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NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF THE US-RUSSIAN "RESET" WORLDWIDE

The following article studies the negative consequences of the Russian "Reset" worldwide. The analysis of the reasons for the Russian "Reset" has revealed the fact that the "Reset" was the best alternative for the normalization of the deadlocked relations between the USA and the Russian Federation.

Obviously, the "Reset" was successful to some extent, but the negative results that followed Obama's passive policy and the growing aggression of the Russian Federation outweigh the advantages of the "Reset".

Research has shown that the wrong course of the "Reset" policy has led to severe consequences such as the Syrian refugee crisis, which affected not only the neighboring countries in the region but Europe as well: during the crisis, Europe hosted about one million refugees. At the same time, Russia has increased its self-esteem and aspiration toward escalating aggression and violence.

Additionally, the article deals with US-Georgian relations during the presidency of Barack Obama. The importance of the bilateral relations between the USA and Georgia and the mutual desire to strengthen the relations in the fields of economy, security, diplomacy, science, energy, and culture has been emphasized in the Charter on Strategic Partnership.

The author also studied the response of the Russian Federation to Georgia's aspiration for the European Union. Currently, Georgia continues to move towards EU integration. This fact is significantly important in the current political context as Georgia remains the target of one of the most serious claims of the Russian Federation. There still exists a real danger that Georgia's sovereignty will be violated, especially after the Syrian, Ukrainian, and Karabakh war conflicts.

It has been concluded that Georgian diplomacy should be able to ensure the future reality where Georgia will not engage in war with Russia, even in case of expected or unexpected scenarios of events.

Keywords: Russian "Reset", the USA, Obama, the Syrian crisis, Syrian refugees, displacement crisis, Georgia, the Government of Georgia, the EU, NATO membership.

The main goal of the Russian "Reset" was to normalize the deadlocked relations between the USA and the Russian Federation. As a result, the relations improved; the two countries reached an agreement on such important issues as: the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, the US-Russian Agreement on Afghanistan Issues, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and etc.

Obviously, the USA and Russia only agreed on the matters of mutual interest. At the end of the "Reset" policy, after the crises in Syria and Ukraine, the world faced the challenges and problems which arose due to Obama's passive foreign policy.

A military attack on Russia is not meant instead of the passive foreign policy of the Obama Administration. President Obama should have demonstrated more courage and determination to resolve conflicts through diplomacy: a more intensive dialogue with the Administration of the Russian Federation was critically essential.

Furthermore, Obama might have negotiated with the princes of Saudi Arabia with respect to the oil production. The production of oil is crucially important for the Russian economy. And if the princes had doubled their oil production for a short period of time (for a couple of years), the economy of the Russian Federation would have suffered catastrophic consequences.

The Syrian refugee crisis resulting from the armed conflict in Syria, is the world's largest refugee crisis of our time. As a result of the war, a huge number of refugees fled the war-torn country. The refugees found

refugee not only in the region and neighboring countries, but in Europe as well. A colossal number of refugees crossed the European borders and caused instability and migrant crisis in the region.

According to the European Union report, the Syrian conflict led to the world's largest displacement crisis and even today the war in Syria remains one of the world's most destructive humanitarian crisis.

The UN Human Rights Office has estimated that the war claimed 306.000 civilians between March 2011 and March 2021¹.

Beyond mortality and displacement, the Syrian civil war has had devastating effects on civilian physical and mental health. Civilians have to live under constant stress and fear. Millions of children, women and the elderly come under attack every day. They are subjected to severe torture.

According to the 2017 report, 2.5 million children have a refugee status, and 1.5 million children are deprived of education².

As a result of massive destruction, Syrian healthcare system has been limited to the civilians. Additionally, the war fully destroyed a lot of healthcare facilities. Since the start of the war Physicians for Human Rights (FHR) has documented 601 devastating attacks on at least 350 health facilities³.

Taking the above-mentioned considerations into account, it is natural that Syrian people seek safety and stability in other countries.

At first, 5.000 refugees left Syria in 2011 and since then, more than 6.8 million Syrians have been forced to flee their country⁴.

