

THEORETICAL PROBLEMS OF CONTEMPORARY LAW AND POLITICS

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MORE REALISM, LESS HYPOCRISY: COOPERATION BY ACTION, NOT POSTURING BY WORDS

A new date, February 24, 2022, has appeared in the calendar of the history of modern international relations, finally separating the old, ineffective and unusable system of overcoming modern security challenges from the system that is emerging now and is as new as it is unexplored, including in terms of usefulness and effectiveness.

A range of theoretical schools, from statist-normativist to realist, compete to discuss the new system. While the first one considers the already well-known ideological thesis for defining the new system – "democracy vs. authoritarianism," the second one refers to a de-ideologized balance of power as its basis (taking into account the necessary minimum of geopolitical "cohabitation").

Regardless of the content or intensity of the theoretical-ideological "clash," the ongoing war in Ukraine has left no way for the Transatlantic Alliance to retreat in terms of critically rethinking its means of border revisionism in Europe. Moreover, the war was itself a strong reminder to Europe itself that any flirting with the idea of "strategic autonomy" at this stage is more of a pretentious ambition than a realistic vision, and that the United States still plays the role of guarantor (host) for "Old Europe". However, it is no less important that after the collapse of the USSR, for three decades now, the states neighboring now the Russian Federation (including Georgia), hovering in geopolitical uncertainty, have been waiting for a timely clear position from the West for ending this geopolitical "semi-pregnancy". The war in Ukraine finally exhausted the practical content of half-hearted, conventional approaches studded only with glossy declarations, and clearly demonstrated the uselessness of such approaches.

The schemes called in recent decades "rapprochement guides" or "roadmaps to integration" for geopolitically vulnerable geographies have become the narcissism of the modern era. The time has come for such cooperation in deeds, not in words, in which the division into seniors and juniors is replaced by a reconciliation of interests, and a genuine partnership is based on a correct and timely understanding of common challenges. And someone's pathetic "uniqueness" or "exclusivity" will be replaced by convergence of pragmatic interests, rational thinking and action.

The fact is that in the process of modeling the future of national security, the perceptions existing up to now have moved from the boringly standard to the format of the uselessly standardized. As a result, the world has begun to move toward new, experimental versions of security solutions, the contours of which are only vaguely outlined at this point. It should also be noted that in order to achieve the necessary efficiency and effectiveness, it is not enough to pursue this process only through the prism of "the struggle of democracy against authoritarianism". To achieve tangible results, it is equally a priority to thoroughly dismantle existing multilateral international mechanisms and replace them with new ones, or to radically reorganize them and transform them into institutions with real power – not just moral authority. Equally important is the establishment of a new economic way of thinking about security broadly, aimed at addressing inequalities or imbalances, and the need to reshape current ceremonial-protocol forms of governance into meaningful modern service providers.

Military conflict is not new to humanity. But systems-forming military conflicts that lead to a new balance of power and a system of relations (whether based on "order" or "disorder") on a global scale are of particular significance. The war that began in Ukraine on February 24 last year belongs exactly to the category of systems-forming conflicts. Accordingly, it has a direct impact on both the regional and our nation-state development. The correct perception and analysis of the results of the war related to such development requires an adequate rethinking of our own expectations, building them on the real possibilities and available resources. In this article we will talk about some necessary circumstances or facts to better reason about the issue.

Keywords: security, geopolitics, globalism, rationalism, democracy, authoritarianism, USA, European Union, Russia, Ukraine, NATO.

Choosing or not choosing one side: the possibility of the impossible?

The created disorder and uncertainty in the global balance of power begs one such very pressing question: How appropriate is it to continue to be guided by the so-called binary principle of dividing into two – black and white – in international relations? To what extent should expediency be overshadowed by considerations of, say, "morality" or "ethics"? Wouldn't any opposition to the expedient approach be a kind of narcissism, self-deception, a futile and fruitless attempt to achieve a particular result for the country? This is an issue on which a full and objective discussion is only possible through an unbiased observation of the big, global picture, through a depoliticized and deideologized analysis of processes and trends.

One visible trend in the context of current conflict is the refusal of a certain group of countries to choose sides. This kind of "multialliance," adjusting to the balance of power in the newly emerging order, gives medium-sized and small countries the opportunity to maintain relations with the global poles (and in some cases, to actively cooperate). The reason for this is essentially that they do not have to make the kind of choices that are known as standing on the side of one particular confronting side to the detriment of the interests of the other confronting side. In a given order/disorder, such "hedging" in the external vector serves to manage risks and minimize threats in the short and medium term. It is clear that the desire alone is not enough to follow the line of non-choice by geopolitical hedging: it requires proper integrity, political skills, appropriate qualities and competence of the members of the leadership team.

