



Analizy natolińskie

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The United States posture towards the war in Georgia in 2008

The assessment, implications and the aftermath.

Brief History of American-Georgian relations

The United States recognized the independence of Georgia on 25th December 1991.¹ Washington was not particularly interested in Georgia during George H. Bush term in the office. His policy toward the post-Soviet republics was dominated by relationships with Moscow based upon “Russia First” policy.² A similar foreign policy was conducted by the newly elected president Bill Clinton during his first term.³ During the second one Georgia became more important due to the growing American interest in the Caspian Sea natural resources and signing of an agreement on building the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan gas pipeline, which runs through Georgian soil. However, some problems surfaced and works on the project were stopped.⁴

When the global war on terrorism was declared after the 11th September, Georgia supported Washington and offered unconditional help.⁵ The first American military advisors came to Georgia to advise local forces under the Train and Equip Program for Georgian forces. The main aim was to help Georgian troops combat the terrorists.⁶

The significance of Georgia in American foreign policy intensified after the Rose Revolution which erupted in 2003 and toppled Eduard Shevardnadze, a former Soviet Union foreign minister. A new young leader, Mikhail Saakashvili, assumed power and set Georgia on pro-Western course.⁷ Georgia became the first post-Soviet republic, except the Baltic States, to be visited by an American president. During this visit President Bush called Georgia a “beacon for democracy”. The United States planned that the Georgian democratic revolution would spread to other post-Soviet republics. The main aim was to weaken the Moscow's interests in the region by overthrowing the authoritarian regimes inclined toward Russia. This might have changed the geopolitical situation in South Caucasus and Central Asia. With these actions Washington clearly encroached on the traditional Russian sphere of influence.

Moreover the military cooperation strengthened. Georgian troops took active part in the war on terrorism in Iraq and in Afghanistan. In exchange the United States supported Georgia's integration with NATO. Tbilisi also became an important partner in energy cooperation joining the construction of the BTC and Baku-Tbilisi-Supsa oil and gas pipelines bypassing Russia and Iran.⁸ Moscow perceived the tightening cooperation between Washington and Tbilisi as a grave threat to its interests in the region. The construction of new gas and oil pipelines endangered the Moscow's position in the European gas and oil market. Russia intended to stop Georgian pro-western course first by using economic weapons. In 2006 the embargo on Georgian wine and water was imposed and gas prices were increased, but these methods failed. According to Vladimir Socor “in 2006 Moscow almost exhausted or lost all forms of leverage on Georgia”. Tbilisi was leaving the Russian sphere of influence and the only way to stop Saakashvili from doing it was a military operation.⁹

The war, which started on 7th August 2008, was a consequence of Georgia's pro western policy and tightening cooperation with Washington. One of the most interesting aspects of this conflict is the standpoint assumed by the Tbilisi's closest ally – the United States. This text tries to analyze not only the American position during the conflict but also to

track the geopolitical consequences for the United States as well as to demonstrate the outcomes for the relations between Tbilisi and Washington.

American attitude toward the Russian-Georgian war

The outbreak of the Russian-Georgian war on 7th August 2008 surprised a majority of the leaders worldwide, who were focused on the beginning of the Olympic Games in Beijing. Most of the Western politicians were at the opening ceremony in China or went on holidays. The President of the United States, George W. Bush, was in Beijing at the ceremony and Condoleezza Rice, the American Secretary of State, went on vacation.¹⁰

The situation on the border between Georgia and South Ossetia had been very tense since the beginning of 2008. The first major incident happened on 20th April, when a Russian plane Mig-29 shot down a Georgian unmanned aerial vehicle, which according to the UN was flying legally. It was an act of military aggression.¹¹ In May Moscow sent a team of military engineers to Abkhazia to repair railway lines, bridges and tunnels between the Russian border and Sukhumi, the capital city of rebel province. Moreover, both sides held military exercises, which started on the same day, namely 15th July. Russia conducted military exercises “Kavkaz 2008” jointly with the armed forces of South Ossetia.¹² Significant military forces took part therein: approximately 8 thousands Russian troops including an airborne unit and approximately 7 hundred vehicles. In the same time Georgia responded with military practices “Immediate Response 2008” with 6 hundred Georgian troops supported by 1 thousand Americans.¹³

The number of border incidents between Georgian and South Ossetia forces was still increasing. Since the beginning of April military units of South Ossetia battered Georgian villages located on the territory of this rebel province. Border accidents increased in early August. On 7th August the President of Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili, announced one-sided ceasefire to calm the situation, which was on the edge of war.¹⁴ On the same day in the morning the American ambassador in Georgia, John Tefft, sent a message to the Deputy Secretary of State, Daniel Fried, about the situation in the region. He assessed it as a very serious one and stated that any course of events was equally likely. During the morning meeting with members of Bush administration, Fried demanded American diplomatic

intervention in Georgia because the situation became very dangerous.¹⁵ On the same day the Georgian chief of diplomacy, Eka Tkeshkishvili, contacted Daniel Fried and informed him about Russian army movements and the anxiety within the Georgian administration about a potential conflict. She additionally asked what actions Georgia should take next. Americans suggested that Georgian forces should maintain the one-sided ceasefire and try not to provoke Russians.¹⁶ But Mikheil Saakashvili ignored the American recommendations and, without informing Washington, ordered his forces to capture the capital city of South Ossetia – Tskhinvali.¹⁷

Why did Saakashvili do that though he knew Georgian military force stood no chance in confrontation with Russia? He thought that Russian attack was unavoidable and it was only a matter of time. He was right because there was a large body of evidence indicating that Russians had been preparing for this war for a long time.¹⁸ He was also anxious about his political career, because as the President of Georgia he was obliged to defend Georgian citizens and territorial integrity of his country. He knew that people of Georgia would not forgive him if he failed to react to the attack conducted in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.¹⁹ By his decision Saakashvili fell into a Russian trap. This trap consisted of the necessity to choose between loss of some territory or use of military force by Georgians in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which would provoke a war with Russia.²⁰

