

## TRANSFORMATION OF THE REGION

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The overall trend of current changes occurring in the world is transition from the monopole system to a multipolar one, or in another wording, a non-polar world. Obviously, without consideration of this global trend it would be hard to understand what is actually going on in our region of South Caucasus. This is especially true, since in the most evident fashion the world order transformation takes place in the Greater Middle East (GME), however conditional this name is, along with the names of other regions. Hence, we shall first present Middle Eastern processes in broad brushstrokes, and following the logic of these developments, only then turn to a more local space of South Caucasus.

### *“The Basic Geopolitical Instinct”*

In interpreting the Greater Middle Eastern processes the analysts refer to the specifics of political regimes in the region, economy and demographics, social tensions and information political technologies, sectarian conflicts, factor of Israel, “controlled chaos” aimed against Russia, China and Iran, as well as other factors that do indeed exist and play an important role. Yet sometimes it appears that these specific developments are dominated by some geopolitical/geo-ideological instinct to grab as much as possible, and better if everything.

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Perhaps, this is the reason why the collapse of the Soviet Union did not end the war against the “Yalta-Potsdam” world, and the fighting the “old world” continued with a truly revolutionary fervor. Yugoslavia was “effectively” disintegrated, and then it was the turn of Asian and African countries that to one or another extent were the offshoots of the previous world order. First it was Afghanistan, and with Iraq the affairs started in 1991 were brought to a logical finale in 2003. Another phase for elimination of the “old order” came to fruition in the recent years. The infamous “Arab spring” started, easily bringing an end to the regimes of Mubarak, Gaddafi, and there was little doubt that the same fate awaited Assad, after which Iran would inevitably follow the suit. However, the “end of history” never arrived. What happened was just the opposite, something that usually is referred to as “the revenge of history.”

In the theory of chain branching processes there is concept of critical conditions, occurrence of which leads to a drastic change of system characteristics and its transformation into another state. During the proxy war in Syria something like that happened in the GME during the war in Syria. Some analytical sources of this country contend that the USA has declared war on Syria in 2003, immediately after occupation of Iraq, while with the Arab revolutions of 2011 the rhetoric and sanctions turned into real actions [1]. Some members of NATO (among which Turkey was especially active), and a few well-known Arab regimes pitched a whole “Terrorist International” against Syria, comprised of militants from 70 countries, which prompted to call it a proxy war [2]. The war in Syria, along with the events in Iraq and Libya resulted in a humanitarian and cultural catastrophe with millions of victims and refugees, a proxy genocide of sorts, which can also be called “news ticker genocide” [3]. The Christian population of the region flees en

masse. For example, in Iraq the number of Christians has fallen from 1.2 million in 1990 to 200,000 today. Interestingly, this fact is accepted by the governments of the countries that contribute to such processes. As Baroness Warsi, UK Minister for Faith and Communities, has stated, with the “violence against Christians by militant groups ... Christian presence in Syria is now in peril.”<sup>1</sup> A cultural genocide is occurring in the Middle East as well. Historical and cultural monuments are destroyed and plundered as vandalism thrives... Terrorist attacks and chaotic situation, breakdown of government, social and economic institutions lead to degradation of societies in the regional countries<sup>2</sup>. Destruction of the region’s Armenian communities is another distinct issue, which poses a direct challenge to the national security of Armenia [5].

One of the military/political effects of these initiated processes was creation of a new network-like geopolitical actor, i.e. the mentioned “Terrorist International” comprised of motley terrorist groups.

Meanwhile, the developments in Syria kicked off drastic changes in the system characteristics, as the theory of chain branching processes predicts. The “rest of the world” “rebelled” and started to resist in an organized manner. It can be safely stated that the war in Syria is the First Multi-Polar War, where unlike Iraq, Egypt and Libya, great geopolitical powers are involved on both sides. Immediate involvement of Iran in this war, as well as Russian and Chinese military and political support to Syria allowed the latter to preserve its statehood despite the tremendous losses and to avoid becoming just a “territory”, as it happened with Libya.

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<sup>1</sup> Charity backs Baroness Warsi’s warning of Christian exodus. <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/charity.backs.baroness.warsis.warning.of.christian.exodus/34706.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Situation is similar in Central Asia, where drug dealing thrives as well (see for example the article by Peter Dale Scott, Professor, University of California, Berkeley [4]).

