_Pipeline

¹⁹⁵ “Supsa Pipeline”

Georgian territory during the war, the flow of oil was temporarily suspended due to security reasons.¹⁹⁶ Thus, the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline was the only alternative pipeline that Azerbaijan could use. The transportation of oil through this pipeline dramatically increased during this period.¹⁹⁷ A short time after the war was over, the transfer of petroleum and natural gas via Georgian route was resumed, and the export of oil Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline substantially decreased. (2,064,000 tons in 2012) This is ten times less than the exports through BTC.¹⁹⁸

3.8.3. Planned Pipelines in the Caspian Region

- **The Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline:** a submarine pipeline between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. An alternative plan proposes its connection to Kazakhstan gas resources.¹⁹⁹ It will provide central Europe with natural gas, circumventing Russia and Iran. In Baku, it will connect to the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline, and with the projected Trans Anatolian pipeline.²⁰⁰
- **The Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline:** a proposed natural gas pipeline from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz gas field through Turkey to Europe. It is joint project of Turkish Botaş and TPAO and Azerbaijani SOCAR oil companies. It is planned to be constructed from 2014 to 2018.²⁰¹
- **The Nabucco pipeline:** a natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan to Austria by the way of Turkey. It will also reach Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary with additional smaller pipelines. It aims at diversifying the natural gas supply routes to Europe to reduce Europe's dependence on Russia. The main supplier of this pipeline will be Azerbaijan

¹⁹⁶ "BP shuts in Georgia links", *Upstream International Oil&Gas Newspaper*, August 12, 2008, accessed April 26, 2013, <http://www.upstreamonline.com/live/article1161539.ece>

¹⁹⁷ "Azerbaijan decreases oil exports via Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline", *Regnum News Agency*, accessed April 26, 2013, <http://www.regnum.ru/english/887804.html>

¹⁹⁸ "SOCAR exports 25m tonnes of oil by oil routes in 2012", *News.AZ*, January 8, 2013, accessed April 26, 2013, <http://www.news.az/articles/economy/74716>

¹⁹⁹ Shamil Midkhatovich Yenikeeff, "Kazakhstan's Gas: Export Markets and Export Routes", *Oxford Institute for Energy Studies*, NG 25 (November 2008): 68.

²⁰⁰ "Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline", Wikipedia, accessed April 26, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trans-Caspian_Gas_Pipeline

²⁰¹ "Trans-Anatolian_gas_pipeline", Wikipedia, accessed April 26, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trans-Anatolian_gas_pipeline

along with Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Iraq and Egypt. It is planned to be finished by 2017. Russian South Stream project is seen as a rival to this project.²⁰²

3.8.4. Russia's Concerns about the Planned Pipelines

Russia holds the monopoly in the European energy market as an oil and natural gas supplier, which makes EU countries dependent on Russia. European countries are very enthusiastic about finding alternative energy route in order to reduce this dependency. However, Russia is very uneasy about the above mentioned planned pipeline projects as it will lose its domination in the energy sector. Russian leaders and experts often express their concerns about the pipeline projects, especially the Nabucco and the Trans-Caspian pipelines. For example, Alexander Golovin, an expert diplomat on Caspian issues, argues that “a major gas pipeline would pose a serious, dangerous risk to the prosperity of the entire region (Caspian).”²⁰³ Regarding the Trans-Caspian pipeline, the EU was notified by Russian Foreign Ministry stating “the project seemed to have been adopted without taking into account the internationally accepted legal and geopolitical situation in the Caspian basin, and as Caspian Sea littoral state, Russia could veto any international agreement allowing for the pipeline to be built.”²⁰⁴ Kremlin not only considers the efforts for alternative pipeline projects as a menace to its economic interests, but also questions the viability of them. Ivan Grachev, State Duma Energy Committee Deputy Head, stated that “the signing of the agreement on the Nabucco project was an attempt to put pressure on Russia.” He also questioned the viability of the project.²⁰⁵

²⁰² “Nabucco Pipeline”, Wikipedia, accessed April 26, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nabucco_Pipeline

