

SOME ASYMMETRIC FEATURES OF THE SECURITY DYNAMICS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND THE SURROUNDING REGION

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Dear Secretary of the National Security Council of the Republic of Armenia, Mr. Artur Baghdasaryan!

Dear Colleagues!

The presentation of the analysis of the specific regional security processes in such a professional audience as the Alumni Association of George C. Marshall Center for Security Studies is, does not suppose the exhibition of well-known facts permanently circulated on the media pages and sites. Our task is to characterize – in the form of mutual public consultations – the system of external and internal factors that determine the major trends and security dynamic's processes in the South Caucasus, and to focus on individual characteristics of their asymmetric features that require special attention with regard to the strategic assessment of the threats likely to provoke dramatic consequences for the security of the South Caucasus, Armenia, as well as its allies and partners.

In my presentation of personal capacity, I will express my opinion as a Counterterrorism Fellow of the US National Defense University and a Graduate of George C. Marshall's US-German Center for Security Studies.

ON THE FEATURES OF FOREIGN-SECURITY CONTEXT OF THE REGIONAL SECURITY'S DYNAMICS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS.

Large-scale changes gaining an intense circulation in the geopolitical system of the Greater Middle East provide for new problems for the security of the South Caucasus fraught with a dangerous aggravation of existing intra-regional threats. The possible reconfiguration of the geo-strategic system in the Middle East – under the shift of the global center of influence on the world processes to the East¹ – coming into resonance with the growing crisis in relations among the major actors in the Middle East is reflected in the dynamics of critical changes of the security environment in the South Caucasus.

The difficult-to-predict developments of the "Arab Spring", the growing international tensions over Iran's nuclear program, the transformation of Turkish foreign policy of "Neo-Ottomanism" towards the Islamic World, the complexity of development prospects of the security dynamics in Central Asia in connection with the scheduled withdrawal of the Coalition troops from Afghanistan, as well as the deepening system crisis in the geostrategic space of the European Union – all these are the main external factors affecting the dynamics of security environment's

changes in the South Caucasus.

A unique role in maintaining the security in the South Caucasus plays the dynamics of Armenia's, Georgia's, and Azerbaijan's involvement in the international security system in both bilateral and multilateral dimensions. Here as a positive factor it should be mentioned that in comparison with its neighbors Armenia is more balanced in maintaining the diversity of its security orientations and the development of its security cooperation with both NATO and the CSTO, Russia and the US, as well as with other world power centers, including China and India, European countries and those of the Greater Middle East. However, it should be noted that the established complex system of relationships between the very South Caucasus states affects the security dynamics in our region, reflecting their divergent security interests in respect of Russia, Turkey, and Iran.

Many of the strategic think tanks point the rise of the probability of the devastating regional war in the Middle East with an inevitable involvement of the South Caucasus in its orbit. With such a catastrophic development of the regional situation, the main threat to the national security of Armenia has been and remains the possible aggression of Azerbaijan against Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. Since the signing of the armistice and resuming of the war among the parties to the Karabakh Conflict, Armenia has supported the peace process under the auspices of the OSCE². It should be noted that during the regular meeting of the Presidents of Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan – Dmitry Medvedev, Serzh Sargsyan and Ilham Aliyev – in compliance with the Minsk Group Co-Chair countries – the Presidents of the US and France – held in Sochi on January 23, 2012 – there has been some progress in the agreement on the Fundamental Principles of the Nagorno-Karabakh resolution in connection with the both sides declaring their willingness to accelerate achieving agreement “taking into account the work already done”³.

It is known that the Karabakh conflict is not solved since Azerbaijan does not recognize the right of existence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. The non-recognition by the Azerbaijani authorities of the inalienable rights of the Nagorno Karabakh people to self-determination up to its independence and the legal fact of its legitimate exercise reflects the local version of the exotic interpretation of international law by the Azerbaijani authorities⁴. The armed phase of the Karabakh conflict has arisen because of the attempts of the Republic of Azerbaijan to destroy the legally self-determined Nagorno-Karabakh Republic by waging the war against it with the threat of recurrence of the Genocide's catastrophe, the cruel reminder of which took place in the anti-Armenian pogroms with mass killings of civilian population in Sumgait, Kirovabad and Baku in 1989-1990⁵. Thus, the basis for the peaceful resolution of the Karabakh conflict – as in the case of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict – should be the need for mutual recognition of the parties to the conflict – the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic⁶.