Americans did not know much about the situation in the region. Their military satellites failed to detect movements of Russian forces, because they were focused on the situation in Afghanistan and Iraq and the American military advisers who were in Georgia also did not send any information. One of the main issues for politicians in Washington to surface at the beginning of the conflict was to guarantee security to those advisers.²¹

This lack of precise data gave rise to the most important question: who started the war? A split emerged within Bush administration; some politicians were disappointed with Georgian's response provoked by Russians. Others argued that Americans underestimated threats of Moscow and signals from the Georgian allies. But most of them still believed that it was possible to confine this conflict to the borders of South Ossetia. Washington had to intervene to defend American strategy and interests in this region. Moscow's attack on Georgia could demolish the pillars of a new transatlantic security. American diplomats very quickly drafted the main aims of their actions: they intended to stop the fighting, protect

Mikhail Saakashvili, who was hated in Russia, and finally they wanted to persuade Moscow that Kremlin would be severely punished and the whole action against Tbilisi would have a detrimental effect on American-Russian relationships. American politicians sought a way to stop the Russians not only in Georgia but also to contain their aggressive actions in other conflict areas, like Ukraine or the Baltic States.²²

The Secretary of State contacted Saakashvili on 7th August evening, when the Russian soldiers were fighting with the Georgian forces. Rice presented a 4-step ceasefire plan. There

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were the following main points: an immediate ceasing of fight between the Georgian and Russian soldiers, withdrawal of Georgian and Russian troops back to the positions of 6th August and deployment of new peace forces on the territory of South Ossetia and elections in this separatist territory. This proposal was announced when Georgian forces still occupied a small part of South Ossetia. Rice contacted the Georgian President and the Foreign Minister of Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov. Saakashvili accepted the proposal under the condition that the government of President Eduard Kokoity in South Ossetia would be dismissed. But the whole plan collapsed immediately when the Russian forces escalated the conflict.²³

In his first speech during the war President Bush expressed his concern about the situation in the Caucasus region and appealed for peace. He also underscored that Russian actions outside the territory of Georgia were illegal.²⁴ Moreover, he made phone calls to the Russian President Dmitri Miedvediev and the Georgian leader. Bush warned Miedvediev that extending the conflict would meet with a strong opposition from Western countries. The Russian President compared Saakashvili to Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and said that the Georgian leader would be punished.²⁵ Bush's appeal was ignored. He also failed to persuade Vladimir Putin in Beijing. He was unable to use good personal relationships to make Putin stop the escalation of the war.²⁶ The White House press spokesman was harsher in his comments; he clearly

declared that Moscow had broken the rules of the United Nations Charter. Moreover, he announced that the future of Russian-American relationships depended on the actions conducted by Moscow on the days to follow.²⁷ In the meantime American forces warned Georgians about an imminent Russian air raid on Tbilisi.²⁸

During the weekend (8th-9th August) Bush Administration discussed the objectives of the Russian invasion. The American ambassador in Tbilisi prepared an analysis for Bush administration where he wrote that the main aim of Russian attack was to topple the government of Mikheil Saakashvili. This opinion was shared by Richard C. Holbrooke. The constant influx of Russian troops, bombarding the whole country, made it clear what the true aim of Moscow was. They intended to destroy the whole Georgian infrastructure and turn Georgia into a third world country.²⁹ This hypothesis was supported by the Putin-Bush and Putin-Sarkozy talks in Beijing. Both French and American presidents felt that the Russian Prime Minister was very determined to punish Georgia and reluctant to talk about the ceasefire.³⁰ What is more, Tefft stressed in an alarming tone that Washington had to react on the situation; otherwise it could lose its entire influence in the region.³¹

On 10th August members of Bush administration concluded what the real aim of Russian actions was. Moreover, the Georgian army was in full retreat and constantly bombarded by Russian forces. Mathew Bryza, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasians Affairs, informed Rice that Georgia forces were too weak to defend Tbilisi successfully and without American help the whole country could collapse. This information induced Rice to act.³²

The Secretary of State called the Foreign Minister of Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, who said that Russian forces would not stop military operation till every Russian citizen in South Ossetia was safe. He also wanted Georgian forces to leave the territory of South Ossetia. What was the most controversial, he insisted on dismissal of the Georgian President. Those talks and especially the demand for Saakashvili's resignation was a watershed in the American perception of the ultimate aim of Moscow actions. The last statement by Lavrov was used by the American United Nation's ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad to bring condemnation on Russians by the international community.³³

On 11th August the situation was very dangerous, with Russian tanks being several hours from Tbilisi. Western leaders knew that Georgia did not have enough strength to

defend their capital city even with an additional brigade transported by Americans from Iraq.³⁴ In his memories President Bush wrote that it was the most terrifying moment for him during the whole crisis. He was seriously worried about the future of the democratic government of Georgia.³⁵

Bryza came to Tbilisi in the evening of 11th August. The Georgian government was shattered and knew little about Russian movements. Everyone in Tbilisi was afraid of the Russian invasion. Bryza met with David Shekris Bakradze, the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, who accused Americans of not defending Georgia, Bryza answered that Georgia was not a NATO member so the United States did not have any obligation to defend Tbilisi. But he also assured Bakradze about American support. At the same time the first C-17 Globemaster warplane with humanitarian aid landed in Tbilisi, although Russians threatened to shoot it down. Moreover, Americans did not evacuate their embassy and sent Bryza to provide diplomatic support to Saakashvili. Meanwhile, Bush also tried to back up the Georgian President, who asked for *Stinger* rockets or U.S. troops on the Georgian soil. Some of the military advisers of President Bush were eager to send American troops to Tbilisi. There were also discussions within Bush administration whether the attack on Georgia was the beginning of a larger offensive and the next target would be Ukraine and the Baltic States or whether it was an action aimed only at Georgia.³⁶ A military operation was seriously discussed, but members of Bush administration agreed that it could cause a war between Russia and the USA.³⁷ The other controversial issue discussed among Bush administration was a plan to evacuate Saakashvili in case of a Russian attack on Tbilisi.³⁸