The vast majority of displaced Syrians have found refuge in neighboring countries. Turkey hosts the largest number of the Syrian refugees- 3.7 million refugees; Lebanon- about 851,718 Syrians; Jordan – 668,332; Iraq – about 345, 952 refugees; Egypt – 133, 568 refugees⁵.

The admission of refugees is one of the most serious problems for some developing countries. While migrants try to flee poverty and danger, the countries which host them experience long-term social, economic, political, and environmental problems.

A huge number of refugees move to Europe. During the Syrian war, Europe has hosted more than a million refugees. Initially, most Syrians entered Europe from the Middle East by crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece by boat. Others endangered their lives while crossing the Mediterranean Sea to enter Europe.

During the crisis, Europe has hosted about one million of refugees. One-fourth of the refugees crossed the Mediterranean Sea, half of the migrants chose the way through the Greek Islands, the rest of them found other ways.

The disorganized, irregular, and dangerous migratory flows have been moderately organized after the implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement in 2016.

The EU and some other non-governmental organizations are still actively involved in the management of the refugee crisis. Mostly, refugees choose the Central Mediterranean route to enter Europe illegally. More than 21.000 people have died or are missing in an attempt to enter Europe.

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency has deployed four operations in order to fight migrant smuggling and save the refugees at risk. Thanks to these operations, more than 586.000 lives have been rescued since 2015:

1. Operation Themis, which was launched in February 2018, replaced the Operation Triton. The Operation Themis covers the Central Mediterranean.

¹ United Nations Human Rights (2022). *UN Human Rights Office estimates more than 306.000 civilians were killed over 10 years in Syrian conflict* <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/06/un-human-rights-office-estimates-more-306000-civilians-were-killed-over-10>> (2022, November, 15).

² Save the Children (2022). *Syrian Refugee Children Stories: Life as a Refugee* <<https://www.savethechildren.org/us/what-we-do/emergency-response/refugee-children-crisis/refugee-stories>> (2022, November, 15).

³ Reliefweb (2022). *11 years of violence against health care in Syria* <<https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/11-years-violence-against-health-care-syria>> (2022, November, 15).

⁴ World Vision (2022). *Syrian Refugee Crisis: Facts and How to help* <<https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts#:~:text=About%2013%20million%20Syrians%20in,people%2C%20are%20displaced%20within%20Syria>> (2022, November, 15).

⁵ Statista (2022). *Ranking of the largest Syrian refugee-hosting countries in 2020* <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/740233/major-syrian-refugee-hosting-countries-worldwide/>> (2022, November, 15).

2. Operation Poseidon, which was launched in 2006, covers the Eastern Mediterranean (Greek sea borders with Turkey).

3. Operation Indalo -covers the Western Mediterranean route between Morocco and Spain.

4. Operation Irini, which has been launched since March 2020, focuses on the disruption of human smuggling and trafficking networks¹.

The EU has taken effective actions to prevent criminal networks from exploiting vulnerable refugees. As for Georgia, the first migrant flow (about 2.000 refugees) reached its borders in 2014. In 2015, the number of refugees made up about 1450 people, in 2016 the number decreased to 950 migrants and in 2017 only 379 refugees entered the country².

The higher number of refugees in 2014 was due to the expectations of migrants that through Georgia they would be able to enter European countries without difficulty. Since the refugees realized that it was difficult to enter Europe through Georgia, they left the country and started to seek other ways to cross European borders.

Since Georgia formally gained its independence on 26 December 1991, a colossal part of the aid provided to Georgia has been received from the USA. During these years, the USA invested hundreds of millions of dollars in Georgia's development. Though, all the US investments put in Georgian economy derives from the US geopolitical interests in Eurasia.

According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Eurasia is thus the chessboard on which the struggle for global primacy continues to be played, and that struggle involves geostrategy – the strategic management of geopolitical interests"³.

