

COMMITMENT BY DEFAULT? LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS OF GEORGIAN- US SECURITY COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT

While awarding the politics of oil a subsidiary role, the aim of this article is to assess the consequences of Georgia's security cooperation with the United States and thereby it seeks to answer the question: *what long-term issues and risks are connected to the US-Georgian security cooperation?* These do not solely emanate from the traditional physical threats of military affairs, political instability and unsettled disputes over hydrocarbon assets. An increased engagement also brings about risks related to how regional actors perceive the cooperation. By this cognitive aspect, the traditional security risks become stronger and more dangerous.

KEYWORDS

Georgia, the United States, Caucasus, NATO, security, military.

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Between 2002 and 2003, only one major improvement of the Georgian Armed Forces was made. That was the status of the military units, which were trained within the US-funded "Train-and-Equip" programme (GTEP). The United States of America has during the latest decade extended its presence and influence in Georgia within every sector of society and cooperation on issues connected to the hydrocarbon business and promotion of democracy is also increasing. In general, it is cooperation where both Georgia and America benefit, as it may contribute to stable development in the region. However, even if Georgia wants the US presence, it stands to reason that risks emanate from the strained relations between the US and the regional powers of Iran and Russia. If progressive development is to take place, such risks must be avoided.

Thus, the aim of this article is to assess the issues relating to Georgia's security cooperation with the United States. Thereby, this article seeks to answer the question: *What long-term issues and risks are connected to the US-Georgian security cooperation?*

Consequently, this article will, initially, discuss the American and Georgian approach towards cooperation and outline the strategic context. Thereinafter, it will penetrate the political problems and issues related to the civil security cooperation of democracy and economic growth. Subsequent parts will assess military and strategic key-points and analyse the impact by cooperation. Finally, a few conclusions are drawn.

In 1999, USAID defined the US interest in Georgia by stating that:

Two primary themes establish the underlying basis for U. S. foreign policy objectives in Georgia: (1) the requirement for a politically and economically stable Caucasus region at a geographic crossroads that borders states with potential volatility, such as Russia and Iran; and (2) the vital position of Georgia as a Caucasus transit country of oil and gas for the U. S. and the West.¹

¹USAID in Georgia, *Strategic Plan Georgia –USAID/Caucasus*, 1999, p. 9.

It can thus be argued that these two points are of greatest interest to assess and incorporate when canvassing security issues of Georgian-American cooperation. However, in contrast to most security analyses, this article will award the second point, concerning the politics of oil, a subsidiary role - despite the fact that it is a pivotal issue. The impact, or presumed impact, of the cooperation itself will instead be analysed in-depth against strategic, military and political backgrounds where the first point is at a focus. A key theme, also, in the article will be the connection between 'soft' cognitive concerns and 'hard' traditional security risks derived from cooperation.

Washington's Plan of Priorities

Georgia has enjoyed attention from Washington all since 1991, but the style and intensity has shifted over the years. It is a well-known fact that the 'Russia first' strategy was prioritised until 1994 when military issues and the Caspian oil made their way to Washington's agenda. The general strategic role of today was launched in 1996, and it was not until this time when Georgia came into focus as a prioritised subject for military support.² The reason for these policy shifts has been explained by the fact that Washington came to a clear on Russia's limited capabilities in the South Caucasus.³ Former National Security Adviser to Georgia's President Eduard Shevardnadze, Archil Gegeshidze, pinpoints the reasons for Washington's attention to Georgia. He states that it is due to:⁴

1. International prestige of the political leaders that leads to pro western foreign policy.
2. The strive for containing Russia

²L. Jonson, "The New Geopolitical Situation in the Caspian Region", in C. Chufirin (ed.), *The Security of the Caspian Sea Region*, New York, Oxford University Press/SIPRI, 2000, p. 18ff.

³S.E. Cornell, *Beyond Oil: US Engagement in the Caspian Region*, Working paper no 52, Uppsala University, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 2000, pp. 13-18.

⁴A. Gegeshidze, "Georgia in Need for a New Strategic Agenda", *Caucasus Context*, no: 1, 2003, p. 38ff.

3. Promotion of peace in the region, where Georgia is a key player
4. Georgia is the gateway for east-west transport, and a door against north-south
5. Introducing western values in Eurasia

In 1999, The RAND Corporation made a study on Western and US/NATO interests in the wider Caspian region and stated that the objectives were confined to:⁵

1. Prevent regional hegemony (from Iran and Russia)
2. Get access to energy resources
3. Reduce risks of civil war or intrastate conflicts
4. Discourage spread of militant and anti-Western Islamic movements
5. Prevent spill-over effects to important regions, as the Persian Gulf

Naturally, all of these points mentioned above 'qualifies' as issues of security, but the two latter points are of minor importance for Georgia, which will be discussed further on. Yet the intensity of the aforementioned threats derived from Georgia and the South Caucasus against the US are rather modest. Therefore, it can be concluded that the gains from having influence in the region are greater than the needs of managing risks and threats, at least in the short-term perspective. However, in the long-run from America's horizon, every state would benefit from a stable Caucasus and promotion of this is best done by security cooperation and extensive engagement. The value added is a new ally. Nevertheless, such a comprehensive security approach is difficult to grasp - and even harder to control. This makes prioritisation of *urgent* security needs difficult.⁶ In order to control this, there must be a harmony in the

⁵R. Sakalsky & T. Charlick-Paley, Tanya, *NATO and Caspian Security: A Mission Too Far?* RAND Report MR-1074-AF, 1999, p. 7.

⁶D. Darchiashvili, "Trends of Strategic Thinking in Georgia: Achievements, Problems and Prospects", in Bertsch, Gary K. et al (eds.), *Crossroads and*

priorities of Washington and Tbilisi. Today it is doubtful if it is so. In either case, concerning the US engagement in the region three features can be noted.

First and foremost, in 2002, the US launched its new US National Security Strategy, which stated that all means are to be used when handling security issues in the post nine-eleven era.⁷ The US public and commercial lobbies, as well as Capitol Hill, have been sceptical about the importance of a vague and ill-defined strategy aimed at promoting liberty and democracy in the region. John McCarthy at *Jane's Intelligence Review* has pinpointed this as a very reason for the frequent mentioning of the Caspian oil in public statements.⁸ It is true, a stable and friendly Georgia may have other advantages to the US, as being a geopolitical asset or being a part of a peaceful region, is rarely mentioned in superficial analyses by scholars, officials or journalists. Today, there is nothing that indicates that the US part of the cooperation would not exist, had it not been for the Caspian oil. Therefore, it is too parsimonious to reduce all foreign policy in the region to an agenda of oil.

