

The end of “International order –1991”: Impact of 2008 Russia-Georgia war on Ukraine

Russian invasion in Georgia on 08.08.08 changed dramatically security environment in the Eastern Europe by the evident destruction of an international order based on multilateral consensus achieved back in 1991, at the collapse of the USSR.

This analysis aimed to provide for assessment of changes, important for Ukraine, occurred as outcomes of war on Georgia followed by unilateral recognition by Russian Federation of breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

“International order – 1991” is a term of definition of the regional international system appeared in the former Soviet Union after its collapse. That order was based on de-jure multilateral recognition of the borders, territorial integrity and other basic principles of international law by all actors involved. Despite certain deviations and specific territorial conflicts appeared even before August 1991 (Nagorny Karabakh, Transnistria) the very basis of the peaceful USSR “divorce” and CIS formation was determined by transformation of former administrative borders between soviet republics into state borders of Newly independent states (NIS). Only former republics (neither autonomies nor other territories) enjoyed full-fledged independence and international recognition. That consensus was welcomed and legitimized by the international community: former soviet republics became members of international community and the subjects of international law.

In fact, Russian-Georgian war followed by annexation of the part of Georgian territory by Russian Federation changed the very basis of the international order emerged in that part of the world after the year 1991. Certain international consensus and rules, which were a milestone of stability and security in the Eastern Europe (or Western Newly Independent States – Western NIS) *does not exist anymore*. The basic principles of that order were destroyed by Russian Federation in August 2008.

There is no consensus in the region regarding some substantial principles of international order. NIS do not have a common approach toward the even simplest question: *how many independent states exist now in so-called post-soviet space?* For Russia they are 17 (11 CIS + Georgia + 3 Baltic + Abkhazia + South Ossetia). For all others they are still 15. There are no jointly accepted criteria of new state’s recognition. There is not anymore a consensus regarding the role of UN Security Council as the only legitimate body authorized to sanction the use of force abroad (despite the fact that such a notion still provided by the official Russian foreign policy concept published in June 2008).

The crucial challenge of international order in the Eastern Europe after 08.08.08 concerns the new consensus on the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity to be achieved. Which kind of consensus is possible? That is obvious that some principal elements of the new order offered by Russia indicate a deepening conflict between Russian policies and the basic national interests of the most of the neighboring NIS.

Russia's approaches to regional security reconsidered

The proposal of Russian Federation is de-facto an idea of limited sovereignty of neighboring states. Any country can continue to rely on the existent borders only if the limits of sovereignty are accepted. In official terms the new Russian approaches were presented by President Medvedev in some interviews during September-October 2008.

As Washington Post writes: Mr. Medvedev was asked by more than one journalist whether Russia's aggression might be directed at other neighboring states, such as Ukraine, Moldova or the Baltic members of NATO. He answered by noting that millions of Russians live outside the country, and he asserted the right as "commander in chief" to "protect the lives and dignity of our citizens." He stated to the BBC: "In certain cases I have no choice but to take these kinds of actions."

Concentrated approach was delivered by President Medvedev in the so-called "Five bullet points":

1. "Russia recognizes the primacy of the fundamental principles of international law, which define the relations between civilized nations. We will build our relations with other countries within the framework of these principles and this concept of international law".
2. "The world should be multipolar. A single-pole world is unacceptable. Domination is something we cannot allow. We cannot accept a world order in which one country makes all the decisions, even as serious and influential a country as the United States of America. Such a world is unstable and threatened by conflict".
3. "Russia does not want confrontation with any other country. Russia has no intention of isolating itself. We will develop friendly relations with Europe, the United States, and other countries, as much as is possible.
4. "**Protecting the lives and dignity of our citizens**, wherever they may be, is an unquestionable priority for our country. Our foreign policy decisions will be based on this need".

5. "There are regions in which Russia has **privileged interests**. These regions are home to countries with which we share special historical relations and are bound together as friends and good neighbors. We will pay particular attention to our work in these regions and build friendly ties with these countries, our close neighbors. These are principles I will follow in carrying out our foreign policy. As for the future, it depends not only on us but also on our friends and partners in the international community. They have a choice."

The two that matter most are 4 & 5. If Kremlin is committed to uphold this view, it is an unwelcome turn for the whole Eastern Europe.

The Medvedev's doctrine in some substantial features is similar to so-called "Brezhnev doctrine" of 1968, delivered immediately after Soviet invasion to Czechoslovakia, arguing for the principles of de-facto "limited sovereignty". At that time it was a "socialist system" in a position of major limit. Countries of the Soviet block were allowed to have certain specifics of their own "socialism" but only within the general model authorized by Kremlin. Czechoslovakia passed over the limits and was immediately punished.