Below some critical characteristics of the warring powers are briefly reviewed, with somewhat more thorough focus on the USA as the main ideologist of the processes underway.

### *Resources and positions of the geopolitical actors*

**The United States.** The USA experiences a deficit of resources both in financial terms – problems with the debt and the dollar system in general, budget reductions including for Pentagon – and in intellectual/ideological terms. It seems that some members of the American elite realize this and among them are not only former politicians, such as Paul C. Roberts, one of the fathers of Reaganomics, but also some renowned professors and scientists. As Francis Fukuyama wrote: “Many political institutions in the United States are decaying... This is the result of intellectual rigidity and the growing power of entrenched political actors that prevent reform and rebalancing.”<sup>1</sup> Georgi M. Derluguian, professor at the University of Chicago expresses thoughts along the same lines, as he does not rule out collapse of the USA [6] and draws subtle parallels between the USA and USSR, noting that some American business schools in essence are almost no different than Soviet Communist Party schools [7]. Another issue the American society faces is the inconsistencies between the national and corporate interests caused by the so-called *deep state*<sup>2</sup> and hence, perhaps, the revelatory memoirs of some high-ranking officials [8, 9].

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama, The Decay of American Political Institutions, The American Interest, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/articles/2013/12/08/the-decay-of-american-political-institutions/>.

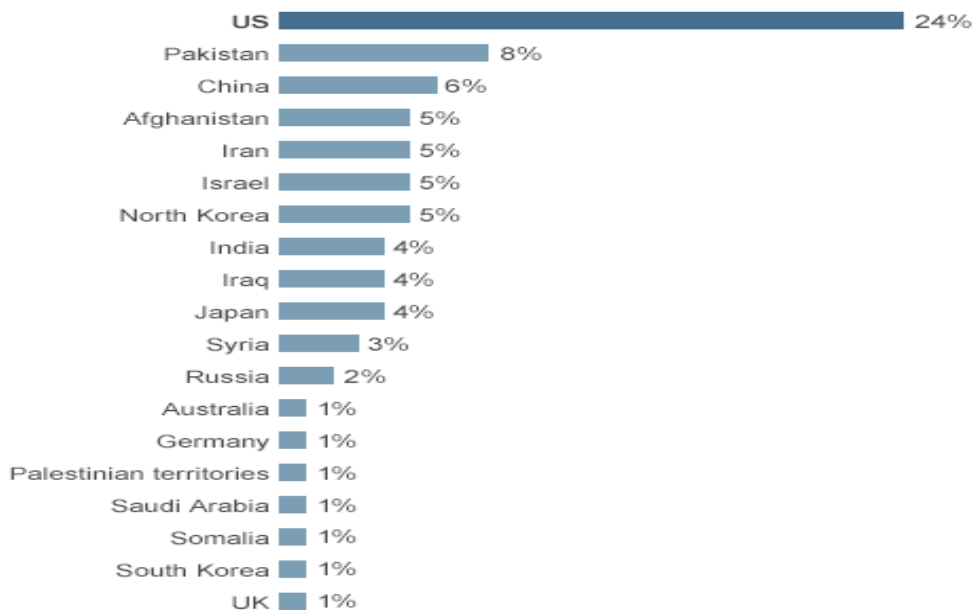
<sup>2</sup> The Deep State, the Permanent Campaign, and the Frayed Fabric of American Democracy, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/07/the-deep-state-the-permanent-campaign-and-the-frayed-fabric-of-american-democracy/277828/>

This is a context in which one has to consider the GME transformation scheme; a grandiose, all in all politically faulty and antihuman project. These circumstances, among other things, tainted the reputation of the superpower: according to the annual Gallup polls, as of the end of 2013 “the USA is considered the greatest threat to peace in the world” (see the *Figure* below<sup>1</sup>).

*Figure*

### Which country is the biggest threat?

Q: Which country do you think is the greatest threat to peace in the world today?



Source: WIN/Gallup International

Interestingly, the USA has won this dubious distinction by a landslide, well ahead of runner-up Pakistan.