In his speech of 11th August President Bush condemned the Russian actions again and appealed for troops withdrawal. He put a pressure on Moscow to accept a peace agreement.³⁹ The United States Vice President Dick Cheney assured the Georgian President that Washington did not forget about its ally and promised to punish Russia for their action. American media expressed solidarity with Georgia and appealed for help to this country.⁴⁰

The ceasefire negotiations were conducted by France as the country that assumed the Presidency in the Council of the European Union. Three different groups could be distinguished within this organization. The first one included such countries as Poland, Sweden, Baltic States, which demanded a harsh reaction including imposing sanctions on Moscow; the second group was led by France and Germany, which mildly criticized Moscow;

there were even some countries which supported Moscow, for example Slovakia. Once more the European Union showed its inability to conduct a common foreign policy.⁴¹ A similar situation happened in NATO, where the rift was not so deep as in the EU, but different positions of members also caused inefficiency of this organization. At an emergency meeting of the ambassadors of NATO members on 12th August they announced strong support for the Georgian independence and sovereignty and condemned the Russian use of force.⁴² On 19th August during an emergency meeting of the North Atlantic Council, allied foreign ministers called for a peaceful and lasting solution and respect for Georgia independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.⁴³ Also the United Nations (UN) was unable to act. Several meetings of the Security Council took place but this body was unable to pass any resolution because proposals made by Moscow, e. g. the renouncing of the use of violence by South Ossetia and Georgia, were vetoed by the United States and Great Britain while the ideas put forward by Western countries were blocked by Moscow.⁴⁴

The effective diplomatic action of France was a success of this country and not of the EU. It is obvious that Washington cooperated with Paris, President Bush spoke with Sarkozy many times and the French side informed Americans about the negotiations, but the decisive voice belonged to Sarkozy.⁴⁵ After the negotiations in Moscow the French President announced a Six - Point Peace Plan. This document contained six principles:

“No recourse to use violence between the protagonists.”

“The cessation of hostilities.”

“The granting of humanitarian aid.”

“The return of Georgian armed forces to their usual quarters.”

“Russian armed forces to withdraw to the positions held before hostilities began in South Ossetia. Russian peacekeepers to implement additional security measures until an international monitoring mechanism is in place.”

“The opening of international discussions on the modalities of security and stability of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.”⁴⁶

When the members of Bush administration examined the content of the ceasefire plan prepared by France they were really concerned. This document should have been very precise, with exact dates and places. The one negotiated by Sarkozy was very vague and could

be interpreted in many ways. But because Americans entrusted France with negotiations, they could not criticize it for signing this document.⁴⁷

Ronald Asmus, who was the director of the Transatlantic Center in Brussels, enumerated several mistakes in this document. According to him a ceasefire should include an exact date and place. What is more, there was not any distinction made between Russian peacekeepers who stationed in Abkhazia and South Ossetia legally before war and forces that conducted the invasion. Also the term “implement additional security measures” was very vague. Those neglects left an opportunity for Moscow to interpret this ceasefire according to their own interests and the Russian military could control the major strategic points in Georgia.⁴⁸ However, on 13th August Bush officially supported the French peace plan. One more time he backed Georgia up and threatened Moscow with serious consequences.⁴⁹ Additionally he announced that humanitarian aid would be delivered by warships and warplanes, which should be a manifestation of American military power.⁵⁰ Robert Gates, the Secretary of Defense, was even harsher in his comments. He said that if Russia did not step back from its aggressive posture and actions in Georgia, the U.S.-Russian relationship could be adversely affected for years to come.⁵¹

The biggest failure of American policy was not the action during the 2008 war but inability to persuade NATO members to grant Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia and Ukraine during the NATO summit in Bucharest

But the Georgian President did not want to sign this treaty. He was afraid that the lack of clarity of this document would be beneficial for Russians. After consultations with Sarkozy, Rice prepared an annex addressing the Georgian worries. The word “status” related to South Ossetia and Abkhazia was deleted from the ceasefire document and also there were some amendments on the demarcation line.⁵² Then the Secretary of State went to Tbilisi to negotiate with Saakashvili. She persuaded the Georgian President to sign the Sarkozy-Medvedev agreement. On 15th August, at a joint press conference Rice and Saakashvili announced that works on the document were completed, thus ending the war.⁵³

Despite this fact Russia continued air attacks against Georgian villages and their ground forces entered into one of Georgian villages and offered Russian citizenship. Even the

comments from the American Secretary of State about delayed withdrawal and breaches of the ceasefire agreement did not help. On 20th August the first signs of Russian forces leaving the Georgian territory were spotted.⁵⁴ But on the same day the Russian ambassador vetoed the UN resolution which called for military forces return to pre-conflict positions.⁵⁵ During the withdrawal the Russian troops destroyed Georgian military infrastructure. They claimed that they had the right to stay in certain areas of Georgia but this was described by American and German authorities as violation of the ceasefire agreement.⁵⁶ Last Russian troops left Georgia territory in 2010.⁵⁷ According to remarks from the American diplomats, Russia was using the loopholes in the ceasefire document.

The reaction of the Bush administration was strongly criticized by commentators of American newspapers and think-thanks. They called the reaction of the United States as “Katherine”⁵⁸ of American foreign policy.⁵⁹ A journalist of Wall Street Journal wrote that American did the “outsourcing” of their foreign policy into the hands of the President of France Nicholas Sarkozy.⁶⁰ This was also the end of the period when European security was too important to leave it on European shoulders.⁶¹

The Bush administration did not have any ideas or possibilities to do more. The idea of military support for Georgia was excluded from the debate because of significant engagement of the American army in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even if the American army was ready for attack, it was highly unlikely that they would do it. The outbreak of conflict with Russia could end in a nuclear war.⁶² There was a heated debate about this issue within George Bush administration; the “hawks” like Dick Cheney, Daniel Freid or the national security adviser Stephen Hadley opted for military support while Condoleezza Rice was reluctant to use military force.⁶³ What is more, Washington needed Kremlin in its foreign policy:

to deter the nuclear program of Iran,
to transport materials to NATO forces in Afghanistan,
in actions against proliferation of nuclear materials
in negotiations with North Korean regime.⁶⁴

