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Legacy of the Cold War: NATO Turning into a Global Policeman

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Recently declassified Soviet files have revealed that in 1952 Joseph Stalin offered the US a deal: he would reunite Germany by abandoning East Germany provided this united Germany refused to join NATO. Washington rejected this overture, although it has always been held that the US did everything it could to reunite Germany until the Berlin Wall fell in 1989.

The released documents came as a surprise to many experts. After the death of Joseph Stalin, Lavrenti Beria called on the Western countries to reunite Germany as a neutral state. James Warburg believes that such a possibility existed but they still opted to include West Germany in NATO, and its acceded to membership in 1955.

The case of Germany has important implications for 'divided' Georgia. Choosing to join NATO will put off the resolution of Georgia's territorial disputes for decades. It is very unlikely that the US is more concerned about Georgia's territorial integrity that it was about Germany's. There are no signs of that. Moreover, as in the case of Germany Georgia's territorial integrity is considered less important than its NATO membership.

In 1955 the Socialist countries (led of course by the USSR) set up the Warsaw Pact. NATO always rejected the proposals to sign non-agression pacts with it or dissolve both alliances. We talk about NATO a lot in Georgia but the discussion has rarely come down to specifics. Almost no one talks about what exactly Georgia can expect from NATO membership. What advantages does it give us? Or should we join NATO just for Russia's 'sake', to take revenge on it? Joining NATO does not only affect to the territorial integrity of Georgia, which is certainly of vital importance, but all aspects of the Georgian state.

Let us address the military aspect first. The outlook here does not seem attractive. In an interview in 2007 former Defence Minister Davit Tevzadze noted: NATO has an armed forces quota and a plan for how to use all the troops of its member states. Bulgaria, Romania and the Czech Republic have been disarmed since joining the alliance. Once they were told what their function was in NATO these countries had to dramatically cut their armed forces. If the situation changes tomorrow these countries will become vulnerable due to their lack of domestic forces. If we join NATO we will become the first target for Russian attack. Even if we become a member nobody will be able to help us with their troops in practice. The only means of assistance NATO has is Turkey, which is capable of making a rapid reaction, but rapid reaction means that Georgia will turn into a theatre of war. A grim outlook, indeed.

The Georgian public demonstrate stunningly little knowledge of NATO. The common opinion is merely that what was bad under Soviet ideology became automatically good after the demise of the USSR. Had NATO really been an alliance against the Soviet threat it would

have died after the Warsaw bloc dissolved. But quite the contrary is happening: NATO is expanding into former Socialist countries and some of the former Soviet republics.

In his 2004 book The Choice: Global Dominance or Global Leadership Zbigniew Brzezinski draws interesting parallels: “NATO acquired a new role in the 90s of the twentieth century when it established stability in the violent and turbulent Balkans. At the start of the next decade it became clear that we cannot avoid a kind of stability pact for the Caucasus – something similar to the stability pact of South Eastern Europe.”

The recognition of Kosovo in the Balkan example has demonstrated what this stability actually looks like. Giving up territorial integrity in this way is not attractive for Georgia. Brzezhinski believes that NATO’s further penetration into the former Soviet Union is inevitable as Russia has recognised the superiority of the Atlantic community in the global security structure. The last four years have demonstrated that Russia’s, and not only Russia’s, attitude towards NATO has radically changed.
In the last few months more politicians have started advocating Georgia’s neutrality. Peoples’ attitutes towards NATO have also started changing. Georgian society is no longer homogenous and positive about Georgia joining NATO. This is no wonder, as NATO is looking more and more like a global policeman. The only thing which might push Georgia to embrace this policing is the restoration of our territorial integrity, but this is an issue NATO would not intervene in.

If we look at the lukewarm positions of our ‘friendly’ countries towards Georgia’s territorial woes we gain the impression that the West needs our membership purely for its own interests. But Russia does not need NATO at its southern border. NATO would not be a bad counterweight in the dialogue with Russia to bring remedies for our vital ills, but Kosovo has shown that territorial integrity is not a red line the West cannot cross. Therefore, we need neutrality on condition that Georgia’s territorial integrity will be restored through negotiations with Russia.

In general American politics is prone to building myths (politics in general is fed by myths but the scales here are impressive). Here are a few examples.

It was widely reported in 1998 that in Kosovo the Serbian armed forces had indulged in ethnic cleansing, forcing half of the Kosovo Albanians to flee. The continual bloodshed forced the US administration and its allies to conduct mass bombings to allow Albanian refugees to return home. In short the NATO attack of March 24 was portrayed as an act of mercy.

What happened in reality? According to American analysts, about 2,000 people died, on both sides, before the NATO bombings started. On March 27, on the third day of the attack, NATO Chief Commander Wesley Clark told journalists that the Serbian Government was expected to react shamefully and this was grounds for concern for the Western political leadership. In his memoirs Clark writes that he told then-Secretary of State Madeleine Allbright that if NATO continued attacking Serbs the Serbian Government was most likely to terrorise civilians and NATO would not be able to protect them.

Boston University Professor Andew Bachevich believes that these bombings should turn into a lesson for every European state which has illusions that the rules of the new system of post-Cold War international relations – which Washington established – do not apply to

them. To the US hegemony in a united, integrated and free Europe is important.

In February 2008 the US crowned its Kosovo campaign of nine years with a brutal violation of territorial integrity, sovereignty and international law by promoting in every way the unilateral recognition of Albanian Kosovo. Such shameless behaviour by the US directly encouraged Russia to recognise Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In fact, if such an act is acceptable against Serbia why can it not be done to Georgia?

After the shameful February 17, 2008 UN Security Council session anti-American sentiments swept Serbia. It is amazing that such sentiments form in those very countries which Americans want to help democratise. The US has somehow managed to seed anti-American sentiments in fomer Yugoslavia, which was the most pro-Western country after the dissolution of the Warsaw bloc in both economy and mentality.

During the last Presidential elections Davit Gamkrelidze complained that due to Saakashvili's adventurism popular support for Georgia joining NATO had fallen from 84 percent to 63 percent in two months. This figure miraculously recovred in two weeks to 77 percent (in short, it is bad to rig the votes in the Presidential elections but OK to rig the results of the referendum!). "I find it extremely difficult to advocate for the US," he said. It is up to him to decide whether it is worth doing this but the attempt by the Georgian opposition to show America that it is more pro-American than the Government or pro-democracy than the Government looks unconvincing and unsupportable now.

Following the Rose Revolution the Georgian Parliament rapidly ratified an agreement which allows American servicemen to freely travel throughout Georgia and not face justice here if they commit a crime. They will be judged by American laws. Georgians cannot search, detain or arrest American servicemen. Let me remind you that in the previous 10 years the Russian soldiers here did not have the right to move from one base to another without the permission of the local Georgian authorities and some arrests took place when rule was infringed.

What else is joining NATO but a compromising of our sovereignty? Against this background it is ridiculous to even theorise about deploying NATO bases in Georgia as current policy has already turned Georgia into a military base for NATO, which Americans can freely travel around and do whatever they feel like doing in.

Most Georgians believe that NATO is a military organisation. Nobody mentions that France has left the NATO military organisation but remained a member of the North Atlantic alliance. It did this back in 1974, citing its motive as being: "to restore France's sovereignty in its full form."

Georgia, with its problems, is still as much of an alien country to the West as it was 20 years ago. Protection of our sovereignty remains the top priority for Georgia.

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