

THE EVOLUTION OF GEORGIA-RUSSIA RELATIONS (2003-2008): A SWOT ANALYSIS OF GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS, ECONOMIC PRESSURES AND STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES *

UDC 327

DOI: 10.52063/25792652-2024.4.23-84

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This article examines the evolution of relations between Georgia and the Russian Federation, particularly in the period leading up to the "Five-Day" War, which significantly changed the dynamics of relations between the two nations. Focusing on the period following Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003, the study analyzes the changing nature of bilateral relations, the influencing factors and challenges faced by both sides amid changing geopolitical developments.

The purpose of the study is to understand how Georgia navigated the complex geopolitical landscape, balancing its aspirations for NATO and EU membership with its ongoing territorial disputes with Russia. The central research question is: How did Georgia's foreign policy during 2003-2008 address its geopolitical vulnerabilities and opportunities in the face of Russian opposition?

The study applies a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) methodology to evaluate Georgia's foreign policy decisions in this critical period, considering both internal and external factors. The findings highlight the strategic importance of Georgia's geographic location and political reforms but also reveal significant vulnerabilities, including unresolved territorial conflicts and dependence on Western support without formal security guarantees.

The conclusion emphasizes that while Georgia sought to leverage its democratic reforms and geopolitical significance, it remained constrained by the power dynamics of the region, particularly Russia's influence, which culminated in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. This analysis provides insights into the complexities of small states navigating regional power structures and the importance of strategic diplomacy and military readiness.

Key words: Georgia, Russian Federation, bilateral relations, Rose revolution, South Caucasus, foreign policy, multilateral diplomacy, geopolitics.

Introduction

The period between 2003 and 2008 represents a critical phase in the foreign policy trajectory of Georgia, shaped by its efforts to assert sovereignty and align with Western institutions in the post-Soviet geopolitical environment. Following the Rose Revolution of

* Հոդվածը ներկայացվել է 19.11.2024թ., գրախոսվել՝ 10.12.2024թ., տպագրության ընդունվել՝ 31.12.2024թ.:

2003, Georgia, under President Mikheil Saakashvili, embarked on a strategic pivot towards the West, seeking integration with NATO and the European Union. This shift, driven by aspirations for political, economic, and security benefits, directly challenged Russia's historical influence over Georgia and its position in the South Caucasus region. The dynamics of this period were further complicated by the unresolved territorial conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where Russian-backed separatists maintained de facto control. The growing divergence between Georgia's pro-Western policies and Russia's regional interests escalated tensions, resulting in a series of diplomatic, economic, and military confrontations. This work examines the interplay of domestic reform, regional security concerns, and international alignments that defined Georgia's foreign policy during this period. It explores the strategic choices made by Georgian leadership, the limitations of its international alliances, and the eventual consequences of these decisions, culminating in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, which significantly altered the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus.

Naturally, the processes that occurred before 2003 were serious prerequisites for the emergence of protest. Corruption, unfavorable economic conditions, a difficult social situation, internal contradictions regarding Abkhazia and Ossetia, excessive freedom in Ajaria, and election fraud led to the revolution known as the "Rose Revolution (Kandelaki, 2006)." It began during the elections held in Georgia. Parliamentary elections were held on November 2, 2003, and according to official data, Shevardnadze and his allies won (Mikaelyan, 2010). However, the published results were not recognized by international observers or Shevardnadze's opponents. Mikheil Saakashvili, based on sociological polls, publicly announced his victory. His claims were supported by the International Association of Free Elections and local observers (Anable, 2004). Based on this data, Saakashvili demanded new elections and called on the Georgian people to take to the streets in support of him. In mid-November, mass demonstrations occurred in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, spreading to other cities and villages across the country (Ibid.). Groups from the Qmara youth organization chanted their slogans. Concurrently, the Supreme Court of the country annulled the results of the presidential elections. On January 4, 2004, new presidential elections were held in Georgia, in which Saakashvili won. The inauguration took place on January 25 of the same year. New parliamentary elections were also held on March 28, 2004, where the New Democrats, supported by Saakashvili, emerged victorious (Meliksetyan, 2016). Thus, Mikheil Saakashvili came to power in Georgia in November 2003, thanks to the so-called "Rose Revolution." Many believed that the processes taking place within Georgia's internal life were significantly supported by Western powers, and it was thought that the newly elected Georgian authorities would emphasize Western standards in the country's development, especially since many members of the new government were educated in the West. An interview given by the newly elected President of Georgia to "RIA Novosti" on January 18, 2004, is noteworthy, where he stated that he intended to make his first foreign visit to Russia as President of Georgia.