Moreover, Rajan Menon actually argues that there are no vital interests for the US in the Caspian region (and therefore not in Georgia). The Kremlin dimension, instead, is the key issue to consider in this respect.⁹ Naturally, any attempts to label the South Caucasus in general and Georgia in particular, as a backyard of a 'sphere of influence' in the 'near abroad' is seen by Argus' eye. In fact, in 1998, Steven Sestanovich testified in congress that the US "absolutely reject the idea of a Russian sphere of influence".¹⁰ Four years after this speech, Nicholas Burns, US Permanent Representative to NATO, officially declared the Caucasus as NATO's zone of

Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia, New York, Routledge, 2000A, p. 70f.

⁷National Security Strategy of the United States of America, The White House, September 2002.

⁸J. McCarthy, "The Geo-politics of Caspian Oil", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, July, 2000, p. 24.

⁹R. Menon, *Central Asia's Foreign Policy and Security Challenges: Implications for the United States*, NBR, vol. 6 (4), 1995, pp. 13-15.

¹⁰K.T. O'Halloran, "A New U.S. Regional Strategy Toward Russia", *Strategic Review*, vol. 27 (3), 1999, p. 58.

interest,¹¹ which gives some indications on Washington's plan of priorities. Even today, Russian ambitions are of greater intensity than the American ones, but its limited capacity infringe on its regional agenda.

Finally, cooperation can be conditional or unconditional. Support often depends on if some prerequisites are fulfilled, Haas and O'Sullivan has shown.¹² The IMF and the World Bank, for example, often demand economic reforms prior to giving financial subsidiaries to the region, and so does the US. The result is that the cooperation takes an asymmetrical form and reduces Georgia to a receiver, while the US is a donor and a conductor. From Georgia's point of view, such a relationship may be frustrating, but alternatives are worst. Another important aspect of this is that regional state will not appreciate the stabilising factors of US engagement if they see it, either as hegemonic activity, or as something that will reduce their power, relatively speaking. However, there are reasons to believe that this is of minor importance, as Georgia is on a friendly basis with all states in the region, except Russia.

Tbilisi's Plan of Priorities

Georgia is dependent on foreign assistance and its weak situation therefore serves as a guiding star in the attempts to attract foreign attention, either from the US, from the EU or from Russia. During the Boris Yeltsin-era, Georgia was even weaker than today and had to rely on Kremlin's support. The price was membership in the CIS and positioning of Russian troops on Georgian ground. About the same time as Georgia received attention from Washington, its relations with Moscow came to a halt. If the American goals, outlined above, were to be reached, the US had to take on Georgia itself, and now there is only the Western way to go.

Georgia's blessing and curse is its geopolitical location. If the directions of the compass are considered, Georgia is the key state for

¹¹N. Burns, "NATO Admits in Public Caucasus and Central Asia are Within Sphere of its Interests", *RIA Novosti*, 9 May, 2002.

¹²R.N. Haass, & M.L. O'Sullivan, "Terms of Engagement: Alternatives to Punitive Policies", *Survival*, vol. 42 (2), 2000, p. 114f.

east-west transportation and cooperation and, at the same time, the buffer between north and south. However, this is not much to offer if there are many security problems. Therefore, a substantial part of the cooperation between Georgia and the US is related to this field.

Georgia's national security is comprehensive but in contradiction, it is also vague, incoherent and almost non-existent. A part from conflictual aspects, education, societal development, rule of law and creation of democratic institutions is also included. However, there is no real national security doctrine, no defined or codified concepts and no concrete action plan. Thus Georgia does not know where to go, or how to do it. It goes without saying that in such a situation, the American subsidiaries can be connected to prerequisites that follows Washington's lines of priorities.

There is, also, a lack of consensus in Georgia on national security between people in general and the élite. To a great extent, strategic thinking within the élite echelons harmonises with Western ways of thinking. Shevardnadze once again confirmed his Westernised views in TV, during May 2003, by stating Georgia's firm course towards membership in NATO and the EU.¹³ Although, there is a clear discrepancy between statements of intentions and implementation of policies, as far as the government is concerned. Attempts to meet NATO standards, for example, will be further elaborated later on. Contrastingly, the public does not award much attention to NATO or EU, but are mostly concerned with traditional security problems such as territorial integrity; ethnic violence; lack of rule of law and, finally, financial crises.¹⁴ This kind of disharmony between the élite and the public concerning the US presence pose a dilemma, for several reasons. Firstly, it shows that two diametrically opposed views are entrenched in the society. Naturally, this is problematic if either camp suggests shifts in the security agenda. Secondly, if democratic features are realised in Georgia, the ruling élite and regime will consider public opinion and act on behalf of it. Thereby the American attempts to support democracy undermine its own future engagements and realise the US departure from the

¹³-"V Nastuyashee Vremya u Menya Yest Garantia togo[...]: Intervyu Prezidenta Gruzii Eduarda Shevardnadze Telekampanii 'Rustavi-2'", *Svobodnaya Gruzia*, 16 May, 2003.

¹⁴Darchiashvili, *op. cit.*, p. 67ff.

region. If long-term cooperation, especially on equal basis, is to be undertaken, such risks must be avoided. The obvious way for doing so is, consequently, to aim support in such ways that the preferences of the public are satisfied. Improvement for the public, and not only concerning abstract ideas of security for the regime, is thus a paramount aspect. Fortunately, security cooperation in Georgia incorporate such projects that are meant to develop the civil sector and it can therefore be concluded that this danger is not urgent.

Inter-Caucasian Relations

As indicated, Georgia's relations with its neighbours are positive in all cases but the Russian and US has, presently, positive relations with all states of the South Caucasus, but rather negative relations with Iran. The relation with Russia alters, depending on general world politics and its regional undertakings. Most analysts of the region know, however, that the Georgian autonomous region of Adjara has close links to Russia. This is also the case for the *de facto* independent region of Abkhazia and the region of South Ossetia. Samthske and Javakheti, in addition, are populated with many ethnic Armenians that both fear Turkey and favour Russia. This illustrates that any security cooperation has an embedded risk of offending some state or region. If the security cooperation is to have a stabilising effect, these perceptive dilemmas must be taken into consideration. By no means the course is settled in advance, but if the perceptions held by regional actors concerning the US intentions are negative, counter-measures might be taken. Surely, the US has the possibility to withdraw its commitment, but in the long-run, Georgia and regional states as Turkey and Azerbaijan will be negatively affected. Zbgniew Brzezinski said in the summer of 2003, concerning the US campaign in Iraq, that: "[t]he United States has for the first time found itself at the height of its military might and at the bottom of its political popularity."¹⁵ If things are going in this direction for the US at a global level, it may affect the South Caucasus and constitutes the foundation of future policies that well might get an impact in the South Caucasus.

¹⁵Quoted in L. Shevtsova, "New Danger: Hyperpower on the Loose", *Moscow News*, 7-13 May, 2003.

Even if it is often considered so in Georgia, Russian engagements, and allegedly attempts to undermine peace and stability in the South Caucasus, has been proved to be far from the main reason of the insecure situation in the state.¹⁶ As Alexander Rondeli frequently states, Georgia is a weak state as well as a weak power.¹⁷ Also RAND concludes that the major risks are not derived from external powers, but from domestic instability.¹⁸ Washington clearly acknowledges this fact and the GTEP is conducted parallel to civil institutional building.