It is worth noting that the major players are also ambivalent about the new international political formation. For example, the latest version of the U.S. National Security Strategy speaks not only about cooperation with strategic allies and partners. It is indicative that the U.S. foreign doctrine, contrary to the long-standing dogma of "democracy-autocracy," has shifted toward a more open, relatively inclusive approach. And there is a rational explanation for this: in the struggle with Russia and especially with China

over the distribution of influence in the world, it has become difficult to secure alliances (only!) with ideological clichés. Thus, the time-driven pragmatism in the foreign arena also determined the rationality of Washington's approach. This manifests itself in ad hoc alliances or partnerships with historically, culturally and ideologically different (and sometimes sharply different) countries to solve problems. As a result, to strengthen its position in the new world, a global actor today needs to structure relations in a new way and invest in them properly. We would also add that this new foreign doctrine is clearly trying to look at the processes in a post-one-polar world through the lenses of realism. Moreover, for the sake of practical utility, the United States, as a participant in the new global system, uses very specific methods to pursue its interests, such as: A realignment from stated ideological straightforwardness to the creation of a more "nuanced" policy; Not engaging in an endless competition of "gift-giving" with other global players to win the favor of particular nations; Supporting the interests of other nations, securing them and considering them only on a reciprocal basis.

Of course, the so-called "multi-alliance" – the avoidance of taking any side, depending on the specifics of each country – is also a specifically realized choice. A good example of this is Israel, which simultaneously with its strategic alliance with the United States works closely with its main rival, China, in the economic sphere, and also has tactical cooperation with Russia on security issues in the Middle East.

It is also natural that the attitude of a global or any other major player to a medium or small country primarily serves the interests of the former. This tendency has become even more evident in recent times, with the major countries as if trying to avoid the intrusive role of "geopolitical babysitter," acting with pragmatic agreement on goals and without automatic expressions of solidarity. Examples of this unity of interest include such situational-tactical platforms as the Quad, the Abrahams Accord, and I2U2.

Despite a number of drawbacks, this approach can lead to a more self-sufficient system of relations: its participants realistically assess each other's expectations and clearly and acceptably define specific policy priorities. This approach is also perhaps the most effective response to pointless posturing and the waste of resources in international relations.

Spheres of influence: an immutable given?

In terms of the ongoing war in Ukraine, Europe is faced with a choice between the 1975 Helsinki Act and New Yalta. There is not much to choose from, although the complexity of the process was openly discussed at the Munich Security Conference in February 2022. And February 24 of the same year showed that the containment measures of the West, in particular of the United States, were not enough to prevent a reoccurrence of "Yalta" in Europe.

Along with pointing out the ineffectiveness of Western security policy with regard to the post-Soviet space, it is now openly discussed to what extent has the West's stereotypical approach caused the vulnerability of Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. The question also has arisen, to what extent have Western partners delayed in finding effective alternatives to existing approaches to security and implementing them in a timely manner. Is it possible to restructure global relations in such a way that the phenomenon of spheres of influence becomes a thing of the past?

In our view, spheres of influence have been, are and will be a concomitant phenomenon of international politics for the foreseeable future. Some of the existing spheres will remain, some will be modified, and some may be completely replaced. One of the most important determinants of the end of the war in Ukraine will be the definition of spheres of influence, this time already in the area along the borders of the Russian Federation. In academic circles, there is more talk about this today; Politicians and government officials directly involved in the process are making much more cautious predictions.

It should also be noted that a sphere of influence is a place or location within which one major actor consolidates its advantage, both through geographic proximity and through an overt demonstration of power. The establishment of such an advantage is facilitated by the fear or reluctance of the other major actor

or actors to accept the challenge and intervene. This reluctance is often motivated by the high risks or costs associated with interference.

Speaking about the fate of countries that found themselves in a peculiar geopolitical vacuum after the collapse of the USSR, we also think it necessary to point out some circumstances, which may be unpleasant to hear about, regarding the redistribution of spheres of influence. Thus, we will try to explain, at least partially, the geopolitical vacuum resulting from the lack of courageous action and certain stereotypes on the part of the West regarding the post-Soviet space. We can say that the result of the same stereotypes is the "comfort zone" in which the Western world voluntarily exists for several decades after the formal collapse of the USSR.