Georgia-Russia Relations after the "Rose" Revolution

After the "Rose" Revolution, the new leadership of Georgia began to plan foreign policy priorities, which involved many complicated issues. Various experts claimed that the new leadership would drastically change the course of foreign policy towards the West, which contained many uncontrollable risks. Saakashvili's interview with NTV is particularly noteworthy, where he stated: "It will be my first official visit to Moscow," the newly elected president of Georgia said on the NTV channel on Sunday. Saakashvili

noted that, as president, he viewed Russia as "a superpower to be reckoned with and, personally, a huge cultural area with which Georgia is closely connected." He remarked, "I was brought up in Russian culture; my favorite poets were Okudzava and Vysotsky." Saakashvili expressed that he did not intend to change his political course toward the US after taking office. He emphasized that the withdrawal of Russian military bases from Georgian territory did not imply the arrival of Americans in their place. "This is about something else. Our interest is that the Georgians themselves preserve their territory," he stated ("Saakashvili: My First Serious Visit" 2004). "The US 'gives us helicopters and assault rifles' and helps Georgia train officers," Saakashvili said. "We will be happy to have the same cooperation with Russia," he stressed. On February 11, Saakashvili made his first visit to Moscow as president (Kaminski, 2014). Before heading to the Kremlin, Saakashvili visited the Georgian church in the capital to pray for the success of his Moscow mission ("Saakashvili: My First Serious Visit," 2004). The negotiations proved to be quite successful. The Kremlin concluded that Mikheil Saakashvili was a responsible politician with whom one could speak objectively and honestly. Nearly four hours of communication took place during the negotiations in the Kremlin. Vladimir Putin and the new president of Georgia spoke one-on-one for two and a half times longer than the protocol required, followed by another hour over a working breakfast with delegations ("Tbilisi and Moscow Will Build New Relations" 2004). Mikheil Saakashvili remarked, "I came here to make friends ("Georgian President Meets Putin" 2004). I hope it will work out." Vladimir Putin responded, "We have paid attention to your statements. This is a positive impulse ("Vladimir Putin Met with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili" 2004)." This morning, he prayed in a Georgian church in Moscow for the successful conclusion of the negotiations. At the outset of the meeting, the president spoke about the warming of bilateral relations. Mikhail Saakashvili expressed hope that all issues would be resolved. There were no announcements from the presidents following the meeting. Initially, journalists assessed it with cautious optimism. Only after conversing with Vladimir Putin's adviser on international affairs, Sergey Prikhodko, did it become clear that the on-the-record discussions between the two leaders were very fruitful. Sergey Prikhodko, deputy head of administration, stated, "Today, we finally have a partner we can talk to." "The previous assessments of the Russian president regarding the situation in Georgia are a matter of history," Prikhodko said. "Already today, we were able to reach an agreement with the new leader on the issue of Abkhazia, the Sochi process, and the immediate resumption of the work of the intergovernmental commission on the economy (Peuch 2004) . The forces have been instructed to submit a joint action plan. Military department cooperation will be restored, and work on the border treaty will continue. As for the Russian bases in Georgia, Sergey Prikhodko does not rule out that the presidents will issue instructions in this matter as well." At first glance, it seemed that Georgia-Russia relations were entering a new stage of historical development.

The Beginning of Tension between Georgia and the Russian Federation in 2004

Since 2004, Georgian President M. Saakashvili, due to his mistakes in foreign policy and geopolitics, failed to properly balance the internal and external processes in Georgia, leading to the loss of control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Despite the relatively high level of economic relations and political contact between Russia and Georgia, with Russian military presence in Georgia, the Georgian leadership quickly escalated tensions with its northern neighbor. Already in the spring of 2004, Saakashvili made harsh statements, accusing Russia of supporting separatist movements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, who were unwilling to negotiate with Georgia. Accusing Russia of