²⁰³ Sergei Blagov, “Russia Tries To Scuttle Proposed Trans-Caspian Pipeline”, *Eurasianet*, March 27, 2006, accessed April 26, 2013, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav032806.shtml>

²⁰⁴ “Russia frets over EU plans to link up Caspian gas fields”, *EU Observer*, September 9, 2011, accessed April 26, 2013, <http://euobserver.com/economic/113608>

²⁰⁵ “Russian MPs criticize Nabucco gas pipeline project”, *Eurussia Centre*, July 14, 2009, accessed April 26, 2013, <http://www.eu-russiacentre.org/news/russian-mps-criticize-nabucco-gas-pipeline-project.html>

When we look at the figures of Russian gas and oil exports from 2007 to 2011, it is seen that current South Caucasus pipelines, namely BTC, BTE, and Baku – Supsa can hardly challenge Russian energy monopoly, as shown in the next page. Thus, they cannot pose a significant threat to Russian interests. In fact, what Russia is worried about is the realization of the planned projects. Only a small fraction of the rich Caspian oil and natural gas resources is being used at present. Caspian Sea littoral countries have about 14% of the world's total proven oil reserves, and about 50% of the world's total proven natural gas reserves.²⁰⁶ Through alternative pipelines, the flow of natural gas and oil to world markets will substantially increase once they begin to function. In addition, according to some proposals, Central Asian countries Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan will also supply natural gas to these pipelines. It is obvious that such a development would seriously affect Russian interests. All these facts clearly indicate how geostrategically important the energy issue is for Russia regarding its relations with South Caucasus and the Caspian region.

²⁰⁶ BP, *BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2012*, accessed April 26, 2013, <http://www.bp.com/sectiongenericarticle800.do?categoryId=9037178&contentId=7068624>

Table 1.

World imports of crude oil by country (1,000 b/d)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	% change 11/10
Eastern Europe and Eurasia	7,294.1	6,508.2	7,243.3	8,255.7	8,568.8	3.8
Russia	6,993.8	6,173.2	6,828.8	7,852.2	7,994.3	1.8
Others	300.4	335.1	414.6	403.5	574.4	42.4

Table 2.

World natural gas exports by country (million standard cu m)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	% change 11/10
Eastern Europe and Eurasia	303,390	315,360	259,220	287,490	319,709	11.2
Azerbaijan	1,280	5,380	5,860	5,500	5,200	-5.5
Kazakhstan	640	800	-	1,200	1,200	-
Russia	231,830	237,300	211,660	228,650	245,799	7.5
Turkmenistan	52,400	55,800	29,900	30,740	46,110	50.0
Ukraine	2,600	1,000	-	-	-	-
Uzbekistan	14,640	15,080	11,800	21,400	21,400	-

Source: OPEC Annual Statistical Bulletin 2012²⁰⁷

3.8.5. Energy Security: August 2008 Georgian – Russian War and its Aftermath

The most significant implication of the 2008 war for the region was increasing concerns about the security of the current and planned pipelines crossing through Georgian territory. It is argued by some that by recognizing two autonomous republics of Georgia and fortifying its military presence there, Russia achieved a geostrategical gain to control the South Caucasus energy corridor. The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development analysts contend that Russia's aim was to weaken Georgia's geostrategic importance as a secure transit route for Caspian energy.²⁰⁸ Sohov argues that paradoxically both hard-line Russian nationalists and those who consider it a threat share this view.²⁰⁹ In fact, Russia never welcomed the BTC, Baku-Supsa, and BTE pipelines; however, it was not able to

²⁰⁷ OPEC, *Annual Statistical Bulletin 2012*, accessed April 26, 2013, http://www.opec.org/opec_web/static_files_project/media/downloads/publications/ASB2012.pdf

²⁰⁸ The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, "After August 2008: Consequences of the Russian-Georgian War", (2008): 13.

²⁰⁹ Nikolai Sokov, "The South Caucasus Corridor After The Russian-Georgian War", *Ponars Eurasia Policy Memo*, No. 49 (2009): 1.

prevent their construction due to its own domestic problems such as Chechnya war and limitations in the transitional period after the fall of the Soviet Union.