It is also telling that since the end of the Cold War, many statements by the United States and the collective West about the unacceptability of spheres of influence are examples of the pointless narcissism we have already discussed. Moreover, according to individual sources, what some today call Russia's "backyard" (and hence sphere of influence), along with Russian expansionist policies, was also driven by Western tolerance (and, in some episodes, direct concessions). It should also be noted that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, one of the Western narratives was to recognize the Russian Federation as the sole legal successor to the Soviet Union. This would not have been a problem were it not for the fact that this same recognition was accompanied by a so-called element of "conditional sovereignty" of neighboring countries, which, again, implied Russia's dominant role over these countries.

It is a fact that, given the realities of the current stage, only statements or half-measures – to maintain in one form or another the comfort zone mentioned – will not fit the time and the current processes. Thus, a result-oriented, practical policy that fits current requirements and reality is inevitable. Any other approach would be like repeating well-known "what if" reasons from the past.

One more thing: the structuring of the modern security system does not a priori require a special formal declaration by one major actor of its influence in one or another sphere and a formal renunciation of influence by another actor. For example, one political consequence of the war in Ukraine may be that the country remains outside the U.S. declared sphere of influence, which does not preclude the continuity of assistance in military and security capacity building. This approach of delegating primary responsibility for one's own defense will serve as an equally effective counterweight to weakening or even nullifying the sphere of influence of an unfriendly country. As a variety of so-called experimental systems of security, this option is also worth evaluating in order to raise the bar for our country's national security.

And since we are talking about defining or revising spheres of influence, including in terms of a possible renewal of geopolitical boundaries in Eastern Europe, it is equally relevant to ask what might lead to the decision to change/revise the status quo. Especially when we agree that the best way to achieve real results in today's environment is not through useless ideological clichés, but by finding a pragmatic intersection of interests. In this regard, one of the key factors will be the correct identification of existing or potential threats, as well as the possession of auxiliary means of their management (balancing). We would like to say a few words on this as well.

Balancing the threat

Undoubtedly, alliances as well as other kinds of ally and partnership relationships are in many ways a response to existing and future threats. It is also clear that the threat to a small country can come mainly from an aggressive neighbor. Therefore, the desire of a small country to find a support, a partner, a reliable guarantor of its national security is understandable. It should also be noted that balancing (and in some cases roughly eradicating) a threat – real or imagined – is not only the concern of a small country. This task applies equally to a large country – especially when an event or process may be seen by it as contrary to its own security interests. A frequently cited example to illustrate this is the well-known wave of NATO expansion in Eastern Europe, which the Russian Federation saw as an alleged violation of an agreement reached

with the West (even today mutually exclusive assessments around such an "agreement" do not cease) and as an act of encroachment on the Russian sphere of influence (it should be noted that although a minority, some Western scholars consider this assessment not unreasonable).

In the context of the war in Ukraine, the decision by Sweden and Finland to change the status quo and apply for membership in the North Atlantic Alliance, which amounts to a reassessment of the emerging threats and an attempt to balance them, is also telling. Linked to the same geopolitical and military opinion is Israel's line of regional policy in the Middle East, based on the Abrahamic Accord, as well as several situational-tactical alliances in the Indian and Pacific Ocean basins (AUKUS, Quad). These and other examples of threat assessment and management measures in specific geographic regions serve to unify the following objectives: balancing threats based on the nature of spheres of influence, managing the security environment, and preventing further military escalation.

The collective Western involvement in the Russia-Ukraine war, in the form and scale that we see today, is widely believed to fall into the same category. In particular, according to a certain Western political-academic line, Western support for Kyiv serves to counterbalance future threats that might emerge as a result of an undesirable war scenario in Ukraine or the spillover of hostilities outside of Ukraine (and hence the expansion of Russia's sphere of influence). The cost of mitigating and containing additional threats, both direct and indirect, arising in the event of such a development would be much higher. Thus, existing threats vs. future threats and current costs vs. future costs already require rational optimization and management by introducing appropriate forms.

We think that official Tbilisi should take all of this into consideration in order to communicate with its partners on national security issues in a meaningful and timely manner.

A return to political economy?