bias, Saakashvili expressed his desire to replace Russian peacekeepers with NATO forces, or at least supplement them with units from other CIS countries, like Ukraine (Garb, Inal-Ipa, & Zakareishvili 2002). Russia warned that this could escalate into a "Kosovo scenario," leading to ethnic cleansing and armed conflict. In the spring of 2004, tensions escalated in the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict zone, which had been considered frozen for many years. The conflict intensified throughout the summer, turning the region into a war zone. At the same time, a diplomatic conflict emerged between Georgia and Russia. Tbilisi appealed to international organizations, accusing Moscow of supporting the "separatist" regime, and demanded the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers from South Ossetia. On August 13, the Georgian parliament demanded the suspension of Russian peacekeepers' mandate in South Ossetia and their replacement with an international military force after the shooting at the Georgian Prime Minister's convoy in South Ossetia (Aladashvili 2005). On September 13, the Russian Federation warned about the possibility of blocking transport connections with Georgia (though this measure was not carried out) and restored railway connections with Abkhazia, which had been interrupted since 1992. In winter 2005, the Georgian authorities demanded the immediate withdrawal of Russian military bases. The 62nd base in Akhalkalaki and the 12th in Batumi warned they were ready to declare themselves "outlaws" (Kuznetsova 2004). In March 2005, Georgia's Parliament decided that Russian troops must leave Georgia by January 1, 2006. On September 27, Parliament decided on the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but President Saakashvili did not support this decision. On January 22, after explosions in the main gas pipeline that halted Russian gas supplies to Georgia and Armenia, Saakashvili accused Russia of sabotage and blackmail. On January 26, he signed a decree withdrawing Georgia from the CIS Defense Ministers Council ("Withdrawal from the CIS" 2009). On March 27, Russian authorities banned the import of Georgian wines and mineral water into Russia. In the first year of the embargo, Georgia's losses were estimated at \$40 to \$70 million. On February 2, 2006, Saakashvili said during a meeting with Georgian ambassadors in European countries, "We are dealing with a very rich, vile, vicious, experienced enemy whose goal is to prevent the revival, unification, and eventual liberation of Georgia" (Saakashvili 2024). On June 14, Saakashvili met with Vladimir Putin in St. Petersburg. He expressed his determination to engage in peaceful dialogue, primarily involving Russia, to resolve the conflict. On August 6, 2006, several pro-Russian opposition figures were arrested in Georgia. Saakashvili claimed they were planning a coup. On September 27, Georgian police arrested four Russian officers accused of espionage, prompting Russia to announce a transport blockade of Georgia ("Russian Officers Sentenced" 2010). A few days later, Russian soldiers moved into Russia, but the transport blockade remained in effect. Kazbegi-Uper Lars, the only border crossing between Georgia and Russia, was closed by the Russian side and resumed operations in March 2010. According to Saakashvili, Georgia should join the European Union no later than 2009. In early 2007, Saakashvili stated that "nothing can prevent Georgia from joining NATO" in a press conference in Tskhinvali. On March 13, 2007, Georgia's Parliament unanimously adopted a declaration to accelerate Georgia's NATO membership. On November 2, 2007, an indefinite protest by the united opposition began in front of the Georgian Parliament building, with around 300,000 participants. Initially, the opposition's main demands were fair elections, a transition to a parliamentary republic, and the cessation of human rights violations (Markedonov 2009). However, after the police brutally dispersed the protests on November 7, using tear gas, rubber bullets, and batons, the opposition escalated its demands, calling for the immediate dismissal of Saakashvili. More than 500 people were injured during the crackdown, and the government forced the closure of opposition media outlets, including

