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Georgia's Strategic Orientation, Amity or Enmity

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Abstract: Georgia and other thirteen republics with little or no experience of modern independent statehood were born after collapse of the Soviet Union. Georgia was confronted with the first issue of survival and national security and later with the choice of strategic orientation priorities regarding political realism which was so vital for it in Caucasus region. Today it is really difficult to imagine two enemies worse than Israel and Iran. The depth of these divisions are evident in both countries' rhetoric. The objective of study is to point out which "side" Georgia's leadership loyalties trend to determine its strategic choices. The Study is to examine whether Georgia's political orientation is realistic and sustainable or it is based on political idealism and lack of sufficient strategic experience? The hypothesis of study is; "Georgia's political orientation is a sustainable strategic choice and based on its national interest and national security. Findings of study indicate that; Georgia's foreign policy seeks to avoid choosing only one side. Currently, nationals of both Israel and Iran easily can enter Georgia. The Study has a descriptive nature and data collected based on library method.
Keywords: Iran, Georgia, Israel, Caucasus, Diplomacy.

1 Introduction

With the break-up of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War, three republics in the South Caucasus, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, achieved independence for the second time during the twentieth century (Kamrava, 2016: 3; Bishku, 2009: 295), Georgia is also the only state in the region having formal diplomatic ties with all its immediate and near neighbors and political links with Iran and Israel (Bishku, 2009: 296), however, it is one of very few countries in the world that has been able to avoid choosing sides And inaugurated formal diplomatic relations with Iran shortly (Kamrava, 2016: 113; Maza, 2014), after declaring independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 (De waal, 2010: 7; Kamrava, 2016: 113; Peimani, 2009: 273; Cordesman, 2013: 46; Elgie and Moestrup, 2016: 120).Without any doubts, development of constructive relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran is one of priorities of the Georgian Government (Chakhvashvili, 2015: 5-6). Partly due to its proximity, the Islamic Republic has remained Georgia's reliable trading partner ever since (Peimani, 2009: 45; Cordesman, 2013: IX), moreover, a visa-free travel agreement between Georgia and Iran went into effect (Kamrava, 2016: 23). As a result, the number of business transactions between the two countries has skyrocketed. According to a Wall Street Journal report, which sparked concern among analysts, Iranian businesses registered in Georgia rose from just 84 to 1,489 (Faucon, Solomon and Fassihi, 2013). Georgia is the only South Caucasus state that has both an Iranian embassy and consulate and the country is an extremely popular holiday destination for Iranians. There are also many economic ties: While Iran does not enter Georgia's top ten of trade partners, Georgia's access to Western markets across the Black Sea makes it an attractive market for Iranian investors (Paul, 2015: 57-58). In spite of the fact that Georgia is too remote and focused on Russia to take an activist approach toward Iran, but both have an interest in preventing Russian domination of the South Caucasus, nonetheless, Georgia has not espoused any substantive role regarding Iran. And the US-Georgia-Iran triangle does not feature prominently in public pronouncement by Tbilisi or Washington (Cordesman, 2013: 91), and What has struck the majority of international observers as most bizarre is the fact that this new era was presided over by the government of former President Mikhail Saakashvili (Peimani, 2009: 285). This seemingly incoherent policy was driven in part by a desire to reduce Georgia's energy dependence on Russia (Simão, 2018: 129; De Waal, 2010: 137), following the war of August 2008 over South Ossetia, the Georgian government considers Iran an ideal alternative supplier of energy as it is the second largest supplier of gas worldwide (Maza, 2014). Iran's gas exports to Georgia have been a major pivot in bilateral economic relations (Sarıkaya, 2011: 13) so that in early January 2006 Georgia signed a preliminary agreement with Iran to import gas

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(Mafinezam and Mehrabi, 2008: 53-54; Hunter, 2010: 183), The United States had downgraded its security ties with Georgia after initiating its "reset" policy with Russia, making this key U.S. foreign policy accomplishment a mixed blessing for Georgia at best. (Kakachia, 2011: 2). Although Tbilisi's outreach to Tehran was reasonable given the political climate and Georgia's need to diversify its field of cooperation by engaging its larger neighbors, Saakashvili's UNM[1] appeared to embrace realism with an unbounded enthusiasm that did surprise most, the Georgian Dream, which came to power after the parliamentary elections in October 2012 and then solidified its hegemony over the government in the presidential elections in October 2013, did little to damage the connections Saakashvili had so carefully cultivated with Iran (Gelashvili and Coalson, 2012; Maza, 2014).While the United States claims to be monitoring the possibility of Iranian businessmen who are avoiding sanctions by investing in the South Caucasus, their activities don't appear to have gone beyond monitoring and blacklisting specific institutions, Meanwhile, an intergovernmental Joint Economic Commission continues to function between Georgia and Iran (Maza, 2014). In July 2013 the Georgian government tightened visa rules for Iranian citizens, who had been able to travel to Georgia visa free since early 2011. But even these new visa rules are far from stringent, and the new restrictions didn't stop Tbilisi from hosting an Iranian business forum shortly thereafter (DFwatch staff[2], 2013).