Firstly, Americans threatened they would block Russian accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) but they did not carry their threats into effect⁶⁵. The only sign of

Russia being ignored was that during the debate within the G-8 group, the American Secretary of State did not talk with Russians. Washington promised to aid Georgia and transferred 1 billion dollars.⁶⁶ During this crisis the U.S. mainly made speeches and limited their reactions to statements that condemned Russia and assured Georgia of American help, but there were no serious actions. Washington only canceled the joint navy maneuvers with Russia.⁶⁷

This war showed that Moscow was ready to defend Russian interests in “near abroad” at any cost and even risking deterioration of relationships with the United States.⁶⁸ Russian influences in this region increased, and the position of the country in the rebel province was also strengthened.⁶⁹ Most experts on Russia saw the conflict with Georgia as a proxy war in which Tbilisi was a representative of Washington against Moscow.⁷⁰ In Svante E. Cornell’s opinion the whole war was not only about the South Caucasus and Georgia but rather about the limits to the aggressive foreign policy of Russia. Moscow wanted to divide Europe into spheres of influence, where the former post-Soviet republics would be in the Russian sphere of influence.⁷¹

In this war Kremlin wanted to achieve many different aims, which can be grouped into three levels:

On the local level Russia aspired to show Georgians that their pro-Western policy was faulty and they would be punished even more severely if they did not change their course. What is more, it was an attempt to show that U.S allies were not safe and could not escape from the Russian sphere of influence.

On the regional level Kremlin wanted to show how it would react on any Western efforts to decrease Moscow's influence in this region. Also Russian politicians wanted to send a warning message to Western companies to stop investing in the oil and gas transit network in this region.

On the global level Russia demonstrated its strong opposition to the international order, which in Moscow's opinion reflected the interests of the West.⁷²

However, Russia did not achieve all aims: Western companies continued investing in the region, Georgia did not change the course of its foreign policy and did not break close relations with Washington. But the American position as a superpower was shaken and some

United States allies became more careful in their behavior in the international area. However, Moscow's action revealed true face of Russia as a neo-imperial country which aspired to rebuild its position of the Cold War era.⁷³ In spite of this situation France sold to Russia modern Mistral warship⁷⁴ and German Rheinmetal⁷⁵ will build a training center there. The negative cause for Moscow was the Warsaw agreement on building American anti-ballistic missile defense system.⁷⁶

Assessment of American policy toward the war in Georgia

In general the American response toward the conflict in the Caucasus is assessed as very weak and inadequate. Bush administration did not play a crucial role in the negotiations. The President decided that the United States would act as a supporter staying in the shadow. He did that despite serious doubts about the strength of the European Union to stand against Moscow and the awareness that the EU was not such a close ally of Georgia as the United States. However, Washington outsourced the negotiations to France and President Nicolas Sarkozy. It seemed strange that the United States handed over such a crucial issue to the least pro-American country in Europe. But since onset of the Sarkozy presidency the relationships became much warmer and it was possible for Washington to trust Paris. However, the United States sidestep was completely uncommon to Bush foreign policy, when Americans were solving the majority of world problems unilaterally.⁷⁷ There were several reasons why Bush handed over negotiations to Paris. He did not want to act unilaterally, and from his perspective the war in Georgia was not the problem of United States-Russia relations. Bush realized that the next Washington action without support from European allies would not be successful. But the cooperation between transatlantic partners was difficult after a lot of crisis situations, including first and foremost the war in Iraq. The President wanted to show Russians a united voice of Western countries against the Russian invasion. This kind of policy was best recapitulated in the words of Stephen Handley: "The message we wanted to send Russians was not that the United States and allies punished you. But this is a response of the 21st century system of security, which showed you that there was no place for behaviors from the 19th century". What is more, Bush administration wanted to avoid a situation where the media would start to talk about a potential conflict between Washington and Moscow instead of focusing on the war in Georgia.⁷⁸ Bush wanted to kill two birds with one stone; he did not want to harm his relationships with Russia and he wanted to help the Georgian ally. But it

was impossible to do those two things at the same time. Unfortunately for Saakashvili, the American President applied the “Russia first” rule, so typical of Western European countries as well as for Bush Senior and Clinton administrations. In this case it meant that Bush administration would help Georgia but only to the extent this would not harm Russians.

Bush policy toward the conflict in Georgia was characterized with a paraphrase of famous words of one of the American presidents, namely Theodore Roosevelt. He said ”to talk softly and carry a big stick”. The administration of President Bush talked loudly but their actions were very weak.⁷⁹

A Polish professor, Jadwiga Kiwerska, claimed that the weak and unsuccessful U.S. reaction on the crisis in Georgia concluded 8 years of very ineffective foreign policy of Washington. In her opinion the Bush Doctrine and the whole neo-conservative ideology should be blamed for the weakness of American position. Kiwerska expressed a view that the entire American diplomatic action was focused on saving Washington's reputation as a superpower than on real effectiveness.⁸⁰ In her opinion the biggest failure of American policy was not the action during the 2008 war but inability to persuade NATO members to grant Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia and Ukraine during the NATO summit in Bucharest.⁸¹ Another mistake made before the war, which strongly influenced the forthcoming events, was the recognition of Kosovo independence despite a strong Russian opposition. Later Moscow invoked Kosovo precedence against Georgia as regards South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The United States made a huge mistake because Americans did not notice that Kosovo case would influence the situation in the Caucasus. Politicians in Washington thought that they would be able to isolate the case of Kosovo⁸² only to the Balkan region and it would not be used in similar cases. Americans did not create any mechanism that could prevent Georgia from a similar scenario in the case of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. They ignored Saakashvili's remarks that the recognition of Kosovo independence would be dangerous for Georgia.⁸³ Bush made also a serious mistake during the meeting with Vladimir Putin in Sochi, shortly after the NATO summit in Bucharest. According to American diplomats Putin presented harsh statements on Georgia and Saakashvili. But Bush did not react to these words. In the language of diplomacy silence is equivalent to agreeing with the opposite side's propositions. Some American diplomats

thought that the behavior of Bush could be perceived by Russia as American permission for actions against Georgia.⁸⁴