Imedi, Caucasus TV, and even the pro-government Rustavi 2 (Mikaelyan 2010). On November 7, Saakashvili addressed the nation, expressing concern over the country's situation, referring to intelligence reports suggesting plans to overthrow the government by the end of the year. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia stated that the opposition was coordinating actions with Russia. On the same day, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia expelled three Russian diplomats (Nikitina, 2008, p. 72). On the night of November 8, Saakashvili declared a 15-day state of emergency, citing the attempted coup. On January 5, 2008, Saakashvili was re-elected President with 53.4% of the vote, while his main rival, Levan Gachechiladze, received 25.67% (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2024). During this period, relations between Tbilisi and Moscow became increasingly complicated due to Saakashvili's intention to accelerate Georgia's steps toward NATO membership. In 2006, the Georgian Parliament unanimously voted to integrate Georgia into NATO. On January 5, 2008, a referendum held in parallel with the presidential elections showed that 77% of voters supported NATO membership. In February, Saakashvili sent a letter to NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, expressing Georgia's willingness to join the NATO Membership Plan (AAP). The heads of NATO member states and governments announced in Bucharest that Georgia and Ukraine would become NATO members once they met the organization's membership requirements (Kakachia, Lebanidze, & Kandelaki 2024). With this internal tension, the Georgian leadership, without any documented guarantees or agreements with a third country on mutual security and territorial protection, decided to further escalate relations with Russia. Russia, which had a significant influence on Georgia since the Soviet era, realized that its regional positions had weakened after losing military presence in Georgia. It had to influence Georgia through all possible means to prevent tensions from escalating further. However, Georgia continued to take decisive steps in its anti-Russian policy, with a growing role for Western, especially U.S. experts, whose presence in Georgia's internal affairs was also increasing. During 2007-2008, Western countries made active diplomatic efforts to integrate Georgia into the EU and NATO, discussing the importance of Georgia's membership in these organizations. However, it is important to note that, apart from providing a roadmap for EU and NATO membership and some supporting statements, Georgia did not have a fundamental document by 2008 that could support its overtly anti-Russian policy. By 2008, Georgia had two frozen conflicts on its territory, the need for reforms in border security, serious economic and social issues, political tension between parties, widespread discontent among the population, and the growing presence of Turkish forces in Adjara. Under these circumstances, it seemed unlikely that Saakashvili would resolve the internal conflict with military action. Despite the ongoing diplomatic war between Russia and Georgia, the Russian side was open to dialogue with Georgia. There were many statements from Russia about its readiness to discuss and find solutions to existing issues and challenges with Georgia. However, during the first half of 2008, Georgia took more anti-Russian actions and continued strengthening its pro-Western front. Georgian officials held numerous meetings in European capitals and Washington, seeking more guarantees to protect Georgia's strategic interests. Saakashvili even stated that "Georgia's membership in NATO and the EU is a matter of time."

Why Georgia did not have any Western Documents Guaranteeing its Security by 2008?

By August 5, 2008, Georgia was not a member of any military-political alliance and had no treaty relations with any third country to guarantee its border defense. Georgia did

not have the criteria for EU and NATO membership, and even if it did, political consensus would have been required for the membership process. NATO and the EU, in light of the geopolitical developments and the tense relations with Russia, were not prepared to engage in deeper cooperation with Georgia, despite Georgia's aspirations. Neither regional nor extra-regional countries were ready to sign a strategic alliance agreement with Georgia. On the surface, it seemed Turkey might be prepared to deepen strategic relations with Georgia, but Turkey, as a NATO member, was unlikely to defend Georgia's borders in the face of tensions with Russia, especially considering that NATO member countries, especially the U.S., would act as a significant deterrent. As for the EU, its nature does not include defense provisions, and security issues within the EU are generally addressed based on the fact that most member states are NATO members, thus resolving security issues through NATO mechanisms. Regarding bilateral relations between Georgia and individual EU member states like France and the UK, there was dynamic interaction, but no military or defense documents were signed, largely due to NATO membership considerations and other factors. In 2008, Georgia began preparing to bring back the unrecognized republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Abkhazia's air force shot down five Georgian drones between March and April, but Saakashvili accused Russia of destroying them. Tensions in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone escalated in the first half of 2008, leading to the five-day war from August 8 to 12, 2008 (Markedonov 2009). Thus, Saakashvili's first presidential term unfolded amid significant internal and external changes. In the face of instability and security issues in the country, great importance was placed on economic matters. Agreement on the resumption of flights was reached in February 2008.

SWOT Analysis: Georgia-Russia Relations (2003-2008)

The period from 2003 to 2008 was pivotal in the development of Georgia-Russia relations, culminating in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. By using a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), we can gain a clearer understanding of the geopolitical, economic, and security dynamics that shaped the trajectory of their relations during this period.

Strengths

1. Shared Soviet Legacy and Regional Ties

Both countries shared a Soviet past that facilitated mutual recognition and some continuity in diplomatic relations. The shared cultural and societal bonds occasionally allowed limited cooperation, particularly in trade and informal diplomacy. Georgia's role as a key transit hub for energy resources, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, positioned it as an important player in regional geopolitics. Despite political differences, Russia's energy interests kept Georgia strategically important for Russia, which depended on energy exports.