2 Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical framework of this study is based upon on realism theory, which prepare men for the tragic and stubborn discrepancy of means along with ends in international politics (Thompson, 1960: 69). It emphasizes that relations among states take place in the absence of a world government. For realists, it means that the international system is anarchical (Griffiths, 1999: 1), focus on power is the core of political realism (Lánczi, 2015: 19), thus, international environment created by the distribution of power (Glaser, 2010: 6) which is uneven and changes over time (Griffiths, 1999: 1), moreover, leads states to adopt competitive policies (Glaser, 2010: 6), because, there is no consensus among states about how it should be distributed and it means that the arena of international relations is a form of 'power politics' which is hard to measure. It makes international relations, a realm of necessity, where, states must seek power to survive in a competitive environment (Griffiths, 1999: 1).

3 Georgia-Israel Relations

Georgia-Iran Bilateral relationships are overshadowed by economic aspects, and these ties are not such relations have frequently caused US and Israeli nervousness (Sarıkaya, 2011: 12; Koolaee and Hafezian, 2010: 405).Georgia places a special emphasis on further development of relations with Israel, particularly with regard to economy, tourism and culture (Ryan, 2011:40; Schindler, 2017). Throughout the years, Israel engaged in extensive military cooperation with Georgia, sending Special Forces and private contractors to train Georgian troops, and selling the small nation both armored vehicles and small arms (Zinger and Greenberg, 2008). Between 2000 and 2008, Israel sold hundreds of millions of dollars in arms and combat training to Georgia, including guns, ammunition, shells, tactical missile systems, anti-aircraft systems, and turrets for armored vehicles, electronic equipment and remotely piloted aircrafts (Abunimah, 2008). Unlike Georgia-Iran relations, however, Georgia-Israel ties were strained under the UNM. Israel despite maintaining good relations with Russia at the time, openly supported Georgia's territorial integrity in the wake of the 2008 war with Russia (Maza, 2014), but in a desperate move to entice Russia not to provide Iran with arms, Israeli halted arms sales to Georgia following the conflict (Stratfor, 2008). Israel provided Russia with the codes to some of the drones it had sold to Georgia, allowing Russian forces to use remote technology to send the drones hurtling to the ground (De Waal, 2010: 209). Despite an overindulgence of such incidents which might have caused permanent estrangement between less valued allies, the Georgians and Israelis always managed to bounce back into each other's arms pretty quickly. The motives behind many of these brief bouts of discord are indicative of the complex economic and cultural ties between the two nations.

4 Tensions in Relation with Israel

Archil (Abesalom) Kekelia, was appointed immediately after some incidents (Israeli businessmen case[3], Israeli company, Elbit[4] case[5] and the ownership of an Israeli-based monastery[6]), and charged with the task of mending Georgia's strained relationship with Israel, Saakashvili eventually saw the light in two first cases consequently, the litigation was ignored. And about last case Georgian government entered into talks with both the Greek patriarch and Israeli officials in an attempt to win it back, after all, the Israeli government has washed its hands of the matter (Hasson, 2012).

[1] The United National Movement.
[2] Democracy and Freedom watch.
[3] They were convicted of offering a $7 million bribe to Georgia's Deputy Finance Minister in 2010.
[4] Elbit Systems - International Defense Electronics Company.
[5] It was suing Georgia for 100 million dollars due to the country's failure to pay for drones and other weapons.
[6] The monastery was built in the eleventh century, during the reign of King Bagrat IV by the Georgian Giorgi-Prokhore of Shavsheti

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On November 17, 2013, Georgian and Israeli officials signed an agreement to lift visa requirements and also stressed that the Association Agreement that they plan to sign with the European Union will open doors to deeper economic integration with Europe, thus making Georgia a more attractive trading partner for Israel, too (Cordesman, 2013: IX).