There is not much evidence that Russia aimed at disrupting the oil and natural gas flow through Georgian territory by its attack on Georgia. However, the five-day war raised some questions about the feasibility of transporting energy through the South Caucasus corridor. In fact, it has been long argued that instability caused by regional conflicts in the region may pose a threat to the energy transit in South Caucasus. The possibility of these regional conflicts' turning into a large scale war has always been a cause of concern for both the regional states and the external actors who have stakes in the energy resources of the region. Therefore, security and stability of the region is of vital importance for the continuation of the internationally funded energy projects.²¹⁰ In addition, future pipeline projects like Nabucco which will pass through the region may have difficulty attracting investors due to security concerns. The war in Georgia seems to have delayed the construction of the EU's Nabucco project. No significant steps have been taken since the war.

Whatever Russian aim was, the 2008 war was perceived as Kremlin's message to regional countries, namely Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, that Russia is against alternative pipelines and wants to maintain its energy monopoly in the entire region.

3.8.6. Developments Regarding the Energy Issue after 2008

Georgian - Russian war did not bring about the expected instability in Tbilisi which would cause a regime change. Indeed the flow of oil and natural gas through the existing pipelines resumed shortly after the armed conflict. Russia did not opt to disrupt the South Caucasus energy corridor although it had the capacity to do so. However, Moscow achieved its aim to undermine the reputation of Georgia as a transit energy route. Russia still continues its attempts to impose its energy policies in the region using non-military instruments. Moscow offered its alternative routes

²¹⁰ Güner Özkan, "The War Georgia and Turkish Foreign Policy Towards the South Caucasus", (paper presented at the 4th International Foreign Policy Symposium: Turkish Foreign Policy in the new Era, Kars, April 29-30, 2009)

such as the North Stream and South Stream projects arguing that the South Caucasus energy corridor is not efficient. Russia offered the South Stream project as an alternative to Nabucco. South Stream will transport Caspian natural gas to Europe under the Black Sea. With this project, Russia will also have a chance to circumvent Ukraine with which it had problems over the pipeline carrying Russian gas to Europe due to price disagreement.

The West and the regional countries are aware of the Russian efforts. Western support for the South Caucasus energy corridor continues. This support is mentioned in the US - Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership, which was signed a few months after the war as a sign of solidarity between the two countries. An article of the charter states: "Recognizing the importance of a well-functioning, market-oriented energy sector, the United States and Georgia intend to explore opportunities for increasing Georgia's energy production, enhance energy efficiency, and increase the physical security of energy transit through Georgia to European markets, We intend to build upon over a decade of cooperation among our two countries and Azerbaijan and Turkey, which resulted in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Supsa oil pipelines and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipelines, to develop a new Southern Corridor to help Georgia and the rest of Europe diversify their supplies of natural gas by securing imports from Azerbaijan and Central Asia."²¹¹

In 2009, Russia made an appealing offer to Azerbaijan: buying all its natural gas at the European market prices. Moscow's aim was obviously to block the realization of the Nabucco pipeline project. However, Azerbaijan did not accept Russia's bid as it would hamper its economic and political relations with Western countries and would make Azerbaijan dependent on Russia.²¹² Azerbaijan's cautious foreign policy regarding its relations with the West and Russia may impede the realization of the future pipeline projects. Baku does not want to take side in the

²¹¹ "United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership", *Civil Georgia Daily News Online*, January 9, 2009, accessed April 20, 2013, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=20249>

²¹² Famil Qurbanov, "Debate on Caspian Sea and Future of Nabucco Gas Pipeline Project", *Caspian Weekly*, 04 March 2010, accessed April 28, 2013, <http://en.caspianweekly.org/center-for-energy-research/928-debate-on-caspian-sea-and-future-of-nabucco-gas-pipeline-project.html>

Western – Russian geopolitical rivalry in the South Caucasus; it follows a balanced foreign policy.