Gradually, Georgia continues to move towards the EU integration. This fact is significantly important in the current political context as Georgia remains the target of one of the most serious claims of the Russian Federation. There still exists a real danger that Georgia's sovereignty will be violated, especially after the Syrian, Ukrainian and Karabakh conflicts. It is crucially important to find out if there is a risk of war recurrence and how would it be possible for Georgia to avoid a possible conflict under the creeping occupation conditions and continue the process of European Integration. In order to answer these queries, I will discuss the US and Russian national interests in Georgia.

The USA as well as the Russian Federation have economic interests towards Georgia. Obviously, Georgia strategically is not the most important country in the region. Azerbaijan, which shares borders with Russia and Iran, owns a huge supply of oil and gas, represents quite a powerful state for the West. Georgia is a transit state that automatically emphasizes the state's geopolitical importance.

According to the director of the Swedish Institute for Security and Development Policy – Svante Cornell, "Georgia may not be the most strategic country, but it is the most critically important in South Caucasus"⁴.

Before the 2008 Russian-Georgian War, the Georgian government had made some serious mistakes. The Georgian authorities should not have refrained from expressing a negative attitude towards the recognition of Kosovo Independence. It was impossible for the West to react critically to the negative attitude of Georgia, but the passive policy of the Georgian government encouraged Russia's destructive actions in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region.

It should also be noted that, the Georgian Government should have assessed the George W. Bush Presidency more adequately.

George W. Bush unequivocally expressed America's wholehearted support for Georgia. In 2005 he even visited Georgia and after the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, the USA sent an aid package of more than 1 Billion dollars for Georgia's reconstruction after the war⁵.

On January 9, 2009 the USA and Georgia signed a Charter on Strategic Partnership. The Charter affirms the importance of the bilateral relations between the USA and Georgia and emphasizes

¹ European Council (2022). *Saving lives at sea and targeting criminal networks*

<<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-migration-policy/saving-lives-sea/>> (2022, November, 15).

² National Statistics Office of Georgia (2022). *Migration/Refugees*

<<https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/322/migration>> (2022, November, 15).

³ Brzezinski, Z. (1997). *The Grand Chessboard*. New York: Basic Books, 8, 93, 113, 122, 125, 129.

⁴ Civil Georgia (2018). *Svante Cornell: US-Georgian Cooperation Should Be Based on a Broader Strategy*

<<https://civil.ge/archives/220078>> (2022, November, 15).

⁵ The Guardian (2008). *Bush Backs Ukraine and Georgia for NATO Membership*

<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/01/nato.georgia>> (2022, November, 15).

the mutual desire to strengthen the relations in the fields of economy, security, diplomacy, science, energy, and culture¹.

Notwithstanding all of the above, the decision made as a result of the US support at the Bucharest summit is considered to be one of the main causes of the 2008 war.

Contrary to the 43rd US President's rigid foreign policy, Barack Obama radically changed the existing policy and started Russian "Reset". Consequently, relations with Georgia deteriorated.

Obama met Saakashvili in 2011 only after the Governments of Georgia and Russia signed an agreement on bilateral negotiations on Russia's membership to the World Trade Organization.

Additionally, Georgia seemed to be beyond political conjuncture due to the confrontational policy of President Saakashvili with the Russian Federation. President Obama's peaceful foreign policy disapproved of all kinds of confrontation and, as a result, in 2009 during his visit to Russia, Obama stated:

"For any country to become a member of an organization like NATO; they must undertake reforms; they must be able to contribute to the Alliance's mission. And let me be clear: NATO should be seeking collaboration with Russia, not confrontation"².

It should also be emphasized, that during the meeting with President Saakashvili, President Obama referred to Georgia as "Russia":

"And one of the first things that I did was express my appreciation for the institution – building that has been taking place in Russia – in Georgia." – he immediately corrected himself³.

Despite the fact that President Obama instantly corrected his mistake, he may have implicitly stated that Georgia was regarded as a part of Russia and this mistake may serve as an indicator that the Obama Administration would not deteriorate its relations with the Russian Federation because of Georgia.