September 11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have once again placed the risks of anti-Western Islamic movements of the security agenda. Yet, there are no indications of this being an urgent risk in Georgia or the South Caucasus. The often-cited prophet of the 'clash of civilisations', Samuel Huntington, has put the Caucasus on the world map by defining the region as a 'fault line' where the clashes between Christianity and Islam would take place.¹⁹ Huntington's findings and arguments nowhere are left unopposed. As an example, Svante Cornell's account of the ethno-political conflicts show, there is no religious 'clash', but the conflicts in South Caucasus have other roots, as territorial, ethnic and most of all political.²⁰ It is true though; ethno-political and confessional problems exist in several regions, in both North and South Caucasus. The regions of Abkhazia, Adjara, South Ossetia, Meskheta, Samtskhe and Javakheti in Georgia has during the last decade experienced a period of increased tension and need to be taken into consideration. It can therefore be said that institutional building and development of

¹⁶N.V. Zubarevich & Y.E. Fedorov, "Russian-Southern Economic Interaction: Partner or Competitors", in Menon, *et. al.* (eds.), *Russia, The Caucasus and Central Asia: The 21st Century Security Environment*, New York: ME Sharpe/EastWest Institute, 1999, pp. 119-144.

¹⁷A. Rondeli, "Regional Security Prospects in the Caucasus", in G.K. Bertsch *et. al.* (eds.), *Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 49f.

¹⁸Sakalsky & Charlick-Paley, *A Mission Too Far*, p. 83f.

¹⁹S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, London, Simon and Schuster, 1997, pp. 275-280.

²⁰S.E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separation in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*, PhD Dissertation, Uppsala University, 2002, pp. 21-57.

economic structures will not *per se* solve all problems, as other forces may be stronger. The second war in Chechnya shows that ethnicity or religion can be tied closer to states (or state-like entities) by external circumstances. During the first war, confessional aspects had only a minor role, but due to assistance from states in the Middle East and due to the intensity of the war, its importance increased. Currently, there is little evidence that shows an awareness of this in Washington. If the public opinion is taken as an indication of the general conceptions of threats, it can be concluded that an important aspect of security cooperation is missing.

Civil Security Cooperation

Military support set a side; security is also handled within the civil sphere, where support for democratic reform and promotion of market-based businesses is given by the USAID. In the long-run, democracy and market-economy is believed to have the best stabilising effects on world politics and by that it will also make America secure. In general, the support given consists of five main parts. Private sector and market reform – 35%; health, humanitarian assistance and community development – 22%; democracy and governance – 16%; energy and environment – 14% and, finally, cross-sectoral activities - 13%. The total sum reached \$50,650,000 as of the FY2001.²¹ In monetary terms, this is a modest sum for America, but Georgia and Armenia are the states that receive most aid per capita by the US, apart from Israel and Egypt.²² This illustrates the importance of the financial support from the US to Georgia.

Yet, it must be remembered that what has started to happen this last decade, took almost a century in the West. It would therefore be out of context to demand that the Georgian society would have the same democratic features as the West does. A paramount issue is, however, that there is a likelihood of authoritarian policies in Georgia, and it has been show that authoritarianism and recession in

²¹USAID in Georgia – *Monthly Newsletter*, vol. 1 (1), 2001, p. 1.

²²US Government Assistance to and Cooperative Activities with the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union, FY 2000 Annual Report, January 2001.

combination do not promote peace and prosperity.²³ In contrast, UNDP shows that authoritarian regimes do not always make the life of its citizen's worse of than during a democratic regime.²⁴ Nonetheless, if the liberal view on trade, often proposed by the US, is to be the carrier of growth and peace, too firm political control and prioritisation of security are counter-productive. Democracy indeed lays the foundation for stability, but there is a risk of other security issues overshadowing the situation and undermining the process of democracy.

Albert Menteshashvili has argued, in a NATO-sponsored report, that Georgia's membership into the European Council and as potential prospective member of NATO will be part of creating security and stability for the Caucasus.²⁵ There are reasons to believe that this is wishful thinking. First and foremost, NATO is an organisation that guarantees peace and stability in Europe and beyond, at least in the eyes of the White House, but Turkey's and Greece' entry into NATO increased the tension between the two states, not decreased it.²⁶ Additionally, entrenching democracy is a tedious task and when a weak state, as Georgia, is to distribute its scarce resources, it is often sacrificed on the altar of territorial security. A membership in NATO or EU will not be realised in a long time for Georgia and democratisation from above or from the outside may contribute with nothing except ethnic tension and economic polarisation. Nevertheless, incorporating democracy into the sphere of national security could lift it to a prioritised level and thus the means and goals of the state would harmonise. This requires that the regime is more interested the long-term survival of an independent Georgia, than surviving next election.

The single most important thing that has realised Georgia's cooperation with the US is, indeed, Shevardnadze's pro-US foreign policy. However, the emergence of the George Soros-sponsored 'it's

²³Spruyt & Ruseckas, *A Mission Too Far*, p. 107.

²⁴*Human Development Report 2002*, UNDP.

²⁵A. Menteshashvili, *Security and Foreign Policy in Central Asia and Caucasian Republics*, NATO, 1999.

²⁶R.R. Krebs, "Perverse Institutionalism: NATO and the Greco-Turkish Conflict", *International Organization*, vol. 53 (2), 1999, pp. 343-377.

enough' campaign has raised doubts about American intentions. It is argued that due to the general election in the fall of 2003, American attempts are made to undermine the Shevardnadze government by this campaign. This argument is said to be supported by the fact that the mastermind of the 'it's enough'-campaign in former Yugoslavia was Richard Miles, currently US Ambassador to Georgia.²⁷ If anti-American forces would replace Shevardnadze it would, naturally, have an impact on the foreign policy. Forecasts of possible successors are not easily made, but currently most of the political spectrum agrees on the benefits of US support and EU and NATO membership. Nevertheless, Shevardnadze is nowadays considered to be a part of the obstacles to reform - not a part of the solution. If that is the case, a new reform-eager and pro-US establishment might increase the possibilities for the US to reach its two goals discussed above.

It must be remembered that external economic support for reform can be a misguided form of aid as it does not give the expected impact if problems, such as corruption, exist. Since 90% of the Georgians believe that bribing an official is the only way of solving their problems,²⁸ and that up to 92% of all officials are involved,²⁹ the situation is serious.

By canvassing cognitive aspects of support for democracy in Georgia, it can be stated that security engagement for developing civil society also carry along risks and implications, either for the two security collaborators, or for the wider region. At least four issues deserve attention.