What is more, in 2001-2008 Americans lost their entire moral standing at the international area. When they announced that Russia violated the international law it sounded ridiculous because Washington did just the same in 2003 with the attack on Iraq. The American accusations against Russians of disproportionate use of force to stabilize the situation and of brutality of their forces could not have been taken seriously either because a close U.S. Ally, Israel, did the same during the attacks on Lebanon in 2006 and Washington did not react. These and other events - like secret CIA prisons, Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib incidents - prevented the United States from being able to effectively appear as the champion of democratic values. In view of these events American criticism of Moscow for doing just the same as Washington did, was hypocritical. Accordingly Bush administration was unable to gather a strong support from international community. Additionally a dangerous precedent of violating international law was created; it was used by Russians and may be used by other powers in future.⁸⁵ A different opinion on this matter was presented by Jerzy Kranz, who argued that the Russian justification of military intervention based on similarity to the American and Israeli interventions was weak and unpersuasive. He claimed that the recent military actions conducted by these two states were aimed at the security of own territory in case of Israel or were precise attacks on terrorists camps in certain countries like Afghanistan or Sudan. In his opinion even the military operation against Iraq was justified by the allegations that Saddam Hussein owned weapons of mass weapon. Additionally, Baghdad ignored several UN resolutions. The invasion was also followed by months of discussions. In case of Georgia Russia showed neo-imperial intentions and blocked any discussion in the UN Security Council.⁸⁶

The war in Georgia demonstrated that the United States was unable to guarantee security to its closest allies. Condoleezza Rice affirmed the Georgian administration during her visit before the war in Tbilisi that Washington had never left its allies. But reality was different. What is more, Americans failed to stop Saakashvili from acting. The war undermined the close relationships with the post-Soviet states which had been developed during the Bush presidency. What is more, the conflict showed that the American expressions

of support are insufficient to guarantee security to U.S. allies. Only the membership in NATO could make the countries secure.⁸⁷

From the military point of view the American 5-year assistance program and the reform of Georgian army failed to prevent it from defeat in the war with Russia. Washington

The war in Georgia was a confrontation between two contradicting ideas. One was represented by Putin, who aspired to rebuild the international position of Russia. The second one, drafted by Bush, was based on building the American sphere of influence in the post-Soviet territory.

prepared Georgian forces for counterinsurgency operations. There were no military practices assuming a Russian attack. Serious neglects on the part of the American intelligence were an event more important aspect. One more time in history the United States, who had spent billions of dollars on different intelligence agencies, failed to predict the outbreak of a conflict. The officials said that the satellites were focused on the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan. This only proved the thesis that high-technology intelligence could only provide a support for traditional methods of gathering information by using spies. After the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the conflict in Georgia was one more example that there was no substitute to intelligence based on human resources.⁸⁸

After the conflict the Russian Prime Minister and the President accused Americans of arming Georgians and ordering Saakashvili to attack South Ossetia.⁸⁹ The White House denied those accusations but even some American political scientists expresses opinions similar to those put forward by Russian politicians. Charles Kupchan claimed that the American

policy toward Georgia before the war could have provoked the conflict. In his opinion, Saakashvili could think that Western countries, especially the United States, would be with him for better and for worse.⁹⁰ But Ronald Asmus disagreed with Kupchan's opinion. He claimed that the whole Bush administration, including the President, sent signals that Georgia should not resolve the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia with the use of

military force. They warned Saakashvili that in case of the use of force Washington would not help him. The Georgian President explained that he had not asked any Western leaders for permission to attack and had ordered the action without informing Americans.⁹¹ Alexander Cooley and Lincoln A. Mitchell in their article wrote that it was almost impossible for Americans to have given a “green light” to a military operation but they enumerated several unofficial groups of Georgia supporters in the U.S., most of whom had visited Tbilisi before the conflict. They could have sent ambiguous signals to the government in Tbilisi, ones which could be understood as a permission for military attack.⁹² As far the American contribution in the Georgia war is concerned, it can be concluded that most of the time the Bush administration ignored Moscow and did not treat Russian as a major power. Russian intervention in Caucasus in 2008 was also a way to manifest that Russia was still one of the most influential countries in the world.

Another argument against the effectiveness of American engagement was comprised by delayed actions. Mathew Bryza was sent to Tbilisi on 11th August, when Russian tanks were very close to the city. On 13th August, i.e. as late as 6 days after the outbreak of the war, the Secretary of State went to Tbilisi. It was too late, and she could not change the situation. What is more, resignation from direct negotiations with Moscow about the future of the closest America’s ally in the Caucasus region also gave rise to negative assessment of Washington actions during the crisis.⁹³

Additionally, American posture would discourage other countries from Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to cooperate with Washington against Moscow. Administrations of those states witnessed the situation where the closest ally of the United States was attacked and there were no effective actions from Washington side. This situation really concerned American allies in Russian neighborhood.⁹⁴ The first sign of decreasing Washington interests was manifested on 2nd November 2008, when Azerbaijan, a country which was an American ally, signed a disadvantageous document with - supported by Russians - Armenia about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Moscow was the broker of this agreement. The United States and other countries involved in solving this problem were not informed.⁹⁵

The war in Georgia was a confrontation between two contradicting ideas. One was represented by the Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who aspired to rebuild the

international position of Russia. The second one, drafted by the administration of George W. Bush, was based on building the American sphere of influence in the post-Soviet territory by using the color revolutions, which spread democracy in post-Soviet republics and established pro-American governments. The 2008 war resulted from the clash between those two ideas. Washington's failure in Georgia resulted in abandoning of the spreading of democratic ideas.⁹⁶ Moscow successfully challenged the United States' international position. According to the Foreign Minister of Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov the war in Georgia clearly showed the end of unipolar world where the majority of decisions had been made by the United States.⁹⁷

Furthermore, the war showed the decreasing influence of Americans on the international area. Washington lost its instruments of influence upon Russia in early 1990s. The war in Georgia showed that Washington lost its ability to resolve conflicts in a peaceful way. The conflict also shook the position of the U.S. as a superpower. Bush administration did not have enough power to stand against Moscow's imperial designs, breach by Russians of the basis of international law consisting in sovereignty of state and territorial integrity in relation to an American close ally - Georgia. This weakness of the U.S. was an effect of Bush foreign policy. The American soft-power was decreased by the negative image caused by the use of tortures and attack on Iraq while American hard-power was decreased by the engagement in two wars, in Afghanistan and in Iraq. The Georgian war only clearly showed how the position of the U.S. changed in the multilateral world with a larger number of very powerful countries emerging. Georgia was a victim of the changing position of the U.S. in the world.