Despite its balanced foreign policy, Azerbaijan did not hesitate to use its energy card against Turkey in 2009 as a reaction to Turkish government's efforts for rapprochement with Armenia. Ilham Aliyev paid a visit to Moscow on April 16-17, 2009, and signed a deal on selling natural gas to Russia. He stated that there is no limit to the amount of gas that Azerbaijan can sell to Russia. He also added that the amount of oil sent to the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline could be increased.²¹³ Azerbaijan's move could also be interpreted as an effort to get Moscow's support in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in return for oil and natural gas. This is also an example of how energy and regional conflict issues are interrelated in the region. This is also good example of how the Russian influence over the regional conflicts works for the interests of Russia. This development could be an indication of a change in Azerbaijan's energy policy. If Azerbaijan comes closer to Russia more, it would be the end of the Nabucco project.

²¹³ Shahin Abbasov, "Azerbaijan: Is Baku Offering A Natural Gas Carrot To Moscow For Help With Karabakh?", *Eurodialogue*, May 2009, accessed April 28, 2013, <http://www.eurodialogue.org/Is-Baku-Offering-Natural-Gas-Carrot-To-Moscow-For-Help-With-Karabakh>

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

4.1. Conclusion

This study was an attempt to discuss some of the implications of the 2008 war for the South Caucasus region from realist and geopolitical perspectives, by also giving due consideration to their background and causes. The following are the main findings of the dissertation.

2008 Georgian – Russian war was a small-scale armed conflict. However, it had significant results which were far beyond Georgia.²¹⁴ It caused a great friction in the relations between the West and Russia. Relations between Russia and the USA returned to their lowest level as in the gloomy decades of the Cold War. With this war, Kremlin stood up against American policies towards the region which it had not been pleased with for over a decade.

From an offensive realist perspective, Russia is an expansionist state looking for domination over its neighbors to maximize its relative power. The 2008 war seems to have proven the suppositions of the realists. Russia is seeking to dominate the South Caucasus. Russia sees the continuation of the status quo as its main interest. Russia returned to its traditional policy colored by realism and geopolitics. Eurasianist point of view dominates Russian foreign policy.²¹⁵ Now we could expect Russia to follow a policy of controlling or taking over Georgia by all means available in the future unless Tbilisi collaborates.

Russia did not, however, go as far as invading all the Georgian territory and overthrowing Saakashvili regime during the war probably because Kremlin knew that it would face several forms of punishment from the international society if it had gone further as the defensive realism suggests. According to this view, the structure of the current international system does not permit Russia to pursue more

²¹⁴ Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, 4.

²¹⁵ Pozdniakov, "Russia is a great power", 3.

expansionist objectives. At present Russia's primary concern is to preserve its position in the system rather than increasing its power as it may face balancing responses from the West and regional countries.²¹⁶

Kremlin views Georgia's membership in NATO as a security threat. As the defensive realists argue, we could assert that Russian policies in the Caucasus serve its security purposes. South Caucasus is seen by Moscow as a region that needs to be controlled for security reasons. From this perspective, in its war against Georgia, Russia was on defense, not on offense. With its military actions in Georgia in 2008, Russia took precautions against the Western power maximization attempt to use the Saakashvili regime. Russia has so far been trying to prevent a potential threat to its security. The 2008 war showed that Kremlin is determined to prevent Georgia's membership to NATO.

For pro-American Saakashvili regime, the situation was a grave disappointment as its expectations from the West did not come true. However, this did not change the course of Georgian administration. Tbilisi followed the same pro-Western policy making some minor foreign policy changes. This fits the realist assumption that small states choose bandwagoning when they face a security dilemma. The same rule applies to Azerbaijan and Armenia. They interpreted the war as a warning from Russia. Russia gave the message that it is ready to use its hard power in case it feels its dominance in its sphere of influence is shaken. The 2008 war reminded the regional countries of the fact that Russia is the most important actor in South Caucasus that should not be ignored. However, this may have a negative effect on Russia's image among post-Soviet republics. They are likely to be more cautious about Russia's intentions and will be compelled to look for alternative alliances.