During the annexation of Crimea, when the action plan for the accession of Georgia to NATO began to be discussed in the Congress, Obama once again proved that neither Georgia nor Ukraine was on path to NATO. Consequently, Georgia would not be allowed to join the MAP.

At a press conference after the EU-US summit in Brussels, Obama stated:

"There have not been any immediate plans for expansion on NATO's membership...I know that Russia at least on background, has suggested that one of the reasons they have been concerned about Ukraine was potential NATO membership...Neither Ukraine nor Georgia is currently on a path to NATO membership"⁴.

In order to avoid the escalation of the conflict, Obama publicly refused to transfer lethal weapons to Ukraine, except for providing Humvees, body armor, night vision and medical equipment and training for the Ukrainian military⁵.

From my perspective, Obama's administration refrained from taking action against Russia due to the extensive experience gained during his presidency. Obama was convinced that the Russian Administration would not withdraw and therefore, would not endanger its national interests.

As for the Obama Administration attitude towards Georgia, with his sharply negative position towards the Euro-Atlantic Policy of the country, President Obama rescued the Georgians from the biggest crisis. According to the Russian Government, if Georgia joined the MAP, Russia would take drastic measures.

Since the summits of Wales and Warsaw, the issue of granting Georgia with a MAP has not been discussed. Yet, it was decided that Georgia would participate in various programs.

Georgia has become one of the most interoperable partners of the alliance. The successful cooperation encompasses active involvement in practical activities to maintain and strengthen Black Sea Security.

¹ U.S. Department of State (2022). *United States- Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership* <<https://www.state.gov/united-states-georgia-charter-on-strategic-partnership/#:~:text=This%20Charter%20is%20based%20on,2>> (2022, November, 15).

² The New York Times (2009). *Obama's Speech at the New Economic School* <<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/07/world/europe/07prexy.text.html>> (2022, November, 15).

³ The White House (2013). *President Obama Meets with President Mikheil Saakashvili* <<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2012/02/03/president-obama-meets-georgian-president-mikheil-saakashvili>> (2022, November, 15).

⁴ Georgian Journal (2014). *Neither Ukraine nor Georgia are currently on path to NATO membership* <<https://georgianjournal.ge/politics/26742-neither-ukraine-nor-georgia-are-currently-on-a-path-to-nato-membership--obama.html>> (2022, November, 15).

⁵ POLITICO (2015). *U.S. steps up Ukrainian combat training* <<https://www.politico.com/story/2015/11/ukraine-obama-putin-russia-216160>> (2022, November, 15).

The NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Centre was opened under the umbrella of the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package¹.

Along with the military training, the Georgia-US bilateral annual military training “Noble Partner” was launched.

This partnership improves and strengthens combat capabilities of the participating nations to defend their common objective and values².

In response, by President Putin’s order, the military forces of South Ossetia were incorporated into the Russian armed forces and a Russian hero Lieutenant General Mikhail Teplinskiy was appointed the first Deputy Chief of Staff of the South Ossetian Military District³.

On the basis of the above-mentioned, each step of Georgia on the path to European Integration will necessarily be followed by the aggressive actions of the Russian Federation.

Like Ukraine, Georgia still remains the target of one of the most serious claims of Russia. Georgian sovereignty is still under threat of violation. Thus, it is absolutely necessary for the Georgian Government to constantly monitor the tendencies of the relations between the main players (the USA and Russia) of the international order of modern global politics. Therefore, the Georgian Government should adequately correct the Georgian political order. In the process of analyzing, predicting, and calculating preventive and protective measures against future threats, a more scrupulous study and research of the dynamics and perspectives of the US – Russian relations is essential.

Georgian diplomacy should be able to ensure the future reality where Georgia will not engage in war with Russia, even in case of expected or unexpected scenarios of events. As, in case of a war, the USA will not be able to act as a guarantor of the legal order and Georgia will find itself alone in the war with Russia.

Additionally, the position of the EU towards the Russian Federation is substantial; it is uncertain to what extent the European Union would be able to overcome political instability in case of Russian-Georgian war. The EU is also unlikely to distance itself economically from the Russian Federation. And the war is bound to have disastrous consequences.

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