<sup>1</sup>Biggest Threat to World Peace: The United States, <http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2013/12/31-6>.

Another alarming sign is the emergence and persecution of dissidents like J. Assange, E. Snowden and like-minded persons, who made stands against the total informational control. As George Washington University professors H. Farrell and M. Finnemore have correctly noted in their article, such people as E. Snowden and “prisoner of conscience” US Army Private B. Manning are even called “high-tech terrorists” by some American officials<sup>1</sup>. However, we believe (and we are not alone in such opinion) that these people are dissidents in the classical sense of the word [3, 10]. The point is not so much the wiretapping, as many people have been well aware of the ECHELON system, but the fact that American citizens, who are usually loyal to their two-party politics and “united government”, began protesting against the “system”, and the *Occupy Wall Street* has to be viewed in this context, as well (see for example [11]). It is no surprise that Snowden was invited to join the Board of Directors for the Freedom of the Press Foundation of former RAND employee Daniel Ellsberg, who back in 1972 published the Pentagon secret documents on the Vietnam War. Expectedly, the recent actions against dissidents actualized the ingenious works of George Orwell.

What is said above in no way means the USA is no longer the world leader; even a glimpse on various indicators makes it clear that America tops the whole planet (see, for instance [12]). However, in 2012 China first time ever surpassed the USA by trade turnover and became a world leader in international trade. The US imports and exports comprised \$3.82 trillion, while for PRC this number totaled at \$3.87 trillion. Nonetheless, the GDP of the USA is twice larger than that of China, \$15 tril-

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Farrell, Martha Finnemore, *The End of Hypocrisy: American Foreign Policy in the Age of Leaks*, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/140155/henry-farrell-and-martha-finnemore/the-end-of-hypocrisy>.

lion and \$7.3 trillion, respectively<sup>1</sup>. However, “something is rotten in the state of Denmark” already, and actually, this was one of the reasons to reject the idea of striking Syria and to start negotiations instead.

Yet war and peace are collective matters, so other actors have to be reviewed, too.

**Iran.** The Islamic Republic is a critical infrastructure for the region. Almost for 35 years the country struggles against the USA in various formats. Vietnam analogies would be inadequate in this case, because Iran has been fighting alone, with no support from the USSR, and sometimes even against both superpowers, as it was the case in Iran-Iraq war. The reason for Iran’s success (including recent changes in Egypt), if not victory, is that they managed to establish in a sense a meritocratic or so-called “smart state” with a well-thought political system, which to some extent is close to the system of values and civilizational traditions of their people. This is not an artificially imposed system, and hence it is viable. It seems the years-long Western confrontation with Iran (still far away from end) was prompted not so much by political, military or economic factors, but rather by ideological considerations, because the Islamic Republic had put forward and is implementing a different model.

**Russia.** Having suffered an utter defeat in the Cold War, this country has entered into a recovery phase. An active stance and well-known initiatives with regard to the Syrian issue brought the country from the regional level back to the ranks of the global geopolitical actors. Currently Russia tries to implement some integration projects: the Eurasian Union will be based on CSTO and Customs Union, so it has a chance to become a full-fledged military/political/economic union. We believe such union does not necessarily mean another confrontation between

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<sup>1</sup> <http://lenta.ru/news/2013/02/11/trade>.

“West and East”, as we support the concept of Greater Europe, where there is a place for South Caucasus countries as well (see for example [8, 13]). However, there are many socio-economic problems in Russia still to be resolved, despite being the 5<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world<sup>1</sup>. Perhaps, these problems are related to the fact that on the ideological map of the world (prepared by *RussRAND*<sup>2</sup>), Russia is the only big country with no ideological system of its own that would generally serve its national security.

**China.** An optimal ideological triad [8] of socialism, liberalism and conservatism had been established in China, which means the country has chosen its own national (and hence, effective) way of development. As a result, in a foreseeable future China will overtake the USA not only economically, but possibly also in science and technology. China’s political activities are mostly focused on Asia Pacific region, but its position in the Middle East, though traditionally restrained, is still very important.