The geopolitical interests of the West and Russia in the region are closely linked by virtue of energy and security issues. Other issues have secondary role. Geopolitical perspective asserts that a country's foreign policy is shaped by its geographical conditions. In the South Caucasus, this is true both for the world and regional powers of the geopolitical rivalry. The geopolitical significance of the

²¹⁶ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 21.

Caucasus does not only attract the regional powers neighboring the region, but it draws also the attention of the world powers, namely the USA and the EU. The reason why Georgia matters to them is that it is a key country in the region serving as a transit route to open seas for the landlocked Caspian region which includes very rich energy resources. Controlling Georgia also means the control of the flow of trade through Caucasus to Central Asia.

The 2008 Russian – Georgian war showed that South Caucasus is such a geostrategical region for Russia that it can resort to hard power, taking several risks. Caucasus, due to its strategic location, has always been an important region for Russia. Since the breakup of Soviet Union, Russia has constantly acted to ensure that it possesses influence on the region. Thus, Russia probably will not be neutral in the future incidents of armed conflict in the region as in the south Ossetian – Georgian conflict since the region serves as a geographical lever to control entire Caspian and the Caucasus region. In this regard, the 2008 war may have implications for the Nagorno – Karabakh conflict in the near future. Not only Karabakh but also Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts in the region seem to remain unsolved for many years to come, which is a serious threat for the Western interests in the region. They are likely to generate new sources of insecurity in the region. There have been Western efforts to resolve them; however, the EU and the USA have limited instruments to contribute to the resolution of these conflicts as it was seen in the recent South Ossetian – Georgian conflict. Their complexity and Russian agenda which conflicts with the Western one make conflict resolution efforts ineffective. In fact, Eurasianist perspective which is very influential in Kremlin holds the opinion that Russia needs to revive Russian Empire in the heartland (Eurasia), and to realize this goal, controlling Caucasus is essential; therefore delaying the resolution of the conflicts in the region is beneficial to Russian interests. This idea seems to have been accepted by the Russian leadership since Russia has always either fueled the regional conflicts or obstructed the resolution of them.

To sum up, the 2008 Georgian – Russian war generated a new geopolitical context in the South Caucasus. Geopolitical perspective colored with realism has become more dominant in the regional rivalry prevailing over globalization. From

now on, geopolitics and structural realism will probably provide the most reliable explanations to understand the behavior of the competing actors in the region. As an illustration of this new reality, it could be argued that recent events provided Russia with a relative advantage over its rivals due to its proximity to the region, and shared identity, common Soviet legacy and the economic interdependence of the regional countries. In addition to this, Russia gained a strategic advantage over its opponents in the region after the war. Due to this new framework all internal and external actors of the region were compelled to redefine their policies and strategies vis-à-vis the South Caucasian politics. Energy and regional conflicts of the region are the two key issues that need to be tackled carefully. Both issues are interconnected as long-lasting conflicts threaten the security in the region, which is detrimental to the prosperity of the regional countries and their integration with the world.

4.2. Policy recommendations and predictions

In this section of the Conclusion, policy recommendation will be made for the internal and external actors of the region in the light of the discussion above. Some predictions will also be made along with a number of suggestions.

4.2.1 Conclusions that Georgia needs to draw

Georgia as the main loser of the 2008 war needs to follow a careful foreign policy which takes the geopolitical realities of the region into consideration. Unrealistic expectations from the US and the EU and excessively pro-Western policies may cause serious consequences for its national security. Georgia should not rely on the US and the EU for its security and the resolution of its regional conflicts. Georgian administration views accession to NATO as a security guarantee against Russia and a way to restore its territorial integrity. However, they are not realistic goals which contradict with the geopolitical realities. It is essential that Tbilisi develop a new model of relationship with Kremlin. However, this does not mean that Georgia should renounce its aspirations to integrate with the West. Azerbaijan can be

a good example for Georgia in that Baku has successfully balanced the West and Russia in the last two decades.