First, François Heisbourg has analysed US Foreign Policy and concludes that from Bosphorus to Indus, there seems to be a zone whereas the 'need' for democracy and attention to human rights, is

²⁷Z. Pochkhua, "The US Government does not Advocate the Overthrow of the Shevardnadze Administration", *Georgian Times*, 12 May, 2003, p. 4, 9.

²⁸"People Dissatisfied with Government", *Georgian Times*, 13 July, 2001, p. 2.

²⁹"Corruption Survey in Georgia – Second Wave", GORBI, June 2002, p. 20.

“less urgent than in places like China”.³⁰ Implicitly this means that the US supports dictators and authoritarian regimes if it serves their strategic purposes. Criticism of this kind can, nonetheless, be misdirected, not only due to the fact that money flows to the region are unaffected, but also due to other reasons.³¹ Georgia has no dictator, even if there still are authoritarian tendencies. Does this mean that democracy must prevail foreign aid? It must be remembered that the US support to Georgia, in monetary terms, is not purely focused on military security, as \$50 millions are given via USAID and \$64 million via the GTEP. On the other hand, perception is sometimes more important than reality and if these issues are not managed by Georgia and the US – it could have an impact on the regional states. At this point, one cannot draw the conclusion that the US has a short-term tactical gain as a point of the cooperation agenda - even if, in 2001, Georgia opened up its air space for American air campaign in Afghanistan.³²

Second, it would be somewhat bizarre to demand from Georgia that it would be a full-fledged western-style democracy before any cheques are signed at Capitol Hill. Surely, there are tendencies of ideological blackmail in the asymmetric cooperation. This relates to a classic dilemma in politics; should security prevail democracy or vice-versa? The scholarly consensus is, naturally, that one cannot exist without the other, at least not in the long run. In Georgia, however, there is a common belief that urgent security needs to be met before spending on democratic reform can be made. The ‘frozen conflicts’ of the region pose a situation where such categorical criticism may serve no purpose but to provide an argument for withdrawal of American engagements. Who would benefit from that? Russia would indeed, at least in the short run, but that does neither produce a sustainable argument for the US, nor for Georgia. This is a clear situation where negative perceptions of regional states are neglected despite an obvious intensity.

³⁰F. Heisbourg, “American Hegemony? Perceptions of the US Abroad”, *Survival*, vol. 4 (41), 1999-2000, p. 12.

³¹Ø. Noreng, “Rørledning er storpolitikk: Det nye spillet om oljen fra Kaukasus og Sentral-Asia”, *Internasjonal Politikk*, vol. 58 (2), 2000, p. 182.

³²*Army and Society in Georgia*, CIPDD, September-October, 2001.

Thirdly, Archil Gegeshidze underscores that as long as it is geopolitical interests that constitute the foundation for American wills to cooperate with Georgia, democratic aspects will be of secondary concern. This has the implication giving a *carte blanche* for corrupt forces eager to reallocate financial aid without implementing designated policies of democratisation.³³ In addition this bears importance, not in monetary terms, but when political pressure is to be put on the regime as a part of enforcing western-values.

Finally, it is worth remembering the Georgian state is not a single unit, even if it is often presented as such. Risks and threats can thus be directed against various levels of the state and society. The government or ruling establishment can, subsequently, 'securitise' threats toward the regime and make them a prioritised goal of the state. This may enhance authoritarian elements and deprive other areas of means and attention. There are, also, reasons to believe that the US has failed to recognise this discrepancy even if it has not prioritised regime-related problems, but it nonetheless invoke a risk of wasting aid for democratic development. In sum, the cognitive dimension of democracy needs attention, not only in economic ways, but also in security planning. Having said this, it is time to explore the military side of cooperation.

The Road to NATO is Scattered with Potholes

Joining the EU and NATO is the prioritised goal of Georgia as a state, so its Parliament has declared in 2002.³⁴ As strange as it may seem for a post-Soviet state, there is a consensus on this issue in Georgia as the view of NATO is general positive within the whole political spectrum. A few prominent politicians, President Shevardnadze is one, hold an optimistic view on the speed of meeting the necessary prerequisites for joining. He has declared that a

³³J. George, "Georgia's Strategic Balancing Act: Has Increased US Presence in Georgia affected Georgian-Russian Relations?", *AmCham News*, no: 3, 2003, p. 10ff.

³⁴"On Beginning of the Process of Accession to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)", *Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia*, Tbilisi, 13 September 2002, no: 1661.

membership is feasible within only a few years time. Yet, this may well be a vehicle for domestic political purposes. The upcoming general election suggests that it may be a way of scoring some additional points.³⁵ In fact, the road ahead is long and scattered with potholes. The problems are found at several levels, economic and well as political and military.

By considering the economic issues, it can be said that Georgia's defence spending has only been 0,5% of its GDP, while NATO has a requirement of at least 2%. As a comparison, Turkey spends 4,5%, which is an extremely high percentage. Although the financial crisis in Turkey has been serious, it is still potent to pay for Georgia's representation in NATO and the salaries for its peacekeepers in KFOR.³⁶ For the present financial year, Georgia almost doubled its defence spending, which indicates the prioritised position of the defence forces.

George Robertson, NATO's Secretary General, visited Tbilisi on May 15 and emphasised that Georgian participation as peacekeepers in Kosovo has been well carried out.³⁷ Even if this participation is rather modest, as it only consists of one platoon, it has great value for Georgia as a newly independent state. During this visit, Robertson underscored that the process towards membership is very long and hard and an excellent geopolitical location will not change this fact.³⁸ As opposed to the most naive forecasts, several Georgian MPs, involved in the NATO issues, argue that security does not arrive automatically by a membership in NATO. Instead, strengthening the state from within is the key solution. In addition, NATO's door might if the process of improving is too slow, MPs

³⁵"Timing is Everything: NATO Secretary General Visits Georgia", *The Georgian Messenger*, 13 May, 2003, p. 2.

³⁶I. Aladashvili, "Foreign Assistance to the Georgian Army", *Army and Society in Georgia*, CIPDD, January-February, 2001.

³⁷G. Bakradze, "A Long Way to NATO", *Georgia Today*, 16-22 May, 2003, p. 1f.

³⁸G. Robertson, "'Georgia and NATO': Enhancing our Partnership", *The Georgian Messenger*, 14 May, 2003, p. 2.

argue.³⁹ However, this may well be an attempt to gain attention for the process of development.

Militarily speaking, only one major improvement has been made within the Armed Forces since 2002, which is the GTEP. This became clear on the 6-8 May 2003 when a NATO delegation undertook the yearly assessment of the Georgian military forces.⁴⁰ It goes without saying that the Georgian armed forces will not be up to NATO standards for a long time, even if the political establishment so decides. Nevertheless, three key issues deserve some attention. First and foremost, the efforts of trying to improve the status of the Armed Forces are not wasted just because membership will not be realised in the near future. All improvement will add some stabilisation to the security structures. What is more, the level that is to be reached does not correspond to the same level as the US or even the UK. Other post-communist states, as Poland, are still in their developing phase, just at a higher level than Georgia is. Finally, there are, unfortunately for Georgia, natural constraints on how much improvement there can be. That relates to the fact that Georgia is totally dependent on support from Turkey and from the US and hence it largely depends on their wills and capabilities.

