

SUPERIORITY OF POWER AND THE RESULTS OF THE 2008 RUSSIA-GEORGIA AUGUST WAR

Indira Papunidze

PhD in Political Science

Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University

Annotation

World history shows that power is still an important phenomenon for states. Firstly, simply because in an anarchic environment, where there is no central government, power is an integral part of political relations, and secondly, the power can help the state to achieve not only military but also other types of goals due to its universal nature. States often resort to violence, despite its high cost. In this paper, we analyze the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict according to Robert Art's theory about the use of force. We will also consider the most influential concept of the theory of international relations - realism, which has not lost its relevance to this day. The qualitative research method is used in the research, namely case study, which means the analysis of real facts based on the works of different scientists or researchers. The issue is unequivocally relevant and important since we observe that the states are still trying to achieve their goals using force. Russia continues to encroach on the territorial integrity of sovereign states, currently, it is waging an active war against Ukraine, which it attacked on February 24, 2022, and is still trying to conquer.

Keywords: Self-defense, intimidation, coercion, boasting, realism, "creeping occupation", military doctrine, separatism, ethnic cleansing.

As Robert Art points out, several universal resources of power exist there, among which is economic wealth, which is a compulsory component for military power, since a rich state can generate more military power than a poor one (we can say that wealth generates power). Political skills are also an important universal resource since a well-trained politician can make adequate political decisions deriving from the interests of the country, possess the art of persuasion, and enjoy a high level of authority in political circles. Military power is also an important universal resource. It is a fact that states that have a large military power, have more influence in world politics. Confrontations of military forces do not produce only military results, in many cases they also produce political results, which have a significant impact on current events in other areas.¹ The results depend on the scale of military confrontations.

¹ Art R., Jarvis R., "International Politics, Permanent Concepts and Contemporary Issues", Ilia State University Publishing House, Tbilisi 2011, p. 211.

It is of interest to observe the four functions of power identified by Art, namely: defense, deterrence, compellence, and swaggering.² Will any particular military strategy work to perform all four functions well? Only great powers have sufficient resources to create such military power that can perform more than two functions at the same time. Even in this case, it is possible to perform the mentioned functions only in relation to small states.

The use of force with the purpose of defense involves the use of military means to achieve two goals - to prevent an attack and to minimize the damage received in the event of such an attack. A state concerned with self-defense directs its forces against an actual or potential aggressor but does not use them against the aggressor's unarmed population. However, when the state considers that the enemy's attack is expected and goes on the offensive, it carries out a pre-emptive strike, and if it considers that the enemy's attack is imminent, but only in the future, it still starts to attack, it resorts to a preventive strike. Accordingly, states are guided by the principle - "attack is the best defense".

The use of force by states for the purpose of deterrence implies the use of military force to ensure that the adversary does not resort to any undesirable action. The essence of deterrence is the threat to use force to punish the opponent, and if the threat has to be carried out, it means that the deterrence has failed.

The use of force with the purpose of compellence involves the use of military power to force an adversary to stop an action or to do something it has not done. As for swaggering, it is the most selfish use of force, because its purpose is to strengthen the national pride of the people. States resort to swaggering in order to present themselves as stronger and more influential. States and statesmen want to gain respect and prestige through swaggering.³

In the Russia-Georgia war of August 2008, according to both sides, the force was used with the motives of defense, in the case of the Russian Federation - defense of its citizens, and the Georgian side claims that it used force with the purpose of defense to prevent the intervention of a foreign country in its territory.

The situation before August 2008 shows that the Russian Federation used its forces in Georgia for the purpose of deterrence, which was implemented by the construction of military bases on the territory of Georgia, the introduction and deployment of military units, as well as military exercises in the separatist regions. The above-mentioned action was also a swagger, which was manifested in the demonstration of military capabilities.

When talking about the mentioned war, it is necessary to briefly touch on the most influential concept of the theory of international relations - realism, according to which the system is inherently conflictual, since it is impossible to achieve harmony in the relations between sovereign states and their interests. In such conditions, the issue of power and force comes to

² Ibid, p. 169.

³ Art R., Jervis R., "International Politics, Permanent Concepts and Contemporary Issues", Ilia State University Publishing House, Tbilisi 2011, p. 174.

the foreground, which consists of several components: geographical features, natural resources, industrial potential, population, government, economy, and military potential.⁴ Considering the named components, we can put Georgia in the category of weak states.

The results of the war were devastating for the political and economic life of Georgia. About 300 citizens of Georgia were killed and many people became displaced. The number of direct foreign investments was halved, due to the creation of an image of an unstable country for Georgia. Today, more than 20% of the territory of Georgia is occupied by the Russian Federation, and the annexation continues in the form of "creeping occupation".