2. Western Orientation of Georgia

After the "Rose" Revolution in 2003, Georgia, under Mikheil Saakashvili, adopted a strong pro-Western stance, pursuing closer ties with NATO and the European Union. This created opportunities for Georgia to strengthen its position in the region and gain backing

from the West, which saw Georgia as a partner in promoting democratic values and regional security.

3. Geopolitical Importance in the South Caucasus

The South Caucasus is a strategically vital region, and Georgia's location at the crossroads of Europe, Central Asia, and Russia granted it significance for both Russia and the West. Its importance in terms of energy routes and regional security ensured that both Russia and the West had vital interests in Georgia.

Weaknesses

1. Divergence in Political and Security Orientation

Georgia's shift toward the West following the Rose Revolution deeply antagonized Russia, which viewed NATO expansion as a direct threat to its security interests and territorial control. This geopolitical divergence led to increasing tensions and led Russia to actively resist Georgia's Western ambitions. The unresolved territorial conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, supported by Russia, remained a significant challenge. Georgia's sovereignty was undermined by Russian backing for separatists in these regions, presenting a key weakness in its diplomatic efforts.

2. Russian Economic Leverage and Sanctions

In response to Georgia's pro-Western orientation, Russia imposed economic sanctions, targeting critical Georgian exports like wine and mineral water. This economic pressure severely impacted Georgia's economy, increasing the difficulty of its diplomatic maneuvering and driving Georgia to seek new markets and financial support from the West.

3. Limited Military Capabilities

Despite growing ties with NATO, Georgia's military was no match for Russia's extensive military resources. This disparity made Georgia vulnerable to military pressure from Russia, as demonstrated by the 2008 war in South Ossetia.

The imbalance in military power made Georgia heavily reliant on Western support for security and defense. Economic and security depends on Russia, domestic instability of Georgia, frozen conflicts were big problem for Georgia. The absence of documents in the strategic and security sectors, including the lack of bilateral or multilateral agreements or treaties with NATO or other member countries, significantly weakened Georgia's political and military position in its relations with the Russian Federation. This absence created serious obstacles to ensuring Georgia's security, as the bilateral security guarantees or military support that could have been provided by NATO member countries remained uncertain and vulnerable without formal legal frameworks. It also meant that Georgia had to face strong regional influences from Russia without having solid international institutions or security agreements for effective defense against it.

NATO and the EU were not prepared to take on the policy of balancing the region or engage in direct confrontation with the Russian Federation on behalf of Georgia. Geographically, Georgia did not hold as much strategic importance for the West as countries like Ukraine, which is not a NATO member, or Moldova, for example. Several EU member states, which were also NATO members, had significant energy dependencies on Russia. For instance, France, Germany, Italy, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Slovakia and others, which consequently restrained them from directly confronting Russia. Additionally, it is important to consider that Russia is a nuclear power with a military-industrial potential, and NATO was not willing to risk direct conflict with such a force for the sake of Georgia.

Russia is geographically Georgia's northern Christian neighbor and, by 2008, was the key actor in the region, given its significant influence over the South Caucasus, which included military presence. Therefore, in 2008, Georgia did not have a balancing state or organization to counter direct confrontation with Russia.

Opportunities

1. Western Integration for Economic and Security Assistance

Georgia's efforts to join NATO and the EU provided opportunities for economic and security support from Western powers. This integration could improve Georgia's economic prospects through investment and trade while enhancing its security through military aid and diplomatic backing. Georgia's role in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline added to its importance in global energy security, positioning it as a key player in energy transit between Central Asia and Europe. Considering Georgia's geographic location and the Western economic and strategic interests, particularly related to weakening the influence of Russia and Iran in the region, Georgia viewed the opportunities to become a strategic partner and potentially an ally of the West. Georgia's position, located next to Russia and serving as a crucial route to the Caspian Sea, made it an important transport corridor for the West, especially in terms of energy security. The West aimed to reduce Russia's influence in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea, and Georgia could play a key role in achieving this goal by serving as a vital corridor to Europe and other regions. At the same time, Georgia sought to strengthen its position as an independent and sovereign state by advancing democratic reforms, economic stability, and friendly relations with the West. This strategy and these relations later provided Georgia the opportunity to move toward NATO and EU membership, thus becoming a more significant ally of the West, while also offering a means to mitigate Russia's pressure on its foreign policy.