**Turkey.** This country attempts to carry out active neo-Ottoman policies, as it can be inferred from the ambitious projects of “Islamic NATO”, “Islamic Peacekeeping Force”, Turkish lira economic zone and even development of nuclear weapons [14]. However, in reality Ankara’s foreign policy failed both in Syria and Egypt<sup>3</sup>. After Russia and the USA reached an agreement on destruction of Damascus’ chemical weapons, Turkey’s plans of invading Syria flunked. Turkey also lost its bid Egypt by supporting the former president Mohamed Morsi. Perhaps, these foreign policy failures also contributed to internal political destabilization.

<sup>1</sup> Россия стала 1-ой в Европе и 5-ой в мире по ВВП (ППС) по данным WorldBank за 2012 год. <http://oko-planet.su/finances/financesnews/197915-rossiya-stala-1oy-v-evrope-i-5oy-v-mire-po-vvpps-po-dannym-worldbank-za-2012-god.html>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://rusrand.ru/important/predstavljaem-vashemu-vnimaniju-prezentatsiju-tsentra-nauchnoj-politicheskoy-mysli-i-ideologii>

<sup>3</sup> Гагик Арутюнян. Провалы в Сирии и Египте натолкнули Турцию на «мягкое проникновение» на Кавказ. <http://www.regnum.ru/news/armenia/1735575.html>.



For whatever reasons, the combination of the above-mentioned and many unmentioned factors has led to a situation, where despite continuing military clashes in Syria and a number of other unresolved issues, some sort of a dynamic balance has been established in the GME. This made the conflicting sides sit down to talk, which with some reservations can be described as an enforced, relative peace. Such situation has been projected on South Caucasus to a considerable extent.

### *Geopolitical Crystallization*

The assessments of situation in our region are usually dominated by alarm-ridden sentiments, but it appears, not everything is so bad and even some “good scenarios” are possible. Such optimism is based on the following considerations.

The most important “external” factor is that a possible war between Iran on one side and Israel, the USA and in some scenarios even Azerbaijan on the other side, has become less likely. This circumstance has a generally positive influence on the situation in South Caucasus.

However, changes occur also in the countries of the region and these processes can be described as geopolitical crystallization. Earlier the region was by and large in a somewhat amorphous situation, in spite of some of the known political orientations. Meanwhile, other trends are observed currently among the countries of the region.

For example, CSTO member Armenia has announced an intention to join the Customs Union, and later the Eurasian Union. With such decision Armenia made a final geopolitical choice and introduced some clarity in the map of the South Caucasus. Under these circumstances, against the backdrop of diminishing energy interest of the West in Azerbaijan due to its depleting energy resources, further convergence

between Azerbaijan and Turkey would be natural, as well as development of cooperation with Israel due to the problems with Iran. Israel may already claim a status of an active observer in the region, though perhaps, is not a full-fledged actor yet.

As always, the role of Georgia is also important. Our neighbor is in a transition stage to a certain extent, and this condition seems a lot more constructive and adequate than it was previously. The Western orientation of Georgia that has already become customary, will apparently remain, but in the background of relative normalization of relations with Russia this circumstance is now a balancing factor, rather than a destabilizing one.

Interestingly enough, the government of Georgia has changed the name of the Office of the State Minister for Reintegration to Office of the State Minister of Reconciliation and Civil Equality<sup>1</sup>. The military policy trend change from offensive to defensive shows that this not just a formal renaming, but rather, a transformation of strategy in relation to Abkhazia and South Ossetia [15].

In the current specific circumstances the observed crystallization positively influences the state of the affairs in the region. Such interpretation of the situation implies that South Caucasus, much like GME as a whole, is in some sort of a dynamic balance. This is a precondition for constructive negotiations regarding the trouble spots, such as NKR, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It is no coincidence that high-level Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations over the NKR restarted in 2013. It cannot be ruled out that such negotiations may result in peace accords. The scenario that foreign policy failures and destabilization in Turkey, as well

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<sup>1</sup> В Грузии утвердили создание министерства примирения,  
<http://lenta.ru/news/2013/11/29/rename>.

as Armenia's membership to the Customs Union may have had a sobering effect on Azerbaijani leadership seems quite plausible.

There is something that may also facilitate this process: the political leaderships in all three South Caucasus countries were elected in 2013, i.e. these governments do have the time resource to take unpopular actions, such as signing peace agreements, for that matter.

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