The war radically changed the attitudes towards the South Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts. Tbilisi's approach to the South Ossetian problem was wrong. Georgian leadership ignored the fact that conflict resolution is a time-consuming and complicated process. In addition, the Russian factor was miscalculated by the Georgian administration. Georgia's unilateral decision to resolve South Ossetian conflict resulted in confrontation with Russia. In addition, Tbilisi's excessively pro-Western attitude that ignored Russian interests was another cause of the 2008 war. That the conflicts have become unsolvable is a widespread perception now, which is a negative thing for the Georgian side. Therefore, meaningful progress in the resolution of the conflicts cannot be expected in the near future.

Another conclusion that Georgian administration needs to draw is that a military solution to its regional conflicts has become impossible. Considering the fact that Russia has now become the guarantor of South Ossetia and Abkhazia's security, investing heavily on building an army would not be a reasonable option. Georgia is not unlikely to reach a military power to confront Russia militarily. Therefore, it needs to elaborate new policies regarding the regional conflicts and its relations with Russia. What Georgia needs to do is to focus on improving its economy and democracy. Once Georgia becomes a wealthy democratic country, Abkhaz and Ossetian peoples may want to be a part of Georgia. However, this alternative is unlikely to work in the short run due to the intensely increased enmity and mutual mistrust between the sides as a result of the 2008 war.

It could also be argued that Russia would give consent to a resolution if Georgia made compromises such as renouncing its goal of NATO membership. Georgian political analyst Ghia Nodia argues that taking such steps would mean legitimizing Russian military actions in 2008, and may encourage it to follow the same approach in its 'spheres of influence'.²¹⁷ Thus, it would be a mistake for Georgia to surrender to Russia's indirect pressure to collaborate with it.

²¹⁷ Nodia, "Georgia's policy towards Russia and the Conflict Regions: Options now", 7.

Despite this gloomy picture for Georgia after the war, Georgian nation and statehood could be safer than the pre-war period. There are two reasons for that. First, Russia exhausted the causes for a new military attack. Whether it was legitimate or not, Russia had some reasons to intervene in the South Ossetian conflict in 2008. Of course, possibility of a new Russian aggression cannot be totally disregarded; however, in case of such an attack, Russia would have to invent new reasons to legitimize it. Therefore, Georgian administration should avoid actions that would give Moscow new pretexts to attack. Secondly, Georgia has more international support today. It was seen that Russia might ignore international society as it did in 2008. Nevertheless, its losses would be more than the gains as geopolitical context has considerably changed since 2008.

4.2.3 Recommendations for the West against New Russian Assertiveness

Kremlin's recent policies show that Russia considers itself as great power in the post-Soviet regions, which does not welcome other external actors that try to penetrate into these areas. Developments that took place after the war indicate that the US and the EU countries seem to accept Russian hegemony in the Russian spheres of interest.

Kremlin is using all means available to restore its dominance that it had in the Soviet era in a different form. It could be called the "new Soviet Empire". In order to achieve this goal, Moscow has the following objectives: weakening American influence in these regions, preventing NATO and the EU expansion, destabilizing the countries with uncooperative governments in the post-Soviet locale by economic, political, and military instruments.

By its war with Georgia in 2008, Russia meant to show that it was not in strategic retreat against the West anymore. Russia revitalized its capacity to resist Western encirclement in the countries it sees as its spheres of interest. The war of 2008 in Georgia brought the South Caucasus into the center of geopolitical rivalry in Eurasia. The war was a demonstration of Russian hegemony not only in the region but also for the other former states of the Soviet bloc.

Russia's ambitions were not confined to the conflict zones in Georgia in 2008 war. Destroying a pro-Western regime's image or even overthrowing its leader would serve Russian objectives, but Russian military action did not bring about huge destabilization in Georgia. Nevertheless, Russia will probably make use of other non-military methods to undermine the influence of the West not only in Georgia but also in the entire region.

Russia's near abroad policy that aims at restoring Russian dominance over the former Soviet countries compels Georgia to make a difficult decision. If Georgia is not given adequate support by the West, Russian influence on Georgia might increase and Georgia might have to abandon its aspirations to become a part of the Euro-Atlantic world. Western powers need to elaborate new strategies to respond to Russia's attempts to dominate the region. Though they have some limits, the West has a number of measures to take against this Russian assertiveness.