NATO expansion has globally been a debatable topic, not the least in the South Caucasus. From Georgia's and America's point of view, Russia can act, despite its weaknesses, in Roland Dannreuther's words, 'in an obstructionist manner'.⁴¹ Most often, this is no real problem as the Georgian-American cooperation continues whether Russia objects or not. However, during times of crisis or war, it may prove to be important. As a comparison, during the Kosovo-crisis, the relation between NATO and Russia that before seemed to make progress, changed for the worse. As indicated earlier in this article, it does not always matter if the US undertakings in Georgia is a *real* threat against Russia or not, as it will have an impact if Russia so believes. When regional policy-makers have read and re-read the

³⁹C. Tashkevich, "MPs Warn Door to NATO May Close", *The Georgian Messenger*, 14 May, 2003, p. 1.

⁴⁰C. Tashkevich, "NATO Military Experts 'satisfied'", *The Georgian Messenger*, 13 May, 2003, p. 3.

⁴¹R. Dannreuther, "Escaping the Enlargement Trap in NATO-Russian Relations", *Survival*, vol. 41 (4) 1999-2000, p. 146.

theoretical literature in the traditions of Machiavelli, Morgenthau and Kissinger, they naturally see the situation as a zero-sum game and act on behalf of these perceptions. If Georgia is weak and lack support of a major power, as America, Moscow could see a window of opportunity for increasing its influence in Georgia. Rajan Menon even argues that as soon as Russia's economic situation improves, it will take on a more active role within its former territory,⁴² especially since Georgia is a key state in the region. From Georgia's horizon, this is one of the strongest arguments for increased cooperation with America.

Finally, "American foreign policy today operates in the realm of choice, not necessity".⁴³ Yet, capacity might in this respect prove more of a limit than the political will of Washington is. Georgia is, after all, not a key concern for Western security. According to RAND Corporation, this is the case - even if rhetoric points to the opposite. NATO and the US cannot, therefore, take on more than they can deliver.⁴⁴

Additionally, Georgian flirtations with NATO do not have a deterrent effect on Russian interest in Georgia, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Ivanov said in late September of 2002.⁴⁵ Even as late as spring of 2003, at the height of the Iraqi war, Vladimir Putin confirmed that Russia saw the GTEP as a net gain for Russia.⁴⁶ Most Georgian would disagree that this represent the Russian policy towards Georgia and Pavel Felgenhauer has showed that Georgia is considered as the most anti-Russian neighbour to Russia.

⁴²Menon, *Treacherous Terrain*, p. 10.

⁴³S.G. Brooks & W.C. Wohlforth, "American Primacy in Perspective", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 81 (2), 2002, p. 26.

⁴⁴Sakalsky & Charlick-Paley, *A Mission Too Far*, p. 84, 96.

⁴⁵"Georgia's Accession to NATO Does not Worry Russia, Says Defence Minister", *Itar-Tass*, 19 September, 2002, from CDI Weekly # 223, 20 September, 2002.

⁴⁶George, "Georgia's Strategic Balancing Act", p. 10ff.

GTEP - "It was just our moral obligation to appreciate this"⁴⁷

As indicated in the previous part concerning potential NATO accession, a lot is to be done in the Georgian Armed Forces. The US Special Forces 'Green Berets' launched the GTEP during the summer of 2002. In wartime, Georgia falls under the responsibilities of the USEUCOM,⁴⁸ but the current peacetime cooperation is conducted under special flag and today, other units, as the US Marine Corps, have taken over the training programme that covers all levels of the Georgian military forces from battalions and below. The duration is twenty months and the total cost amounts to \$64 millions, which is twice as much as the whole defence budget of Georgia in 2002. The units trained are first and foremost Army troops, but also units from the Border Guards. It must be mentioned that the operations are at a very basic level and only comprise 14 weeks for each unit, which include standardised infantry tactics like squad patrol duties and ground navigation. In addition to training, the support also includes supply of arms and equipment.⁴⁹

By and large, the GTEP is conducted in public in order not to impose an increased threat of covert operations against Russia. This is an excellent illustration on how transparency in the security field can reduce the problems of negative perceptions. In addition it shows that Washington acknowledges this dimension. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that at the same time, unidentified Russian fighter aircrafts carry out 'anti-terrorism' operations in the Georgian Pankisi Gorge. Some argue that Russia deliberately postpones the withdrawal of its force in Abkhazia due to the American security engagements.⁵⁰ However, there is no evidence that supports this idea. On the contrary, many indications suggest that the Russians troops in Georgia, as well as its peacekeeping force of the CIS, will stay for an indefinite time.

⁴⁷T. Tatishvili, "What is Written in the Military Agreement between Georgia and the US?", *Georgian Times*, 21 April 2003.

⁴⁸V. Vyazmski, "Obedinennie Komandovaniya Vooroshennikh Sil SSHA", *Zarubejnoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, no: 3, 2003, p. 2-3.

⁴⁹A. Ekberg, "GTEP: and then What", *AmCham News*, no: 2, 2003, p. 20f.

⁵⁰-"Has the Time come for Russian 'Peacekeepers' to Leave Abkhazia?", *Daily News on Russia and the Former Soviet States*, 19 April, 2002, p. 1.

Indeed, Georgia could label the US presence 'Salvation Army' as the current status of the Armed Forces is in extremely bad condition. Poor training and outdated equipment aside, social problems are the greatest concern for Georgian conscripts. Malnourishment is endemic in the army and between 2000-3500 conscripts desert every year. Lack of funds and food even enforces many military units to take on farming instead of training.⁵¹ One could therefore assume that most domestic actors would welcome any proposal that facilitate improvements. As strange as it may seem, removing bureaucratic obstacles to cooperation has had its implications. In late March of 2003, an agreement between Georgia and the US was made on the issues of American military presence. The agreement grants US soldiers the right to enter Georgia without a visa and allow them to carry weapons and military equipment without the ordinary custom procedures. In addition, Americans are granted immunity.⁵² This has upset many Georgians who claim that Americans accidentally might injure Georgians without being held responsible for it. Yet, this criticism has few supporters within the political layers of Georgia. Irakli Batiashvili, Head of the Parliamentary Committee for Defence and Security for commented on this issue by saying:

[a]s regards the question of why we granted such extensive privileges to the US military, I'd remind you that the US is a strategic partner for Georgia, helping us in building our military forces up to modern standards. It was just our moral obligation to appreciate this.⁵³

Gia Baramidze, MP, and former Head of the Committee also held this view.⁵⁴ Georgia is, thus, willing to go great length in order to meet the American demands on cooperation. Drawing upon these statements, two things can be said. First, it underscores the asymmetric relationship and, second, it shows that mutual interests have a price in terms of regulatory concessions. This kind of demands

⁵¹M. Chitaia & N. Zhvania, "Georgia's National Security is at Stake as Chronic Hunger Fuels Desertion in the Conscript Army", *IWPR*, 30 April, 2003.