Conflict in Georgia in American presidential election.

2008 was an important year for the United States. The presidential election took place at that time. After 8 years of George W. Bush presidency, new candidates competed for the office in the White House. One from the Republican Party, John McCain, was an experienced American senator and a Vietnam war veteran.⁹⁸ His opponent was Barack Obama, a young senator from the Democratic Party.⁹⁹ They had different views on several matters including foreign policy. Both of them published essays in "Foreign Affairs" magazine, where they presented their points of view on foreign policy strategy. McCain's

most controversial idea was to exclude Russia from G8 because it should be a club of democratic states. He was a supporter of a strong course toward Moscow by, for example, strengthening the NATO.¹⁰⁰ His strong position toward Kremlin was stressed by his famous statement: that he saw in Putin's eyes three letters: KGB.¹⁰¹ Barack Obama had a different view on foreign policy matters concerning Russia; he was a supporter of cooperation with this country because he saw in Moscow a reliable and important partner in fight against the proliferation of the Weapon of Mass Destruction(WMD) and for nuclear arsenal reduction.¹⁰²

When the war in Georgia broke out, the political campaign in the United States was at the peak. John McCain was one of the most active American politicians during this conflict. In his first statement he demanded immediate withdrawal of Russian soldiers from Georgia and called for the U.N. Security Council meeting. This announcement was made before the first comment by President Bush.¹⁰³ In his next speeches he mentioned deploying neutral peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia¹⁰⁴. McCain also reminded Americans that he had warned against Russia and his predictions fulfilled.¹⁰⁵ The Republican senator talked with the Georgian President every day during the conflict, offering own support for Georgia.¹⁰⁶ He is also credited with the famous statement stressing that he identified with people of Georgia: "Today we are all Georgians"¹⁰⁷. It was a reference to the Berlin speech of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy when he said "Ich bin ein Berliner".¹⁰⁸ McCain even criticized President Bush for his posture toward the conflict. The Republican candidate compared it to the weakness of Carter administration.¹⁰⁹ The Candidate of Democratic Party was also very active during this crisis and while his stance was not so harsh toward Moscow, Obama also appealed for a unified international community reaction and he demanded Russian military forces be pulled out of Georgia.¹¹⁰ What is more, Obama's adviser Susan Rice accused McCain of too strong reaction and appealed for a more reasonable approach.¹¹¹

As we see both presidential candidates were against Russian invasion and condemned it. Both of them acknowledged Russian actions as acts of aggression. They postulated a United Nation resolution, sending neutral peacekeeping forces to the conflict area and granting MAP for Georgia. But the tone toward Moscow was different. Obama stressed that despite Russia's behavior he wanted to cooperate with this state while McCain focused on the criticism of Kremlin and threatened with consequences including exclusion of Moscow from

the G-8.¹¹² Most of the commentators thought that crisis in Georgia would help the Republican candidate win because he was more experienced in foreign policy.¹¹³ Moreover, some opinions appeared that harsh comments from Bush administration were aimed at helping McCain in his presidential campaign.¹¹⁴ Svante E. Cornell foresaw that Georgia would remain an important partner for Washington whoever won the presidential election. He concluded his thesis from the determined reactions of both candidates.¹¹⁵ But his optimistic forecast proved wrong and newly elected Barack Obama changed the course of foreign policy toward Georgia.

Who was guilty of starting the war?

Many commissions were created to examine the conflict and indicate the perpetrator. But either side engaged in this war was partially to blame for it. Georgia ignored Western remarks and fell into a Russian trap, which had been prepared for months.¹¹⁶ Western countries were guilty of ignoring repeated border incidents, Moscow's aggressive speeches including threats to territorial integrity of Georgia and of presenting ambivalent posture toward this region.¹¹⁷ What is more, the recognition of Kosovo, failure at the NATO summit in Budapest where Washington was unable to influence its partners to grant MAP, and American unilateral policy which violated basics of international law, were all used by Russia as a justification for their actions. But the main perpetrator was Moscow. The war between Georgia and Russia was inevitable and even if it had not happened on 7th August it would have erupted later. Both sides had completely different interests.¹¹⁸ There is a large body of evidence that Russia was earlier prepared for this conflict. Since the end of July the Georgian websites were victims of well prepared, organized cyberattacks. Moscow sent additional 2500 troops into region, justifying this decision by allegations that Georgia was preparing an attack, although this was denied by a UN mission. At the same time the Russian air forces announced they looked for pilots who were skilled in flying over mountainous regions.¹¹⁹ The Georgian army captured one Russian pilot who was a reservist and was restored to the army because he knew the region very well.¹²⁰ Many times Russian military jets penetrated the Georgian air space. On 3rd August the mobilization of mercenaries from North Caucasus was announced. One day later the Russian artillery was relocated to Tskhinvali. What is more, the Russian troops that took part in military practices "Kavkaz 2008" did not return to barracks.