5 Georgia-Iran Relations

Georgia is the only South Caucasian country, which has no border with Iran (Valiyev, 2016; Sarıkaya, 2011: 12), nevertheless, Georgia maintained excellent relations with Iran, on a historic basis, and became a conduit for Iranian–western communication (Rayfield, 2012: 389; Simão, 2018: 130; Kamrava, 2016: 23). On the other hand, Iran is the best available regional gas supplier to help Georgia achieve that objective by diversifying its sources of imported energy. On many occasions since 2006, Iran and Georgia have discussed further cooperation on energy that is, large exports from Iran to Georgia (Peimani, 2009: 74). Gazprom with its emergence in Georgia initiates a new geopolitical game this time involving Iranian gas transit to the EU (Jervalidze, 2006: 33), "within which, there is a big temptation for Georgia's current political leadership to get involved in Gazprom's drive to secure the Iranian gas transit project" (Jervalidze, 2006: 38), and both sides are interested in common projects related to education, tourism, transport and, most importantly, the energy sector (Valiyev, 2016) .South Caucasus-Iranian relations are influenced and shaped not only by the regional context but also by Russian-Iranian, US-Iranian and European-Iranian relations (Rondeli, 2014: 5), but Many Georgian experts and scholars have also argued that a strategic partnership with the United States should not exclude reasonable relations with Iran (Hunter, 2010: 183). Iran regards The South Caucasus as both an opportunity and a threat (Kamrava, 2016: 23; Herzig, 2000), and spillover instability of the South Caucasus into its own territory, is one of major concerns (Simão, 2018: 11). In spite of the fact that has just been mentioned, Iran has four main interests in the South Caucasus that include:

- reducing the influence of outside powers;
- continuing to neutralize possible security threats;
- obtaining a bigger economic and cultural foothold;
- And setting the legal regime of the Caspian Sea (Kamrava, 2016: 23; Ryan, 2011: 218).

But Iran has restricted its role in the South Caucasus, by its policy in the region which is determined by four occasionally contradicting elements:

- A desire to expand its influence without directly challenging Turkey or Russia,
- A desire to maintain its role regarding natural resource exports,
- Concern over US and Israeli penetration of the region,
- and a fear of minority unrest in Iran.

These forces, whose impact is in constant flux, have so far left Iran unable to articulate a clear policy toward the South Caucasus (Cordesman, 2013: 48). Moreover, Georgian integration with the West, and more specifically its intention to join NATO[1], has made Iran very nervous (Valiyev, 2016).

6 Conclusions

After independence in the 20th century, domestic and international problems endangered Georgia's national security and its territorial integration which requires Georgia to seek close security cooperation within the international community. And as often the case, states facing an external threat align with other powers to oppose and balance the threat, and that is why Georgia believes that it can rely on the U.S. for its security. Its foreign policy, consequently, was driven by a concern to ally with external powers tilting from balancing to band-wagoning policies.

From the point of view of realism, foreign policy is in a condition of permanent conflict between States without any possibility of evolution or progress, accordingly, Georgia mastered the frangible diplomacy by avoiding choosing sides, and orchestrated such astute diplomatic maneuvers, which caused Georgia enjoy comfortable relationship with Iran, and it has not deterred Israel from considering Georgia as a close ally, however, as Georgia plays shrewd game in the region, with mutual partnership with Tehran, one cannot expect to see Iran playing a superior role in the region. Lack of direct border between them, and geopolitical factors such as dominant Western and Turkish influence, limit Iran's ability to be influential actor in Georgia, beside it remains ultimately unclear to which direction Georgia will tend, although, Tbilisi's economic and political dependence on the West prohibits it from crossing certain red lines in its dealings with Tehran.

Georgian governments tried demonstrating a stark pragmatism, and building alliances on every side of the dividing line. Although, Georgia may be more pressed than ever to make the tough decision between Iran and the West, as it remains unclear whether Georgia will be able to maintain its close connections with Tehran in light of growing efforts to seek membership with both the European Union and NATO.

President Obama clarified that NATO was not going to grant Georgia either membership or even a Membership Action Plan (Rukhadze, 2014).1

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Georgia is likely to continue to see ties with the United States as the best hedge against Russian aggression, making it unlikely that they will support Iran in any major security disputes with Washington. Consequently, Georgia, as a NATO-aspirant country, is unlikely to endanger its strategic relations with the United States or its prospects of Euro- Atlantic integration for the sake of improving relations with Iran. On the whole, with its small state reflex, Georgia assessed the changing international political environment and determined that political dialogue with Iran would help strengthen mutual confidence between the two countries. While trying to maintain a high level of strategic cooperation with the West and simultaneously profit by trade relations with Iran, Georgia's political leadership is aware of the fact that as a small state, its room for maneuvering and ability to formulate foreign policy are relatively limited.

From the Iranian perspective, the advantage of Georgian-Iranian rapprochement is that the Tehran can assert itself more strongly in the neighborhood, particularly when Iran does not have unlimited outlets. Within this context, and taking into consideration Russia's significantly weakened role in Georgia and Washington's less affectionate relations with Tbilisi, there is room for Iranian diplomacy in the region. All this suggests, counter to its international reputation, the possibility that Iran's presence on the regional chessboard could serve as a stabilizing force in the volatile South Caucasus.

Eventually, regarding to realism theory, which describes international relations as a realm of necessity, where, states must seek power to survive in a competitive environment, and by taking the geopolitical and geostrategic conditions of the South Caucasus, in addition to all those domestic also, international problems which imperil Georgia's territorial integration into account, we may come to this conclusion that Georgia is following its national security and national interest by pursuing a realist foreign policy.

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