To win the geopolitical favor of "third countries," some global players have established a new approach to rewarding them with preferential economic gestures or by other similar means. It should be noted that "third countries" are no less successful and flexible in taking advantage of this. Thus, to the newly exalted "realism" is now added a geopolitical handwriting, dictated by an undisguised material interest. Practically, the international system has moved from latent transactionalism to an open phase of mutual exchange. This trend seems to have become irreversible and may become a kind of norm in the medium term, if it is not already. It also poses the following question to be discussed next in this article.

In this sense, the attempt to establish the so-called Global South as a quasi-autonomous pole in the emerging system (lack of system) of global relations is indicative. We have already discussed this issue in previous articles, but now we will highlight one characteristic feature of this quasi-autonomy – a concrete and understandable economic benefit as a measure of expediency of foreign policy actions.

Reflecting this new trend is the fact that though 141 of the 193 countries in the UN format have condemned Russian aggression in Ukraine, but only 33 of them have joined the sanctions against Moscow. To illustrate this even better: roughly the same number of countries supply Ukraine with lethal weapons, while the rest of the world, home to two-thirds of the world's population, refrains from military assistance in one form or another. Stating these numbers is not an attempt to measure the reality with an arithmetic parameter. By no means. These numbers are merely a call to face reality from the perspective of us as a small country.

In the existing situation, even those countries whose responsibilities in the global order are much higher than those of small countries and even of regional leaders do not avoid advantageous moves. They do not consider it unworthy of themselves even when the domestic political system itself or the foreign alliance should not give them any kind of moral right to do so. A good illustration of this is modern India, which has openly justified its geopolitical line with mercantile economic benefits (India's "Balancing Act") which has manifested itself in at least a threefold increase in the purchase of significantly discounted Russian oil.

All of the above shows that current processes cannot be limited to a "struggle between democracy and autocracy," as it leads only to the narrowness of such explanatory analysis, shortsighted foresight, and consequent errors in policymaking. It is a fact that the modern stage offers us a policy of so-called "non-waste interests," and this reality should be accepted sensibly and calmly. The Georgian approach needs the appropriate capacity to adapt to achieve the task at hand – greater national security, greater economic prosperity.

The refusal to contrast black and white in politics...

The ideological contrasts that have characterized Western politics for many decades have, if not disappeared, then undergone a serious reassessment. Judging by the signs that have shown up today, one can assume that the approach of moving from "extreme to extreme" has been stress-tested, facilitated by several unsuccessful military campaigns and the claws of the post-Covid economy. And balancing the right choice between an active role in the external arena and domestic needs became the inevitable dilemma.

The search for the right golden mean is hotly debated in Western sources; there are many opinions or recommendations; there are criticisms, sometimes accompanied by radical appeals. But the task of maintaining domestic economic and social stability and development so that it does not lack the necessary resources for its weighty positioning in the system of external relations remains the axis of the problem. In light of the problems accumulated at this stage, this equation (or balance) is not easy to solve. As an example, we again cite the U.S. national security strategy, which, inter alia, does not exclude situational or tactical cooperation with other countries, or even President Macron's statement on the advisability of a "balanced partnership" of France in Africa.

In short, the declared revision of the political line leads to the necessary understanding by the West that (1) other countries may have their own interests and (2) they may not always coincide with the interests of the West. We have already mentioned this rule of exceptions on the example of several individual countries, which does not mean that these countries are revisionists or that they have begun to sabotage the West: due to their geographical and geopolitical or historical and cultural specificity, they simply retain their own, necessary handwriting in creating practical policies.

Thus, for sincere communication and real work without hypocrisy in inter-state relations (including partner relations), it is necessary at least: (1) to understand clearly what our interests and the interests of the other side are, (2) to be able to identify common priorities in light of the intersection of these interests, and (3) to be able to say frankly what can be achieved together and what cannot.

Public optimism and behind-the-scenes pessimism?

The resumption of Russian aggression in Ukraine on February 24 last year is a test of the strength of the connection between the publicly demonstrated huge practical efforts to defeat the aggressor, on the one hand, and the subjects of these efforts, on the other hand. Today, this strength is assessed in different ways, and it is not only about the position of countries that have not joined Western sanctions or are in a "balancing" mode.

Here, indeed, the most important task is for the indestructible unity to rise before the flouting of international law in the Russian neighborhood and, with a unified standard, unwavering will and result-oriented actions, facilitate the full (rather than half) payment of one big "debt" – the removal of countries caught in a geopolitical and security vacuum, from that vacuum.