After the war, the NATO-Georgia Commission was created, and in December, the foreign ministers of the NATO countries supported the development of the annual national program within the framework of the NATO-Georgia Commission, which was an unprecedented case, because the latter used to be carried out only for the countries included in the Membership Action Plan (MAP). In 2014, at the Wales summit, Georgia accepted the essential NATO-Georgia package, the purpose of which was to develop the defense capabilities of the country and increase compatibility with NATO.⁵

Since October 2008, the format of Geneva International Negotiations has been established between Georgia and Russia, where, in addition to the mentioned parties, the USA, OSCE, European Union, UN, and representatives of the occupied territories participate.

From the point of view of security, Georgia faced a new challenge after the war. The goal of Russia was to destroy the statehood of Georgia and to maintain it forever in its geopolitical area. Since it was not able to fully implement the set goal, there is a chance of repeating the aggression from its side at any time. Based on the current circumstances, Georgia had to reform the security system and bring it into line with new threats. In this regard, the National Security Concept of Georgia adopted in 2011 is important, which reflects the vision of the safe development of the country, national interests, and the main challenges facing the country and establishes the main directions of the security policy.⁶ After the restoration of state independence, the National Security Concept of Georgia was adapted for the second time, which was caused by the events that happened in August 2008.

During the August 2008 war, the so-called ethnic cleansing of Georgians took place by the so-called South Ossetian military forces and illegal formations, which has been confirmed in numerous reports, both at international and local levels. On August 27, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, B. Kouchner, being in Tskhinvali region, said in an interview with Euronews: "Here is a map of South Ossetia and this is a city that is called Akhalkgori. I am told that last night the Russian military forces moved into its territory and drove the Georgians away from

⁴ Rondeli A., "International relations", third updated edition, "Nekeri", Tbilisi, 2006, p. 79-84.

⁵ "Georgia and NATO", Important Dates, Georgia and NATO, Information Center, <http://old.infocenter.gov.ge/nato-important-dates/#1>, last checked on 08/06/2023.

⁶ "National Security Concept of Georgia", p. 3.

there across the border. This is ethnic cleansing to create a homogenous South Ossetia. This is unacceptable, everything cannot be forgiven." ⁷ The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe draws attention to ethnic cleansing and Russian military aggression with resolutions N1633 and N1647.

On August 26, 2008, the Kremlin recognized the "Independence" of Abkhazia and the so-called South Ossetia, thereby ignoring the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. Later, Russia signed agreements with Kokoiti and Bagapsh (the leaders of the separatist regimes) as "presidents of independent states". ⁸ The international community strongly criticized Moscow for this, although the latter still drew parallels with Kosovo and accused the West of double standards. As for the case of Kosovo, it differs from Abkhazia and from the so-called South Ossetia, in the sense that the Albanians were ethnically cleansed there during the Milosevic regime (by the Serbs), while the Georgians were ethnically cleansed in Abkhazia and "South Ossetia" (with the help of outer powers).

The war of 2008 separated Georgia from the West. As the famous American analyst and diplomat writes: "Moscow repeatedly warned Georgia that its drive towards the West would have dire consequences, and the resolution of problems of separatism in Abkhazia or South Ossetia would depend on how much Georgia would consider demands of Russia. Georgia, for its part, stubbornly resisted such pressure from Russia, but for now, Moscow seems to have moved from words to deeds: Russia responded to the recognition of Kosovo by the West and NATO's promise for Georgia on membership by strengthening ties with the separatist regions, which was already very similar to the so-called Creeping annexation strategy: Russia was illegally deploying the army, importing weapons and creating the kind of infrastructure that would involuntarily make you think that it is preparing for a military attack! Was the empire going to strike back now?" ⁹

Russia did not want Georgia to be an alternative supplier of energy resources to Europe. It could not adapt to the fact that bypassing Russia, alternative routes for the transportation of energy resources from the Caspian Sea were developed. In this regard, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Shah-Deniz gas pipeline are noteworthy. According to the Russian political elite, the development of alternative routes for the transportation of energy resources would be the main prerequisite for reducing the influence on the post-Soviet countries and the European Union. ¹⁰ After the war, the implementation of international projects in Georgia was significantly delayed, since for the supply of energy resources, first of all, it is necessary to

⁷ "Kouchner claims ethnic cleansing in Georgia", 27/08/2008, <https://www.euronews.com/2008/08/27/kouchner-claims-ethnic-cleansing-in-georgia>, last checked on 08.08.2023.