⁵²T. Tatishvili, "What is Written[...]".

⁵³*Ibid.*.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*.

is nothing specific for the situation in Georgia, but is something that the US demands on a regular basis.

Speaking about terrorism, none of the states in the Caucasus has been considered to be official sponsors of terrorism,⁵⁵ but recent developments indicated that terrorists might take refuge in Georgia. Contrary to much of media reporting during the last decade, the US has not connected al-Qa'ida to Chechnyan rebels, or seen the Chechnyan politicians as terrorists.⁵⁶ It is interesting to note that a few months after this statement, Vladimir Putin proposed an opposing view by claiming that al-Qa'ida actually have connections in Chechnya.⁵⁷ During the following months, proof of this was undeniably presented as several members were arrested and, apparently, transferred to the American base in Guantanamo Bay.⁵⁸ Although, it is worth noting that the counter-terror agenda for the US has been present for several years in the region. As early as in 1992, Georgian servicemen undertook training in the US.⁵⁹

Consequently, American commitments, under Georgian auspices or not, concerning 'anti-terrorist' activities or regaining Georgian territorial integrity, are not on the agenda even if, occasionally, requests for such undertakings in Pankisi or Abkhazia are heard from Georgian officials. This is a case-point as it highlights three intertwined things. Firstly, it is a clear demarcation line of American commitments. Secondly, it illustrates that Tbilisi wishes to increase the cooperation beyond the current mandate. Drawing upon this fact, it can be concluded that Tbilisi's opinions of Kremlin's are of secondary concern. Finally, it highlights the fact America is calling

⁵⁵*Countering the Changing Threat of International Terrorism*, Report of the National Commission on Terrorism Pursuant to Public Law 277, 105th Congress, FAS.

⁵⁶S. Pifer, "US Policy on Chechnya", Statement Before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Washington, DC, 9 May, 2000.

⁵⁷V. Putin, "Russian President Vladimir Putin's Statement on Situation in Pankisi", 11 September, *Daily Reports on Russia and the Former Soviet Republics*, 12 September, 2002, p 2-3.

⁵⁸"Al-Qaeda Presence in Georgia's Pankisi Valley", *Daily Reports on Russia and the Former Soviet Republics*, 21 October, 2002, p. 3.

⁵⁹C.M. Ekedahl & M.A. Goodman *The Wars of Eduard Shevardnadze*, Dulles, Bassey's, 2001, p. 275.

the shots and dictates the scope of the cooperation, not only financially. Neglecting Russia may, in fact, rock the Georgian boat of security.

Moscow Rocks the Boat

It can initially be stated that seeing the Caucasus as a buffer zone, as many analysts do, follows the realist lines of geopolitics. The logic of the compass encompasses the problems of north-south and the possibilities of east-west. These two dimensions also show the two core objectives stated by the USAID. By reiterating the a key idea, Russian capabilities are limited at this point, but it will make Russia, according to Jaffe, only attempt to reassert itself when it gets stronger - in a way unfavourable for the US.⁶⁰ From Washington's horizon, this can be interpreted as the very utility of controlling the Caucasian 'buffer zone'. It is a clear example of American attempts obtains short-term advantages. It also highlights what regional actors see as a zero-sum game. Except within the *Realist* literature, there is not much proof of this being a perpetual condition of things. However, even if this view counter-productive it will undoubtedly set is mark on regional policies if various actors hold this belief as cognitions and perceptions set the frames of political actions. This aspect deserves attention and is often neglected in security analyses.

Another key issue is that there is no game, great or not, to be won by knocking out Iran and Russia. Instead, the US tries to infringe on their abilities to act in the South Caucasus. This brings along a paradox. On the one hand, the US increases the space for *its* political action in Georgia, but on the other hand, this strive will, as argued, increase the risk level and the magnitude of threats substantially. It will, therefore, reduce the same space for political action.

By turning to the east-west dimension, symbolised by the TRACECA transport-corridor, two broad issues must be highlighted. Firstly, this dimension has a geoeconomic rather than geopolitical advantage for all beneficiaries. Although the political motives behind

⁶⁰A. Jaffe, "US Policy Towards the Caspian Region: Can the Wish-list be Realized?", in G. Chufrin (ed.), *The Security of the Caspian Region*, New York, Oxford University Press/SIPRI, 2001, p. 146f.

economic engagement are paramount, being a stakeholder in businesses makes the US' engagements peaceful and legitimate. Secondly, security theory prescribes that when the importance of certain issues, as economics or energy, increases so much that it is awarded a security label, by any (or every) involved actor, it make its way on the security agenda. This gives legitimacy to the government to handle the issue by extraordinary means. It will, in that case, take on the role as a strategic goal, and the political and military strategic undertakings will be utilised for this very purpose. In a region where the internal security dynamics are conflictual, it will undoubtedly be dangerous. As many Georgians hold the perception that a membership in NATO would solve all security problems, and the fact that much of US-Georgian security cooperation is done within a NATO framework, it deserves further attention.

What is more, if one assumes that the US is 'rewarded' permanent access to military bases in Georgia as a result of its generous subsidiaries, the impact on the region would be extensive. First of all, Russia would strongly object to have even more American soldiers positioned along its southern tier. This would surely lead to a worsening of Georgia's, NATO's and US's relations with Moscow. Second, this would change the strategic context of the region since the US could reach not only Russia, but also the Middle Eastern countries from the north. Although nothing has been confirmed, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* had an article in May 2003 where it stated that the US had initiated negotiations with Georgia and Azerbaijan on utilising their bases for a military campaign against Iran.⁶¹ The Georgian Presidential Press Secretary, Kakha Imnadze, quickly denied this.⁶² To this day, there is no evidence of this being true, in fact, indications of withdrawal of US troops from Iraq show the opposite. Nevertheless, the impact of the article has been substantial and has been quoted frequently. Iran even delivered a formal protest

⁶¹D. Suslov & A. Usejnov, "Bush Skolotil Antiiranskoyo Koalitsiyo: Dlya Udarov po Tegerano Hamen Ispolzovat Territorii Azerbadjzana I Gruzii", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 29 May, 2003.

⁶²"Georgia Denies Talks of Use of Territory for US Attack on Iran", *RFE/RL Newslines*, 30 May, 2003.

note to Baku.⁶³ It is too early to draw any conclusions from this episode, but it is an excellent example of perceptions contra reality.