Approximately 60,000 to 90,000 troops and 3000 armored vehicles were in the region just before the war. Inevitably, it was not a coincidence, but a preparation for an invasion. Andrei Illarionov claimed that Russians had been preparing 5 years for this attack, first preparations in his opinion started just after the Rose Revolution¹²¹. In the light of those facts Russian statements that their reaction was proper and compliant with international law and that Georgian action surprised them, sounded ridiculous.¹²² Sergei Lavrov in his article enumerated several reasons why Moscow had conducted this intervention. Russia defended their own citizens in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the right of those two provinces to develop. He claimed that any accusations of geopolitical interests behind Russian actions were untrue.¹²³ These statements sounded strange if compared with the comments by the President Medvedev, who said in a military base near Georgian Border in 2011: “If you... had faltered back in 2008, the geopolitical situation would be different now. And a number of countries which (NATO) tried to deliberately drag into the alliance, would have most likely already been part of it now (NATO)”.¹²⁴ Some observers interpreted this statement as a normal admiration for soldiers who effectively fought in a war. Others saw this statement as a proof that Moscow planned the war in August to stop the government in Tbilisi in its efforts to join NATO.

Even more controversies erupted with the publication of a documentary movie “The Lost Day”. This 47 minute story is an accusation of indecisiveness and cowardice of President Medvedev in the wake of the war in August. But there were more interesting things in the film. Russian top military commanders said that the plan of war had been prepared in the end of 2006 and was authorized by Putin in 2007. This movie was another argument for proponents of the thesis that Russia started the war.¹²⁵

There was still one unexplained issue, namely who fired the first shot: Russians or Georgian forces. Various reports presented different chains of events. But in my opinion it is best to quote a Mathew Bryza’s statement “whoever shot first is now no longer the issue at all. It is Russia that has escalated so dramatically and brutally.”¹²⁶

After the conflict.

It was announced that the United States provided 38 million worth of humanitarian aid and emergency relief like food, shelters and medical supplies. American planes made the total of 62 flights to Georgia and their warships delivered 132 tons of commodities.¹²⁷

Despite the fact that Americans failed their ally during the war in August, the Georgian government very quickly forgot about the American stance in the conflict. They stressed that the United States were the closest ally of Tbilisi.¹²⁸ But Georgian citizens complained about Washington's behavior. They felt betrayed by Americans.¹²⁹ The reasons of such feelings were not limited to the war but included also Saakashvili's harsh reaction to protests of Georgian opposition and the lack of transparency during elections in 2007 and 2008 with no American reaction to this event. Some Georgian politicians accused Washington of supporting Saakashvili, instead of people of Georgia.¹³⁰

On 3rd September the Secretary of State informed that the United States allocated 1 billion dollars in assistance and the first tranche with equivalent value of USD 570 million would be available for Georgia by the end of 2008. This sum of money included emergency budgetary support to the Georgian government. The main aims of this economic aid were to repair infrastructure destroyed by the Russians, restore good standing of Georgian economy and the GDP growth. This sum of money was allocated on top of the existing aid for Georgia. Additionally, Tbilisi needed military aid to defend the country but after the August war a majority of the army was destroyed so the American Department of Defense (DoD) sent a group of military experts to help Georgians rebuild their army. They were led by general Craddock and spent there a month conducting a comprehensive analysis. In October 2008 talks between Georgians and the Defense Department took place. American partners indicated several deficiencies in practically every aspect of the defense system, from the defense institutions through strategies and doctrine ending with gaps in professional military education.¹³¹

Moscow successfully challenged the United States' international position. War in Georgia clearly showed the end of unipolar world where the majority of decisions had been made by the United States.

NATO decided to develop a NATO-Georgia Commission, whose main aim was to enhance relationships between these two actors. The inaugural summit of this commission took place on 15th September. At this meeting NATO confirmed support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and condemned Russia for their "disproportionate"

military action and for recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.¹³² NATO also provided military assistance similar to the American one.¹³³ What is more, as a punishment for Russia, NATO suspended regular meetings between ambassadors from NATO and Russia. This situation lasted till 29th March 2009, when formal contacts were restored.¹³⁴ But NATO failed Georgians during a foreign ministers meeting in December 2008. Members of this organization again rejected Georgian appeals for granting MAP status. Moreover, American stance on this issue was surprising because Rice proposed to defer granting a MAP and to continue works within the NATO-Georgia commission to prepare Tbilisi for accession instead.¹³⁵

In early September 2008 Matthew Bryza drafted four most important aims for the United States in the South Caucasus. Those included the support for Georgia as the closest ally, diminishing the Russia influences in this region, promotion of a further energetic cooperation and building stability in the South Caucasus jointly with American partners there.¹³⁶

The American Vice-President Dick Cheney's visit in Tbilisi on 4th September was a realization of the first point of Bryza's plan. He said that "America will help Georgia rebuild and regain its position as one of the world's fastest growing economics. Saakashvili and his democratically elected government can count on the continued support and assistance of the United States"¹³⁷. He also assured Georgian people that just like after the Rose Revolution Washington would help Tbilisi again to rebuild its economy and to ensure Georgian democracy and independence.¹³⁸ The main aim of this visit was to show that Americans did not accept Russian policy toward Georgia but also to increase chances of Republican candidate John McCain in the forthcoming presidential election.¹³⁹ The Vice President spoke in a similar manner on 6th September in Italy accusing Moscow of violating the sovereignty of Georgia and aggressive actions against the Western World.¹⁴⁰ Two days later Washington withdrew from U.S. – Russia agreement for Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation. President Bush justified this decision by stating it was a response to Russian actions toward Georgia.¹⁴¹ On 18th September the Secretary of State repeated most of the statements declared by Cheney and Bush. But her speech was gentler, she did not call for international sanctions and also she underscored the necessity of cooperation with Russia in some areas.¹⁴² But the statements from the key figures of Bush Administration about the support for Georgia and territorial

integrity of this country were ridiculed with the Russian decision to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It only confirmed that President Bush had lost any influence on Russia.

The reaction of Washington to the Moscow's decision to recognize rebel provinces met with similar, harsh comments addressed by Bush administration members. The Americans accused Russians of paralyzing the works of the U. N. Security Council because every resolution connected with the problem of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was immediately blocked by the Moscow's ambassador.¹⁴³ It was a clear violation of the six-point agreement negotiated by President Sarkozy. The 6th point thereof provided for an international debate about the future of the rebel provinces. But Moscow's unilateral action to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia made all efforts to establish any dialogue fail. Also the international mechanism to control the situation in Georgia did not succeed.