⁸ Malashkhia Sh., "Anatomy of conflicts", Parliament of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2011, p. 40.

⁹ Asmus D. R., "A small war that shook the world", Ilia State University Publishing House, Copyright © Ronald D. Asmus, Tbilisi, 2010, p. 2.

¹⁰ Chitadze N., "Politology", Black Sea International University L.L.C., Tbilisi, 2016, p. 396.

create a stable environment in order to reach the addressee safely. Russia will not allow Georgia to become an alternative way of supplying energy resources to Europe, and moreover, to bypass Russia during this process. That is why it supports the activation of potential threats facing the countries of the South Caucasus.¹¹

Since 2009, Moscow has been using one of the newest methods of battle, it is the so-called "Borderization" of Georgian territories, which serves the strategy of Russia - to violate the sovereignty of the country and prevent the implementation of independent domestic or foreign policy. Bordering is different from occupation. It implies the expansion of the occupied territories under Russian occupation.¹² Even after the war, creeping occupation and annexation of the territory of Georgia still continues.

It is interesting to observe the content of Russian military doctrines after the war. In the military doctrine of 2010, we read that Russia is threatened by the "aspiration to equip the military potential of the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) with global functions, the realization of which is carried out by violating the norms of international law, which is manifested in the attempt to expand the bloc and the military potential of NATO member states approaching the borders of Russia".¹³ This means that Moscow will oppose the accession of Georgia to NATO in every possible way.

Conclusion

Based on all of the above, we can conclude that power does not mean only high-level military capabilities, it is universal in nature and includes various aspects, the unity of which determines the strength of the state. If after the Second World War, the states that possessed nuclear weapons were considered strong, in the modern world the strength of the country is not determined only by the latter. Because political, economic, social, and cultural issues were brought forward considering which even a small state may become a strong state. The war of 2008 took Georgia further from the West. Russia took care to create the image of Georgia as an unstable country and make it less attractive to NATO and the European Union.

Despite the attack carried out by Russia on Georgia, the country has not changed its orientation of foreign policy, it is still pro-Western, declared foreign policy goal of Georgia is still to join NATO and the European Union. The important achievement of Georgia as a small state was that it brought up Russia as an aggressor state in the international arena, and restored the status of the occupier to the Russian army.

¹¹ Pataraiia T., "Asymmetry of energy transit and security in the South Caucasus: the road between Russia and the European Union"; Heinrich Böll Stiftung South Caucasus, Tbilisi, p.3.

¹² Kakachia K., Kakhishvili L., Larsen J., Grigalashvili M., "Borderization in Georgia: Strategy of Containment of Russian Policy", Georgian Institute of Politics, Tbilisi, 2017, p.4.

¹³ „Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation", President of Russia, February 5, 2010, http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/461, Last checked on 10.08.2023.

References

1. Art R., Jarvis R., "International Politics, Permanent Concepts and Contemporary Issues", Iliia State University Publishing House, Tbilisi 2011.
2. Rondeli A., "International relations", third updated edition, "Nekeri", Tbilisi, 2006,
- 3."Georgia and NATO", Important Dates, Georgia and NATO, Information Center, <http://old.infocenter.gov.ge/nato-important-dates/#1>, last checked on 06/08/2023.
- 4."Georgia and NATO", Important Dates, Georgia and NATO, Information Center, <http://old.infocenter.gov.ge/nato-important-dates/#1>, last checked on 06/08/2023.
5. "National Security Concept of Georgia".
- 6.,Kouchner claims ethnic cleansing in Georgia“, 27/08/2008, <https://www.euronews.com/2008/08/27/kouchner-claims-ethnic-cleansing-in-georgia,> last checked on 08.08.2023.
7. Malashkhia Sh., "Anatomy of conflicts", Parliament of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2011.
8. Asmus D. R., "A small war that shook the world", Iliia State University Publishing House, Copyright © Ronald D. Asmus, Tbilisi, 2010.
9. Chitadze N., "Politology", Black Sea International University L.L.C., Tbilisi, 2016.
10. Pataraiia T., "Asymmetry of energy transit and security in the South Caucasus: the road between Russia and the European Union"; Heinrich Böll Stiftung South Caucasus, Tbilisi.
11. Kakachia K., Kakhishvili L., Larsen J., Grigalashvili M., "Borderization in Georgia: Strategy of Containment of Russian Policy", Georgian Institute of Politics, Tbilisi, 2017.
- 12.Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation", President of Russia, February 5, 2010, http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/461 , Last checked on 10.08.2023.