Moreover, Zbigniew Brzezinski has stated that the US strive for managing regional politics is not related to survival, but is related to general US foreign policy.⁶⁴ He poses a set of broad questions concerning the American endeavours in Eurasia, some of them relates to the Caucasus:

What kind of Russia is in America's interest, and what and how much can America do about it? What are the prospects for the emergence in Central Eurasia of a new 'Balkans,' and what should America do to minimize the resulting risks?⁶⁵

The first case, of a non-cooperative Russia, has partly been discussed already. A hostile, or at least non-cooperative Russia is of gain neither for the US nor for Georgia. From what has been said so far, transparency on security cooperation seems to be a key to reduce this problem. About the second question, the cooperation seems to make progress. A strong, stable and democratic authority in Tbilisi would decrease any problems with 'balkanisation' and given a strong economic situation, Georgia would be able to handle the Russian presence without suffering from the yoke of dependence. However, there are other risks worth penetrating.

Commitment by Default

By analysing US Foreign Policy, François Heisbourg has defined several risks for America abroad. First and foremost, the US can be seen as overemphasising the use of force – a trigger-happy sheriff. This is not the case in Georgia, but rather in Iraq, Kosovo and Afghanistan. Nonetheless, a military engagement can invoke such conceptions in Moscow, which is something for both Tbilisi and Washington to consider. Secondly, passive policy, on the other hand,

⁶³“Russian Media Tries to Stir up the Caucasus”, *The Georgian Messenger*, 3 June, 2003.

⁶⁴Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York, Harper Collins Publishers, 1997.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 48f.

can arouse criticism for the opposite reason - for being reluctant to come when called upon. US can thus be seen as a paper tiger, unwillfull to make sacrifices other than for its own vital interests.⁶⁶ If this idea is explored further, it can be stated that the US, reluctant or not, might end up in a military conflict by its very presence. Even if the US commitment to military affairs, or as guarantor of peace and stability, is neither explicit in rhetoric, nor as a hidden agenda - deepened presence will enhance the risks. This risk may come true in two ways, either as a situation where the regional states invite the US to take on an active military role; second as a 'commitment by default'. Earlier in this article it was shown that first case is rather unlikely, as the US has refused such proposals. However, second idea is worth canvassing.

'Commitment by default' is a risk derived from the plain fact that the US has troops in Georgia as a part of the GTEP. Having troops on foreign ground provides a military target and it will likely be protected as such, even if their role in the region is of a passive nature. Its very presence thereby poses a risk. RAND has also briefly mentioned this idea when creating a scenario for possible combat engagement of the US Army in South Caucasus and Central Asia. RAND expect a regional war in the next 10-15 due to greater intensity in the war in Chechnya.⁶⁷ Exploring such a scenario indeed facilitates Pentagon's planning, but it would be too parsimonious to follow the line of thought to the end when assessing the current undertakings of the US.

Additionally, when the US is trying to win the hearts and minds of the Georgians by providing aid and expertise, it creates a situation of trust and loyalty. This is, of course, mostly of a positive nature for Georgia, but it has the embedded implication of creating a situation of hope and expectations. When Georgian expectations of a military engagement by the American ally, in case of conflict, rises more than what the US is willing to handle, a gap in the relation emerges. This involves two risks. The first is that Georgia cannot count on US support when it really counts, which will affect future

⁶⁶Heisbourg, "American Hegemony", p. 13f.

⁶⁷S. Olikier & T. Szayna, *Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and the South Caucasus: Implications for the US Army*, RAND Report MR-1598-A, 2003.

relations. The second is that if one regional state presumes that Georgia has military support from the US, even if it does not, the existing 'security dilemma' gets stronger. Cognitions become consolidated. This will infringe Georgia's possibilities to interact with other states in the region. Forecasts of pre-emptive strikes can at this point be excluded from any plausible scenario.

As mentioned previously, there is no point in ending Georgian-US cooperation for the sake of it. However, if Georgia, by some reason, fails to develop and integrate in to Western institutions, the US may withdraw its aid. This can also happen by the inauguration of a new President in the US. Such a situation would also, possibly, include withdrawal of US commitments. Alan Dobson has discussed the question of such a withdrawal in general. He argues that exit strategies must be related to a consolidation of archived goals.⁶⁸ Three options come at hand for the US. First, withdrawing all aid, support and commitment from the region. This is plausible but not imperative. George W. Bush's policy towards Georgia is by and large a simple continuation of the one during the Bill Clinton-era. Second, handing over all security 'responsibility' they have been engaged in to a third party, either a regional state or an organisation as the OSCE of the UN. This scenario is unlikely. The US has not any commitment that requires such a transfer of responsibility. The final option is to consolidate the own presence in a long-term perspective and most evidence point in this direction, which follows Brzezinski's blueprint US policy in Eurasia. This bears importance as shifts in the alliances and quasi-alliances are based on perceptions. If the setting changes – it affects the US' plan of priorities. In short, the US might single-handedly withdraw from cooperation, if its prioritisation changes. Also, Kathleen O'Halloran concludes that "[t]he U.S. should adopt a strategy that assures it will retain the flexibility to choose when and where to use its power and influence, at what time."⁶⁹ This is a core of the asymmetric cooperation between Georgia and the United States.

⁶⁸A.P Dobson, "Dangers of US Interventionism", *Review of International Studies*, no: 28, 2002, p. 594f.

⁶⁹O'Halloran, "A New U.S. Regional Strategy", p. 65.

Conclusions and Final Remarks

The issues discussed hitherto can, consequently, be divided into general conclusions along with the two themes of 'soft' perceptive problems and the 'hard' realist ones. By this, an attempt to answer the question: what long-term issues and risks are connected to the US-Georgian security cooperation; is made.

Concerning general findings it can be concluded that the term 'cooperation' is unsuitable for describing the situation, as it imply a reciprocal act. The asymmetric relation calls for different terminology. In addition, the two objectives, stated by USAID, are indeed important for assessing the situation. This is clear when the logic of the compass is considered. The current trends suggest that the US engagement will continue, but there is no evidence of any will to take on an active role in security management. It can also be concluded that the elements of transparency so far are limited, but its benefits have started to draw attention from both Tbilisi and Washington. Finally, an unfavourable perception of US-Georgian cooperation, by a regional actor, is not *by definition* a threat to security or a strategic problem. Still, the effects of these 'soft' perceptions are indeed related to security as they underlie political action. Accordingly, these 'soft' risks can move into the 'hard', physical realm. Subsequently, it might cause other problems and thus deserves attention from policy-makers. The aforementioned arguments suggest that such a danger of cooperation should and can be reduced. Thus, it is time to pinpoint the soft implications of the US-Georgian security cooperation.

Firstly, the American engagement can create expectations for future military commitment that the capabilities, and intentions, of Washington cannot, or do not, want to handle. Indeed, this is no new situation for American foreign policy and by being a superpower the risks for the US is of little importance. However, given the size and strengths of Georgia, the impact would be paramount in Tbilisi and the South Caucasus. Also, negative perceptions by neighbouring states make impose constraints on Georgia's cooperation with other states.