The denial to recognize the legally established states of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic⁷ and the State of Israel is the major obstacle to the peaceful resolution of the Karabakh and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. Meanwhile, it should be noted that on the threshold of the Centenary of the

Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire, such a denial by several states is dramatized by deep emotional, moral and political tensions. It is important to understand that the denial of the facts of the Genocides committed against a number of the world nations and firstly the Armenian and Jewish peoples having restored their independent statehood namely to guarantee the non-recurrence of the Genocide and the Holocaust, as well as to learn lessons from these catastrophes is considered as a key to conflict resolution⁸. In these terms, the concept underlying the provision of the national security guarantees of the Armenian and Jewish peoples – “Never Again”⁹ is topical as never before.

Assessing the dynamics of the changes in the security environment in the South Caucasus in the mid-term perspective – among the specific external factors that determine the intensity level of the influence on the process of the Karabakh settlement – it is necessary to note the upcoming presidential elections in all the three Co-Chair countries of the OSCE Minsk Group. Another peculiarity of the security dynamics process in the region is the need to evaluate the impact of feedback of the prospects of peace and war in the South Caucasus and the surrounding region on the preparation and holding of presidential elections in the very Co-Chair countries of the Minsk Group – Russia, the US and France.

ON THE INTERNAL ASPECT OF REGIONAL SECURITY DYNAMICS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS.

The internal dimension of the security environment dynamics in the South Caucasus is largely due to the well-known divergence of the political, legal, economic, and social development of the regional countries, as well as the arms race not being controlled by the international community in the presence of unresolved regional conflicts.

Finally, an important internal factor that determines the dynamics of the national and regional security in the South Caucasus in the mid-term perspective is the process of preparation and holding in the next few years of democratic and fair parliamentary and presidential elections in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

ON DIFFICULT-TO-CONTROL ASYMMETRIC FACTORS OF ESCALATION IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS IN THE EVENT OF UNLEASHING A REGIONAL WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

The growing tensions over Iran’s nuclear program are a significant threat to the national security of Armenia and the security of the South Caucasus. On the basis of its own security interests Armenia has developed a position which is to respect the legitimate right of Tehran of using the nuclear technologies for peaceful purposes¹⁰. At the same time Armenia attaches importance to the cooperation of Iran with the IAEA in compliance with all the requirements of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons¹¹. The official Yerevan advocates the peaceful settlement of the Iranian crisis through “dialogue, negotiation and consensus”¹².

To date, most publications on the evaluation of the conflict’s escalation with Syria and Iran the

judgments about the prospect of waging a symmetric war dominate – counting the number of troops, planes, helicopters and tanks, aircraft carriers, frigates – accumulated in the Middle Eastern theater of possible hostilities.

Here we consider it expedient to pay attention to those factors that reflect the particular dynamics of the processes associated with the possible anti-American mobilization of specific resources for the conduct of not only the overt symmetric wars but also covert asymmetric ones. It should be taken into account that these security collisions occur and in the near future will develop under the loss of the recognized leader of the Arab world – Egypt. In the management of the Middle East problems America now has to reckon with Saudi Arabia, which for a number of well-known reasons is unable to fully replace the vacant position of the pro-American former leader of the Arab world.

1. It is a sober forecast of the consequences not only and not merely of the overt symmetric war between the US and Iran but of the consideration of the presence in the IRI of the elaborated doctrines and tools of the covert asymmetric war by the Iranian special forces including the strong network of partners in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Iraq and other Islamic countries, as well as beyond the Greater Middle East.

The monographic study of our Institute with the engagement of the relevant experts draws attention to the presence of 40.000 agents in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of the IRI specialized in the conduct of special operation “arts” of asymmetric war in Iran and beyond its borders. We are talking about fighters deliberately going to be sacrificed in the name of faith to become holy martyrs-*shahids*. The scale of unacceptable losses from waging covert asymmetric war against the US and other countries in the case of the war against the IRI – at the global financial crisis – may exceed the calculations carried out on the standards of the overt symmetric war¹³.

This threat can worsen already at the stage of the war against the Alevi leadership of “pro-Iranian” Syria in case of the underestimation of the possible provocation of pro-Syrian pro-Iranian mobilization of the potential of the latent conflict of many centuries between the largest minority in Turkey – Alevi, numbering estimated more than 20 million – and the Turkish authorities. The emerged signals indicate on the advisability of taking into account the possible danger triggering the Alevi community as a factor undermining the stability not only in Turkey but also in the Middle East as a whole. For instance, in January 2012 at the Second Grand Alevi Congress of Turkey claims were made towards the new draft Constitution put forward by the ruling Justice and Development Party. With respect to the clashes between Sunnis and Alevis the Grand Alevi Congress of Turkey expressed its serious concerns¹⁴. It should be taken into account that these signs of the possible mobilization of the Turkish Alevi minority appeared on the background of the publications about the deployment of Syrian opposition army staff’s structures in the territory of Turkey.