First, the West must understand Russian leadership's concerns about Western containment policy of Russia. The West has continuously disturbed the balance in the post-Soviet regions since early 1990s. NATO's expansion towards Eastern Europe is a good example of this reality. Conflict is inevitable when the balance of power is disturbed in international relations. From the realist perspective, it is Russia's right to take action against Western encirclement. Thus, the US and the EU should reconsider their policies towards relations with Russia. They need to focus on generating approaches to reduce tension with Russia. In this effort, they need to have a common policy regarding their relations with Russia. They should find a common approach in dialogue with Moscow in order to create a win-win situation.²¹⁸ They should highlight their mutual interests with Russia in the region and convince Kremlin that South Caucasus as stable region would serve all parties' interests. In other words, the topic of the dialogue with Russia should not be confined to Georgia; other regional countries, namely Azerbaijan and Armenia, should be included as well.

²¹⁸ Nona Mikhelidze, "After The 2008 Russia-Georgia War: Implications For The Wider Caucasus And Prospects For Western Involvement In Conflict Resolution", (paper presented at the Conference on the Caucasus and Black Sea Region: European Neighborhood Policy and beyond, Rome, 6-7 February 2009).

However, efforts for having a closer dialogue with Russia should not shadow the situation in Georgia. Western powers should continue to express their disapproval of Russia's violation of Georgia's territorial integrity and reject the formation of military zones in Georgian territory. They should press for the implementation of the six-point ceasefire plan by Russia and demand Russia to give consent to the establishment of an international peacekeeping force along the borders of the conflict zones. Tactically, American and NATO contribution in this effort will be essential for showing that Russia has to face consequences for its actions in Georgia. If the West fails to give adequate concrete responses to Russia, Kremlin may conclude that using hard power is an appropriate method in order to achieve its foreign-policy goals.

NATO's role needs to be reduced in providing security to Georgia. Granting full membership to Georgia seems problematic and may cause further conflicts considering the strong Russian opposition. It was mentioned earlier that Kremlin declared that it would prevent Georgia's membership at all costs. However, NATO and Georgia can build closer military relations out of a full membership format or the US could give Georgia the status of major non-NATO ally (MNNA) which is a designation given by the USA to close allies with whom American Army has strategic relations.²¹⁹ Such a course could be acceptable to both Georgia and Russia.

The events of 2008 also showed that a new strategy is needed in order to deal with the regional conflicts more effectively. Russian monopoly in the regional conflicts needs to be ended through diplomatic means. Developments since the collapse of the Soviet Union indicate that Russia has been abusing the ethnic conflicts for its interests. Therefore, it cannot be a reliable peacemaker as it is not trusted by the parties of the conflicts due to its confirmed partially in the South Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts. The situation is the same in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The solution is to establish international peacekeeping forces in the conflict areas. These forces need to be positioned on the borders of the conflict areas so as to prevent possible incidents of armed clashes. If there had been an international

²¹⁹ "Major Non-NATO Ally", Global Security Org., accessed April 29, 2013, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/dod/mnna.htm>

peacekeeping force in South Ossetia, the 2008 war could not have occurred. However, Russia would oppose this offer; in this case, the West can warn Russia that its closing eyes to international demands might result in international isolation. In addition, a way of dialogue with the administrations of secessionist regions should be found. Their dependence on Moscow should be ended. This is essential for the resolution process.

Finally, efforts to resolve Nagorno-Karabakh conflict needs to be intensified, but it is not very realistic to hope for an immediate resolution. International pressure on the sides of the conflict would speed up the peace process. Continuation of status quo in this conflict is against the interest of Western powers, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia. Once the conflict has been solved, Russian influence on Armenia and Azerbaijan would be reduced.

To sum up, geopolitical rivalry over the South Caucasus is likely to continue for many years to come. The war in 2008 indicated that Russia still has noteworthy instruments of influence in this region. If the Western passivity continues, Kremlin will maintain its position as the prime actor in the future of the South Caucasus.

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