2. Regional Cooperation in Security and Stability

By pursuing regional cooperation on issues like counter-terrorism and security, Georgia had opportunities to improve its standing in the region. Aligning itself with NATO and other international bodies allowed Georgia to bolster its military capabilities and contribute to regional stability, further distancing itself from Russian influence.

The West aimed to weaken Russia both in the South Caucasus and in the Black Sea region. This opened new opportunities for Georgia to deepen its cooperation with the

West, particularly with NATO, the EU, and the United States, as well as to reduce Russia's influence in Georgia.

3. Energy Diversification and Infrastructure Development

Georgia's position as a conduit for energy supplies between Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Europe presented opportunities for the country to diversify its energy infrastructure and strengthen its role in global energy trade. This made Georgia an essential partner for both Russia and Western countries in regional energy security.

Threats

1. The Russian-Georgian War (2008)

The escalation of tensions culminated in the 2008 Russian-Georgian War, where Russia's military intervention in South Ossetia led to a direct challenge to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia's subsequent recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states further undermined Georgia's position, leading to its international isolation and strained relations with many countries.

2. International and Regional Instability

The war destabilized the broader South Caucasus region, affecting neighboring countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, all of which had strategic interests in the area. The conflict posed a regional security dilemma, complicating Georgia's relations with its neighbors and the West, while exacerbating tensions between Russia and the West.

3. Long-Term Economic and Diplomatic Isolation

The war, combined with the imposition of sanctions by Russia, resulted in long-term economic and diplomatic isolation for Georgia. Loss of key markets in Russia and continued regional instability made it harder for Georgia to develop independent foreign policies, forcing it to rely more heavily on Western support and diplomatic backing.

Conclusion

From 2003 to 2008, the relationship between Georgia and Russia became emblematic of the complex and often contradictory dynamics in post-Soviet geopolitics, underscoring the intersection of national sovereignty, regional power rivalry, and international security systems. This period commenced with the Rose Revolution in 2003, marking Georgia's strategic pivot towards the West under the leadership of Mikheil Saakashvili. This shift towards NATO and EU integration was framed as an effort to bolster Georgia's sovereignty, promote democratization, and secure economic and military advantages. However, the fundamental contradiction inherent in Georgia's aspirations—aligning with Western institutions while maintaining its territorial integrity amid Russia's growing assertiveness—became a source of profound geopolitical tension. From a realist perspective in international relations, the Russian response to Georgia's Westward pivot was almost inevitable. The theory of geopolitical realism, which posits that states act

primarily in their national interest to maximize power and security, explains Russia's reaction as a defensive strategy to preserve its influence in the South Caucasus, a region long considered part of its strategic sphere of influence. Russia's view of NATO enlargement as a direct challenge to its territorial integrity and regional hegemony was rooted in a broader historical context of post-Soviet anxieties about encroaching Western influence. From this standpoint, Georgia's NATO aspirations threatened not only Russian security concerns but also the broader post-Soviet order that Russia had sought to shape through mechanisms like the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and its military alliances.

Georgia's desire for NATO membership and closer integration with the European Union intersected with the unresolved conflicts in its breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. These territories, under the control of Russian-supported separatists, became a high-stakes bargaining chip in Georgia's broader strategy to assert sovereignty. However, the unresolved territorial disputes exposed Georgia's vulnerability in the absence of concrete security guarantees. This vulnerability was exacerbated by the security dilemma: as Georgia pursued Western alliances, Russia's countermeasures—military support to separatist forces, economic sanctions, and diplomatic pressure—intensified, creating a feedback loop that further escalated the conflict. A critical examination of Georgia's geopolitical calculus during this period reveals several miscalculations. While Georgia's strategic location as a transit state for energy resources, particularly the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, granted it significant regional leverage, it was unable to convert this advantage into tangible security guarantees. The lack of NATO membership and the inability to establish a credible deterrent force left Georgia increasingly exposed to Russian coercion. This situation reflects the limitations of soft power in the absence of military deterrence, as the diplomatic support Georgia received from Western powers failed to translate into effective protection from Russian aggression. Moreover, the normative power of international law, particularly regarding territorial integrity and sovereignty, was not sufficient to constrain Russia's actions, highlighting the selective application of international norms in cases where great power interests are at stake. The outbreak of the Russian-Georgian War of 2008 represented a critical juncture in Georgia's foreign policy. The subsequent recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states by Russia served not only to undermine Georgia's territorial integrity but also to expose the failure of multilateral security guarantees. Despite rhetorical support from NATO and the European Union, Georgia's limited military capabilities and lack of strategic depth rendered it unable to effectively counter Russian aggression. In geopolitical terms, the 2008 war underscored the power asymmetry between Russia and Georgia, where the latter's ambitions for greater autonomy and Western alignment were decisively checked by Russia's regional preeminence and military superiority. From a strategic studies perspective, the war highlighted the deficiencies in Georgia's defense posture and the limitations of its foreign policy. The aftermath exposed the dissonance between international expectations and practical security outcomes, where Georgia's pursuit of NATO membership failed to secure sufficient security guarantees or military commitments. NATO's reluctance to confront Russia directly reflected the underlying power politics of the alliance, where the strategic calculus of member states—particularly those with vested interests in relations with Russia—constrained NATO's capacity to act decisively.