Secondly, the US can, once again, be seen as a supporter of authoritarian regimes. However, it has been discussed above that

dogmatic adherence to democracy might be counter-productive. Nevertheless, as long as the Georgian-American cooperation covers substantially more than support for the regime, much of such criticism is out of context.

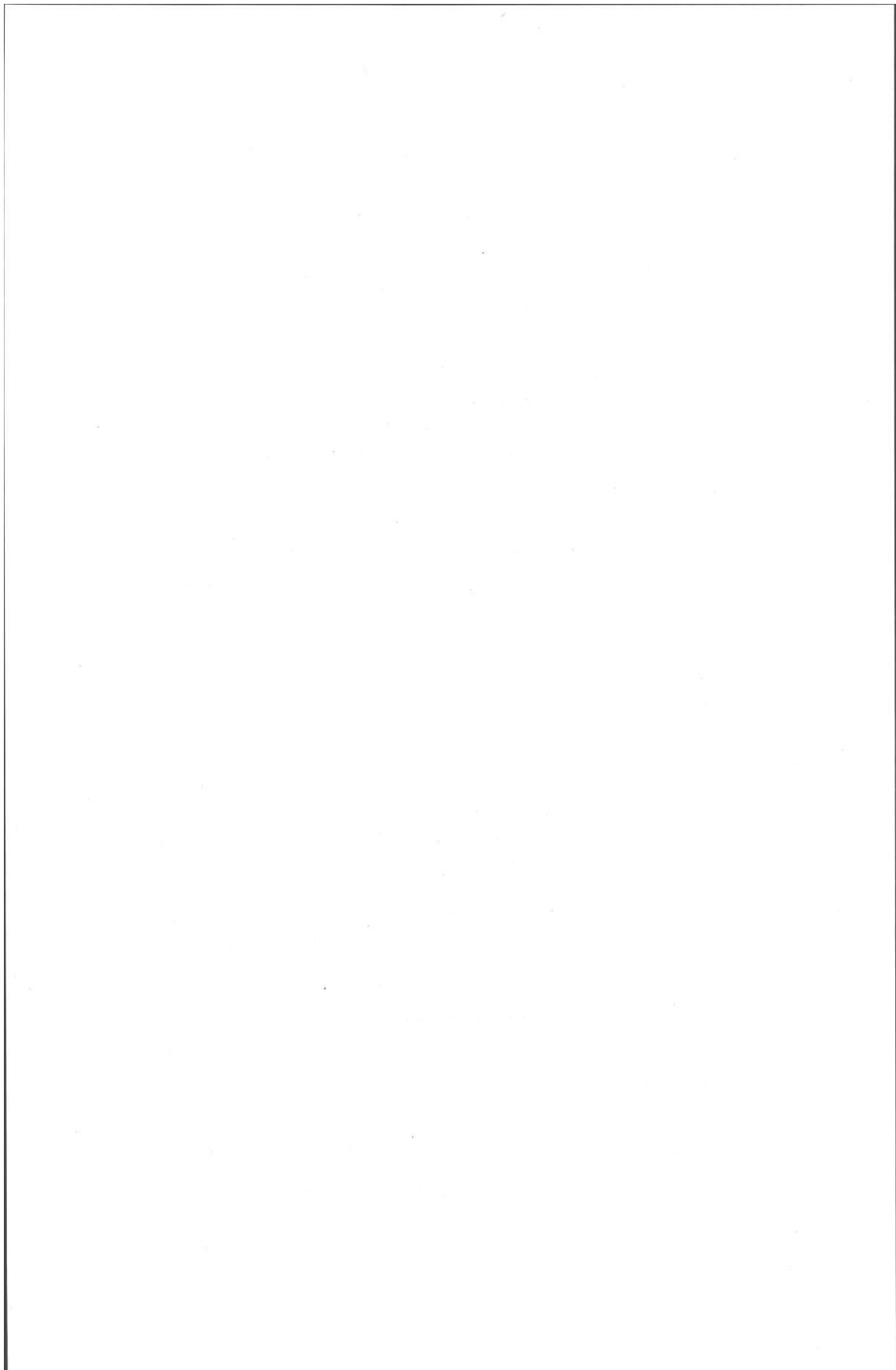
Finally, there can be a discrepancy in the understanding of security by Washington and Tbilisi. Georgian and American conceptions of security must harmonise if the cooperation is to be successful in the long run. In addition, efforts must be made to convince the public of the general advantage of such cooperation.

If the 'hard' security issues are canvassed, four things can be said. The first relates to the advent of a new security context. In the quasi-alliance system, the US interferes at the regional level, which will create a new security context as both an internal, and external, transformation occurs. By and large, even if the level of commitment is low, the US is a part of the Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan axis and opposes the Russia-Armenia-Iran axis. From Georgia's horizon this is largely positive if it does not worsen Georgia's position towards any of the regional states.

Secondly, the US could be ending up in a conflict by its very presence – commitment by default. It has been argued that the US strategic engagement in Georgia brings about risks that may have not existed otherwise. The deeper and wider the military presence is - the higher the risk.

Thirdly, handling of what is thought of to be a zero-sum game. When the US as a strong and in the region unthreatened, state cooperates with Georgia on regional security matters it provides stability. Only if it is carried out in a way that does not bring about higher risks than before, progress is given. It is clear that several actors, especially Russia, consider the undertakings in the Caucasus as a highly prioritised zero-sum game and this needs to be handled in order to prevent a renewed, and costly, regional power struggle.

Finally, commitment is a double-edged sword. No commitment is safe for the US as it can end up being in the middle of a conflict. At the same time, the American aid can contribute to stabilising Georgia and support the way towards peace and prosperity.



WATER DISPUTE AND KURDISH SEPARATISM IN TURKISH-SYRIAN RELATIONS

ÖZDEN ZEYNEP OKTAV

ABSTRACT

This article aims to understand to what extent the water sharing factor was a decisive or the major one hindering an intact peaceful coexistence of upstream country, Turkey, and its downstream neighbour, Syria, by taking the current relations into consideration. Throughout the 1990s, Turkey tried to solve the security issue with Syria by making some concessions such as releasing 500 cubic meters of water per second. However, Damascus maintained its policy of playing the Kurdish card as a useful instrument of pressure. Toward the end of the 1990s, Syria found itself in total isolation and Damascus adopted a new policy, a rapprochement with its neighbours and coping with the image deterioration. Damascus has currently seemed enthusiastic to cooperate with Turkey for the efficient utilization of water. In a region where the bilateral relations are defined by love-hate characteristics, it has, so far, seemed rather difficult to provide a regional cooperation for an integrated and win-win approach to water issue. However, the growing urgency of increasing the water supply by non-conventional water resources in the Middle East and the necessity to find technological solutions to water scarcity problem will increase ecological, hydrological and economic interdependence.

KEYWORDS

South East Anatolia Project (GAP), Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), Non-Conventional Water Resources, Three-Staged Plan, Shuttle Diplomacy.