The accord of 8th September 2008 established the components of the mechanism of stabilization in the Caucasus. It was the continuation of UN and the OSCE missions and created a new one, which would be controlled by the European Union. The main aims of the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) were as follows:

- observation of the entire territory of Georgia
- monitoring of the situation in this region
- maintaining the stability in this region
- actions aimed to ease the tensions between the sides
- helping the immigrants to come back home
- informing the European Union countries about the situation

But the activity of the mission was effectively hampered by Russian troops, who did not allow observers to come to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. What is more, the cooperation between the leader of mission and the local commander of the Russian army was full of tensions. Moreover the authorities of the rebel province accused this mission of being biased. There were two other missions: one led by the OSCE in South Ossetia ended on 31st December 2008 and the second UN mission in Abkhazia also ended as a result of Russian veto in the UN Security Council.¹⁴⁴

Geneva talks on Georgia

On the basis of the six point cease-fire accord the sides were obliged to conduct talks about the security and stability in the Caucasus. The first meeting took place on 15th September. At that time the situation in the conflict area was tense and military incidents happened.¹⁴⁵

From technical point of view, Geneva talks included three mediators: the OSCE, the UN, the EU, and three sides: Georgia, the United States and Russia. Each of them had different aims: Russia wanted to gain international recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent republics while Georgia aimed at restoring the control over those rebel provinces. The United States aimed at preservation of the pro-Western course of Georgia. The participation of Georgia in those talks as one of the sides was a positive gesture toward Tbilisi. Americans wanted to show how important the Georgian integrity was for them and that they would not recognize countries created via breaches of the international law. To stress the significance of the talks, Americans assigned Daniel Freid as a deputy of the Secretary of States to take part therein.¹⁴⁶

The change of administration in the White House and so-called “reset“ in American-Russian relationships¹⁴⁷ decreased Americans interest in South Caucasus; moreover Americans did not want to sharpen their negotiation stance toward Russia. Americans wanted to draw a line which Moscow should not pass if Russia wanted to maintain positive relations with Washington.¹⁴⁸

Geneva talks did not achieve a success, despite the many meetings conducted by the two sides. The only real success could be the establishment of the IPRM (Incident Prevention and Reaction Mechanism)¹⁴⁹. It was a forum of meetings between the parties. The main aim was to de-escalate tensions in region.¹⁵⁰ The main cause behind the failure was not poor organization of the talks but the unresolved situation in the conflict area. Neither side was strong enough to force their own interests through. The situation in the region reflected the progress in negotiations. Without a change in South Caucasus the negotiations would not bring any progress.¹⁵¹

U.S.- Georgia Strategic Partnership

On 9th January the Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze and the American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice signed in Washington a strategic partnership agreement.¹⁵² Just before the signing, Vashadze described this accord as “stepping stone which will bring Georgia to Euro-Atlantic structures, to membership within NATO, and to the family of Western and civilized nations”.¹⁵³ His optimism was substantiated because several countries like Baltic States, Croatia, and Albania signed the “Charter of Partnerships” and later joined NATO.¹⁵⁴

In the preamble of this document one could find the following information: both sides would support sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity of each other. The main goal of this agreement was to fully integrate Georgia with European and transatlantic institutions. In this charter of United States-Georgia strategic partnership, 3 main sections of bilateral cooperation were mentioned.¹⁵⁵ Section II was generally devoted to defense and security cooperation. In this area of the greatest importance was Georgia's accession to NATO and obligation of Washington to help Tbilisi in this task. One of the tools to move Georgia closer to NATO was a NATO-Georgia Commission. Both countries stressed their roles in combating terrorism and proliferation of WMD. Also there was a point about the cooperation between Georgia and Washington in improving their bilateral defense and security cooperation.¹⁵⁶ But as the Deputy Assistant Secretary Bryza pointed out, this charter did not put any obligation on Washington to defend Georgia.¹⁵⁷ Section III was dedicated to the Economic, Trade and Energy Cooperation. That chapter underscored mutual assistance in creating jobs and economic growth by improving market conditions to conduct business without obstacles. Also it was pointed out that this charter could be the first step toward a possible Free-Trade Agreement. Also the United States would try to encourage American companies to invest in the South Caucasus. The obligation of Washington to reconstruct Georgia was repeated. Point 3 of this section was very important because it addressed the energy matters. It provided for increased energy production and energy efficiency and improved security of the oil pipelines and natural gas pipelines. This point also stressed the regional cooperation among Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey in diversifying supplies for Europe.¹⁵⁸ Section IV was about the support for democracy in Georgia.¹⁵⁹ Washington and Tbilisi pledged to cooperate together in increasing the freedom of press, strengthening the

rule of law, transparency of government actions, enhancing political pluralism and creating the civil society. Last section was devoted to increasing the contacts between people of both countries and to promote cultural exchange. On this topic the parties agreed to promote different programs of cultural and educational exchange. Moreover, Washington and Tbilisi undertook to cooperate in higher education, business and scientific research. The Americans also promised to rebuild the damaged cultural-heritage sites.¹⁶⁰

On 22nd June 2009 the first meeting of the U.S-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission was held¹⁶¹. Signing of the strategic partnerships charter was perceived differently by experts. Some claimed it was a confirmation of the United States' high interest in Georgia's fate. Others maintained it was hard to believe that the charter was signed because of special U.S. interest in Georgia. Washington made strategic partnerships with less important countries for American foreign policy, like for example Angola.¹⁶² Signing of the Strategic Charter was rather a kind gesture toward Tbilisi on the part of the administration of George W. Bush, which was then leaving the office. It was a compensation for passive stance of Washington during the war.¹⁶³ In the opinions of critics the grand title of this agreement was exaggerated as this charter was not really strategic. It just included some general declarations about cooperation in various fields.¹⁶⁴

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