Since 1968 world changed significantly. Cold war was over in 1991. However In 2008 Georgia, the country belonging, as viewed by Russia, to the sphere of its "privileged interests" passed over other informal limit of sovereignty which were publicly and vocally delivered and, therefore, formalized.

There are following limits of sovereignty to be imposed by Russia on its neighbors (as they are viewed from Ukrainian perspective):

- Russian "compatriots" humanitarian and political rights to be secured. In the narrow sense "compatriots" are Russian passport holders, in the broader sense they are all who identify themselves with the "Wider Russia" (or post-soviet) cultural and social space. In practical terms friendly policy to Russian "compatriots" should foresee official status for Russian language, Russian education and privileged position for Russian Orthodox Church. National interpretation of history may be accepted only within the frames of "common history" with Russia.
- Informational policy: openness of national media-market for Russian media, first of all, easier availability of state-controlled Russian TV channels.
- Foreign and security policy should be co-ordinated with Russia. Countries of the region should follow either allied policy (SIC Collective Security Treaty) or, at least, neutrality. Joining any other security alliance (meaning NATO) is not to be tolerated by Russia.

Russian military bases' placement should be prolonged; any others' permanent foreign military presence is not acceptable.

- Russia is an only country with the legitimate right to use force in the cases of emergency. Peace enforcement, peace building and peacekeeping are exclusive privileges of Russia in the region. UN sanction is not anymore a necessary prerequisite of the use of force abroad.
- Recognition of new states, partition of existent states in the region is to be an outcome of non-acceptance of abovementioned points by those states.

Irredentism is a sensitive issue for almost all Western NIS. There are existent “frozen conflicts” in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova. In Ukraine irredentist attitudes are rather hidden but may be provoked under certain circumstances. Crimean separatism was overcome in mid-90s but its roots have not disappeared and may be re-activated.

At the same time provoking separatism in the neighboring states by recognition of independence of some of them, and stimulating others Russia provides for additional domestic risks. Russian Caucasus is still a region with continuing potential of instability and separatism. In the mid-term perspective regional irredentism may appear in Russian Far East, Ural region etc. Therefore by recognition of breakaway regions of Georgia Russia launched a risky game, which can lead to fatal outcomes for Russia itself.

In terms of strategic stability Russia has an interest to preserve “international order-1991” in order to minimize risks of its own security and stability. However Russian political elite took a decision to sacrifice certain stability and break the rules in order to change status for better and stronger in short-term perspective. This decision may cost a lot in the future.

Dilemmas for Ukraine

There are at least four optional “directions of thinking” in Ukraine on the issues occurred after Russia-Georgia war which can determine possible scenarios of further development.

1. **Acceleration of Ukraine's rapprochement to NATO** with visible accession prospect recognized by NATO Bucharest summit in April 2008. After Russia-Georgia war Ukrainian supporters of NATO got an evident encouraging argument in favor of their position. At the same time NATO-skeptics also strengthened their standing arguing for “better relation with Russia” as a major security prerequisite. Further **polarization** of supporters and opponents of NATO accession provide additional tension between the

two, therefore the very ground for deep national consensus on this issue is even harder to achieve than before August 2008.

2. **Neutrality.** This kind of thinking is traditionally popular in Ukraine, however it is rather *wishful thinking* attitude than practical concept. Proponents of Ukrainian permanent neutrality usually ignore the fact that Ukrainian neutrality will never be recognized by international community until Russian Black Sea fleet has its base in Crimea (foreign military troops placement is not compatible with the neutral status). There is also an evident lack of arguments for the capacity of neutral Ukraine to secure its borders and territorial integrity having more assertive Russia in the direct neighborhood.
3. **Bilateral security arrangement** with a friendly big power. USA is usually considered for this role. If NATO is not realistically available, Ukraine may discuss bilateral security agreement designed on the basis of Korean model (Republic of Korea has bilateral security arrangement with the USA). However this model looks not much realistic as the US never proposed such an option and the most of Ukrainian political elites are rather European- then American-oriented; don't wish to be considered in Europe as "one more Trojan horse of America".
4. **Revival of nuclear power.** If no appropriate security solution is found in the foreseeable future, debates about nuclear status of Ukraine may be revitalized. Technically Ukraine (unilaterally renounced its nuclear status in 1994) is capable to restore minimal nuclear military potential within 3-4 years after political decision is taken. At the moment this kind of thinking is not on the political agenda, but it cannot be neglected that if the feeling of external threat will consistently increase and no workable international security solution for Ukraine found (i.e. NATO is not practically available), political class of Ukraine may consider even the most exotic solutions.

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