2. Among the asymmetric threats to the US in the event of the regional war in the Middle East our studies point on the possibility of pro-Iranian Shiite population in Iraq to consolidate. The emerging conditions for the independence declaration of Iraqi Kurdistan, if implemented, could transform Iraq into a pro-Iranian nation-state with more than 80 % of Shiite population. Given the 10-year experience of representation of Shiite political and military elites in the representative government and security institutions of Iraq – after deploying in it the coalition forces – this factor can be transformed into a consolidated anti-American power ready to conduct both an overt symmetric and covert asymmetric war in support of Iran and its allies¹⁵.

Thus, supplementing the Iraqi factor to the regional war could have a catastrophic impact on the security dynamics in the Greater Middle East including the South Caucasus.

3. The US program aimed at involving the Central Asian and South Asian countries in the regional cooperation with Afghanistan is worthy of greater attention. However, experts point to the increase of the risk of Islamic radicalization of the Afghan society and the surrounding Islamic region including nuclear Pakistan covertly supporting the Taliban, and the Central Asia's "drug addiction" to Afghanistan – after the announced withdrawal in 2014¹⁶.

Only the superficial review can consider the factor of the upcoming withdrawal of the Coalition troops from Afghanistan as not of high priority for the assessment of regional security in the South Caucasus. Let us consider some peculiarities of the dynamics of regional security in this direction. It should be noted that the war in Afghanistan in 2001, along with the increased levels of "drug saturated" corruption of economics and politics of the Afghan society and the region has increased the role of Iran's influence on the processes in the Afghan society. First of all, it is the increased traditional control of Iran over the neighboring Afghani Khorasan and Hazarajat.

Experts note that in case of war with Iran against the US and the Coalition states the IRI may involve also nearly 4 million same-faith pro-Iranian mobilized Farsiwans, Hazaras and Qizilbashes of Afghanistan. This asymmetric component of the pro-Iranian resource in Afghanistan can undermine the promotion of the US interests in entire Central Asia and thus, in the South Caucasus so related to the trans-regional projects for hydrocarbon transit.

Recently there have been new developments in the CSTO's activities towards Afghanistan. A view dominates within the CSTO that after the withdrawal of the Coalition forces the situation in the region will even more aggravate¹⁷, and Afghanistan can become a threat to the security of Central Asia and to the CSTO on the whole. In this regard, on November 17, 2011, in Moscow at the CSTO Council Board, the Draft plan was agreed upon neutralizing the possible threats and challenges coming from Afghanistan¹⁸.

In December 2011, I had an opportunity to make a presentation on Afghanistan at the special session of the CSTO Academic-Expert Council. The deepening of the outlined dialogue to address the threats from Afghanistan in the formats of Russia – US, and NATO – CSTO – SCO seems to be

rather promising.

In terms of establishing such a dialogue Armenia can play a certain role being Russia's ally and the partner of the United States, as well as a founding member of the CSTO, partnering with NATO and having experience in peacekeeping operations undertaken by NATO, as well as in the drills of CSTO's operating Rapid Reaction Collective Force (RRCF).

CONCLUSION: ON THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF THE "RESET"

In concluding my presentation, I would like to pay special attention to the importance of the invaluable influence on the regional security dynamics in the South Caucasus of the "reset" factor of the strategic cooperation between the US and Russia. Based on my participation as a visiting scholar at the relaunching of the Harvard Strategic Forum "US-Russia Security" in 2010, I consider it my duty to note the high interest of American and Russian professionals in the systemic implementation of the "reset" strategy of the US-Russian cooperation¹⁹. The key to this was going to become the fertile ground of mutual understanding between the Presidents of the US and Russia.

I would like in my personal capacity and on behalf of my American and Russian Colleagues to express the regret that there are some evidences on shrinking the scope of the US-Russian strategic cooperation's "reset". However, I have the honor to express the confidence in the positive long-term prospects of this "reset" – in the interests of secure, progressive and sustainable development of Russia and the US, the world community including the South Caucasus region.

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