And as for the aggressor, its main intention is to find and methodically deepen the cracks in the unity directed at it; for it is testing the strength of generations accustomed to comfort after the Cold War, who consider peace and stability in Europe an eternal given; by devaluing human life, it is trying to embarrass the European "burgher," nurtured by "consumerism," and to disarm his will; Having failed to achieve quick success on the battlefield, it switches to another tactic – the protracted, gradual escalation of military conflict, and in this way, again by devaluing human life, tries to make the necessary changes in the rival's

psychological mindset. At the same time, under the autocracy of its own internal political system, the small influence of public opinion (if it exists at all) does not create any obstacles for the aggressor to pursue an expansionist policy. Time, according to its own calculation, is working for it and it will try to prolong the conflict as long as possible precisely for the purpose of a gradual and final disintegration of the said unity.

Solving the above problem is not easy, of course. First of all, one must believe that one can and will do it, and that solving the problem in half, or postponing it, or stretching it out over a long period of time will make the task much more difficult. Accordingly, the realization of publicly proclaimed goals requires a political attitude grown on realism. Certain fluctuations in the mobilization of necessary attitudes occur periodically. Several such examples can be found in the lines of the Euro-Atlantic Union, where attitudes toward threats are sometimes explained by differences in their perception and evaluation. This, in turn, is determined by geographical remoteness from the source of the threat, as well as historical ties with it and the intensity of trade and economic contacts (influenced by political economy?). Moreover, even in the mentioned context, recently we have been hearing about such "special cases" that require a separate special consideration. For example, in the ranks of Republicans in the United States there are such attitudes towards the war in Ukraine (whether at the level of the House of Representatives or in the context of the presidential election of 2024) that often does not coincide with the course proclaimed by the occupants of the White House – Democrats. Just recall the statement of one of the possible candidates of the Republican Party, Ron DeSantis, who reduced the Russian-Ukrainian war to the category of a "territorial dispute".

The near future will show whether the system can adapt in time, finally get rid of hypocrisy and properly readjust to the management of existing threats. After all, this, in addition to the future of international security, is related to the national security of our country, its adequate setting up and appropriate adaptation to current processes.

‘Notes for Georgia’

The resumption of Russian aggression in Ukraine definitively put an end not only to the post-1945 system of global security, but also to its variety, the post-Cold War structure. The international order has turned into a "disorderly order" at worst, and a hybrid order at best. One symptom of this hybridity is the attempt to create security blocs along regional lines (so-called "regional networking"). Probably a peculiar echo of the same trend is the increasing number of countries pursuing a policy of "balancing" – avoiding a clear stand on one side with regard to military conflict at the expense of greater coordination at the regional level. The same trend explains the willingness of a major global actor such as the United States to work not only with traditional allies, but also with amorphous "middle powers" to achieve short- and medium-term goals.

In the current situation, official Tbilisi's agenda for this stage should consider: (1) The final rejection of the stereotype of seeing the world through an idealistic prism, (2) Searching for unconventional ways of solving Georgia's "more security" issue in the emerging global "alternative order" together with the civilized world, (3) Identifying experimental models in coordination with allies and partners and considering practical aspects on an accelerated basis.

At the same time – to put an end to idealism – the Georgian side should bear in mind that any hegemon will always be true to its nature; that a "big country" cannot be "ordinary" a priori, since this is the opposite of its global hegemonic influence and essence. Therefore, the right combination of healthy interests, coexistence with the dominant powers without hypocrisy and useless posturing, being in acceptable "influences" is one of the prerequisites of our development.

Speaking of hegemony, let us note one caveat to better understand the essence of hegemony: while "hegemony" refers to the reputational influence caused by soft power on its part and the understandable attraction to it, "imperialism" refers to the imposition of one's own influence on others by force.

This is a fundamental difference that the Georgian side should keep in mind, which it should take into account, sensibly and rationally.

Regarding the region, we believe that Georgia's foreign policy should leave all possible and result-oriented doors open. In the South Caucasus, the main focus should be on achieving "stability through trade". We believe that such flexibility and pragmatism will make it easier for our country's allies and partners to better penetrate, engage and consolidate in the region: a region where the concept of "spheres of influence" is still relevant and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

In short, the time has come for Georgian ultra-realistic, unsentimental policy. Under such a policy, an action free of ideological clichés should be measured only by economically understandable benefits and by relations acceptable in terms of security.