This period can be understood as a critical case study in the constraints on smaller states attempting to navigate the geopolitical realities of a multipolar world. Georgia's pursuit of Western integration, while motivated by legitimate security concerns, collided with the entrenched interests of a resurgent Russia, reflecting the broader power dynamics in the post-Cold War order. Georgia's predicament illustrates how regional powers can assert their dominance in the face of external attempts at integration into Western political

and military frameworks. Moreover, it highlights the limitations of international institutions like NATO and the EU in ensuring the sovereignty and security of states at the periphery of competing global powers, especially in regions marked by longstanding geopolitical rivalries.

In conclusion, the period from 2003 to 2008 serves as a profound illustration of the dynamics of statecraft in a post-Soviet environment, characterized by the complex interplay of geopolitical, military, and economic forces. Georgia's experience underscores the paradox of sovereignty in a multipolar world: the tension between pursuing national aspirations for security and self-determination while navigating the strategic imperatives of larger, more powerful neighbors. The Russian-Georgian War of 2008 not only revealed the vulnerabilities of smaller states in the face of great power rivalry but also raised critical questions about the efficacy of international institutions in providing meaningful security guarantees in regions of strategic importance. This case reinforces the notion that states situated at the periphery of competing spheres of influence must recalibrate their foreign policies, balancing aspirations for integration with the realities of regional power politics, military preparedness, and strategic alliances.

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**ՎՐԱՍՏԱՆ-ՌԴ ՀԱՐԱԲԵՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ԷՎՈԼՅՈՒՑԻԱՆ (2003-2008ԹԹ),
ԱՇԽԱՐՀԱԶԱՐԱՔԱԿԱՆ ԼԱՐՎԱԾՈՒԹՅԱՆ, ՏՆՏԵՍԱԿԱՆ ՃՆՇՈՒՄՆԵՐԻ
ԵՎ ՈԱԶՄԱՎԱՐԱԿԱՆ ՀՆԱՐԱՎՈՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ
SWOT ՎԵՐԼՈՒԾՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ**

ՎԱՐԵՆ ՂԱԶԱՐՅԱՆ

*Երևանի պետական համալսարանի միջազգային հարաբերությունների
ֆակուլտետի քաղաքագիտության ամբիոնի ասպիրանտ,
ք. Սպիտակ, Հայաստանի Հանրապետություն*

Այս հոդվածում ուսումնասիրվում է Վրաստանի և Ռուսաստանի Դաշնության միջև հարաբերությունների զարգացումը, հատկապես «Հինգօրյա» պատերազմին նախորդող շրջանում, որը Էականորեն փոխեց երկու երկրների միջև հարաբերությունների դինամիկան: Հոդվածում հատուկ ուշադրության են արժանանում 2003 թվականի «Վարդերի» հեղափոխությունից հետո Վրաստանի արտաքին քաղաքականության փոփոխվող բնույթը, երկկողմ հարաբերությունների վրա ազդեցություն ունեցող գործոնները և կողմերի դիմագրաված մարտահրավերները՝ փոխվող աշխարհաքաղաքականության զարգացումների ֆոնին:

Ուսումնասիրության նպատակն է հասկանալ, թե ինչպես Վրաստանը հաղթահարեց աշխարհաքաղաքական մարտահրավերները՝ հավասարակշռելով ՆԱՏՕ-ին և ԵՄ-ին անդամակցելու իր հավակնությունները՝ Ռուսաստանի հետ շարունակվող տարածքային վեճերի ֆոնին: Հետազոտության հիմնական հարցն է՝ ինչպես է Վրաստանի արտաքին քաղաքականությունը 2003-2008 թվականներին արձագանքել իր աշխարհաքաղաքական խոցելիություններին ու հնարավորություններին՝ Ռուսաստանի հակադրությամբ:

Ուսումնասիրությունը կիրառում է SWOT վերլուծության մեթոդաբանությունը (ուժեղ կողմեր, թույլ կողմեր, հնարավորություններ և սպառնալիքներ)՝ գնահատելու Վրաստանի արտաքին քաղաքականության որոշումները այս կարևոր ժամանակահատվածում՝ հաշվի առնելով ինչպես ներքին, այնպես էլ արտաքին գործոնները: Ուսումնասիրության արդյունքում շեշտվում են Վրաստանի աշխարհագրական դիրքի և քաղաքական բարեփոխումների ռազմավարական կարևորությունը, բայց նաև բացահայտվում են խոշոր խոցելիություններ, այդ թվում՝ չունենալ տարածքային հակամարտություններ և կախվածություն արևմուտքի աջակցությունից՝ առանց անվտանգության գործնական երաշխիքների:

Հետազոտության եզրակացության մեջ ընդգծվում է, որ, չնայած Վրաստանի ցանկությանը՝ օգտագործել իր ժողովրդավարական բարեփոխումները և աշխարհաքաղաքական կարևորությունը, այն մնում էր սահմանափակված տարածաշրջանային ուժերի դինամիկայով, հատկապես՝ Ռուսաստանի ազդեցությամբ. սա հանգեցրեց 2008 թվականի ռուս-վրացական պատերազմին: Այս վերլուծությունը տրամադրում է տեսություններ փոքր պետությունների մասին, որոնք փորձում են գոյատևել տարածաշրջանային ուժեղ ազդեցությունների տակ և ընդգծում է ռազմավարական դիվանագիտության և ռազմական պատրաստության կարևորությունը:

Հիմնաբառեր՝ Վրաստան, Ռուսաստանի Դաշնություն, երկկողմ հարաբերություններ, Վարդերի հեղափոխություն, Հարավային Կովկաս, արտաքին քաղաքականություն, բազմակողմ դիվանագիտություն, աշխարհաքաղաքականություն:

ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ ОТНОШЕНИЙ ГРУЗИЯ-РОССИЯ (2003-2008): SWOT-АНАЛИЗ ГЕОПОЛИТИЧЕСКИХ НАПРЯЖЕННОСТЕЙ, ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИХ ДАВЛЕНИЙ И СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИХ ВОЗМОЖНОСТЕЙ

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В данной статье рассматривается эволюция отношений между Грузией и Российской Федерацией, особенно в период, предшествующий «Пятидневной войне», которая существенно изменила динамику отношений между двумя странами. Сосредотачиваясь на периоде после «Революции роз» в Грузии в 2003 году, исследование анализирует изменяющийся характер двусторонних отношений, факторы влияния и вызовы, с которыми сталкивались обе стороны на фоне меняющихся геополитических событий.

Цель исследования - понять, как Грузия ориентировалась в сложной геополитической обстановке, балансируя между стремлением к вступлению в НАТО и ЕС и продолжающимися территориальными спорами с Россией. Ключевой вопрос исследования: как внешняя политика Грузии в 2003-2008 годах учитывала её геополитические уязвимости и возможности на фоне противостояния с Россией? В исследовании применяется методология SWOT-анализа (сильные стороны, слабые стороны, возможности и угрозы) для оценки внешнеполитических решений Грузии в этот критический период с учетом как внутренних, так и внешних факторов. Результаты исследования отмечают стратегическое значение географического положения Грузии и политических реформ, но также выявляют значительные уязвимости, включая нерешенные территориальные конфликты и зависимость от западной поддержки без формальных гарантий безопасности.

В заключении подчеркивается, что, несмотря на стремление Грузии использовать свои демократические реформы и геополитическое значение, она оставалась ограниченной в рамках региональных силовых структур, особенно в связи с влиянием России, что в конечном итоге привело к русско-грузинской войне 2008 года. Этот анализ дает представление о сложности внешней политики малых государств в условиях региональной силы и важности стратегической дипломатии и военной подготовки.

Ключевые слова: *Грузия, Российская Федерация, двусторонние отношения, Революция Роз, Южный Кавказ, внешняя политика, многосторонняя дипломатия, геополитика.*