Foreign and Security Policy of the Newly Independent States: Balancing between Two Power Centers

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Abstract

The article is focusing on the interplay between foreign policy agenda of the post-Soviet states at the one hand and internal policy developments in these countries at the other hand. One of the main explanations why the post-Soviet elites in non-Russian republics are pursuing the so-called *multi-vectorialism* in the foreign policy is that it serves as a strategy to maximize the most from having good relations both with East and West, and thus trying to perpetuate the monopoly of the power. Uzbekistan is a country in case, as Ukraine (and Moldova) is (or was) indeed also. At the same time, the special relations between the elites of post-Soviet countries and Moscow are very important in shaping the foreign policy agenda of these countries as a result of the Soviet legacy, i.e. the ties of the former Communist nomenklatura with Moscow are still playing a very important role in the most of the former Soviet republics. Another relevant variable in explaining the current state of affairs in the foreign and security issues of the post-Soviet states and the still dominant role of Russia is the fact that the West (NATO and EU especially) are not very successful in trying to limit Moscow's ambitions in the "near abroad". This is making the leaders of most NIS to be obedient to Russia's pretensions in lack of real support from the West in order to counteract these neo-imperial claims from the part of the former metropolis.

Since their appearance, new-born countries of the former USSR have faced a problem of new foreign and security policy formation. One should say that this process has not been finished yet as soon as circumstances of both internal post-communist development and unstable and shaky international environment that hamper security identification still exist. During the last two decades, the countries are trying to find proper security institutions and mechanisms capable to protect their national interests and it is necessary to observe some results on this issue.

The article has three tasks: the first one is the analysis of domestic developments in Newly Independent States (NIS) that affect their foreign and security policy; the second is an assessment of the countries' choice between security integration to West or Russia in the context of security situation in Europe and Eurasia, and finally, formulation of certain suggestions how to avoid or minimize clashes between West and Russia on post-soviet space.

The first circumstance in domestic sphere that affects foreign and security policy is immaturity of post-soviet societies which makes them incapable to create models completely adaptable to threats and challenges of the new century. The countries are still in the process of transition from various semi-totalitarian models of communist rule to different types of authoritarian states. During twenty years, post-soviet space is moving through the process of statehood consolidation based on balance of business and partially political interests of ruling elites. Search for this balance has complicated formulating of real national interests what are often being confused with selfishness of financial-industrial groups and autocrats. For example, in Ukraine, national interests have become a hostage of short-sighted needs of oligarch's clans. Likewise, interests of *siloviki* and affiliated businessmen not completely coincide with Russian state. As a result, national interests are either not formed or distorted by intrusion of business groups.

Type of domestic and foreign policy mainly stems from historically predetermined social structures of ruling class. On the one hand, in European NIS there is a small group of so-called oligarchs formed by former party *apparatchiks*, directors of state enterprises and partially criminals. On the other hand, a type of autocratic "new monarchies" is being formed in Central Asian region. In the first case, oligarchic business is interested in protection of its profits as long as possible. Included into global and European business community, oligarchs stand for "democratic" (or more manipulative than forceful) instruments of power control. In other words, they support use of *soft power* in domestic sphere. At the same time, autocratic leaders are preoccupied with "possession" of a country and even literally survival as soon as their legitimacy is rather unstable. Handover of power from autocrats to their followers is often complicated by power claims of the other parts of elites that surround leader. Therefore, autocratic ruling is weak and for power stabilization it often needs both reprisals within the country and external support of "friendly regimes" from outside, not to mention certain legitimization from leading world players and influential international institutions.

As a result, both business groups and autocrats prefer *multi-vectoral policy* based on "putting eggs into different baskets" that combine selective and situational East-West integration. The most clear example of this so-called multivectoralism is policy of Uzbekistan's president Islam Karimov whose country have been in almost all possible institutions on the post-soviet space that included such different even opposing institutions as the Tashkent Treaty and GUUAM.

As a case study, one should consider Ukraine where dynamics of business

empire's formation in the 1990s directly affected transformation of national interests. First capitals Ukrainian oligarchs made on gas and oil transportation and re-export, therefore the vector of foreign policy was pointed to Russia. But since 2000 Ukrainian business in Russia has faced growing limitations due to Russia's political regime transformation and changes in foreign and security mechanisms and instruments in so-called "near abroad". Support of Moscow's integration efforts has become a key factor for the obtaining business preferences for post-soviet states. Also appetites of Putin's *siloviki* strengthened by gas and oil profits went far beyond national borders and they launched economic expansion in the newly independent states. At the same time growing penetration of the Ukrainian business to Eastern Europe promoted reorientation to West. This business balance predetermined real multivectoralism in foreign policy but it did not help to form strict national interests of Ukraine with clear orientation on certain security unions and institutions.

The second circumstance is connected with the trends of civilization reorientation of post-soviet societies or "civilization return" that, one the one hand, destroy elements of imposed soviet-type society models and, on the other hand, they preserve pre-soviet traditional culture linked to certain civilization as a reaction on Westernization and start restoration of some features of pre-soviet social models although in modernized forms. Actually, one should see the consequences of civilization differences in type of elite formation. Despite, common "illness of authoritarianism", reorientation nevertheless is getting bigger effect on the developments of Newly Independent States. For example, leaders in Central Asia cannot ignore objective character of "Islamization" of their population. Also one should observe gradual and generally slow "Europeanization" in western NIS with the rise of human contacts between people of neighbouring countries.

As a result of both above-mentioned circumstances, the difference between national or state security and safety of post-soviet leaders seems rather insufficient. Therefore, they are doomed for manoeuvring between various power canters in their regions as well as in the world.

At the same time, NIS foreign and security policy has been predominantly shaped by processes in Europe and Eurasia where new integration models had appeared. Let's look at them. Firstly, global cold war bipolarity, passing through some period of uncertainty has been transformed into sub-regional bipolarity. Basically security architecture in Europe and Eurasia consists of two parts or system contains of two sub-systems: Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian ones[1]. The

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[1] Сергій Федуняк, *Європейські виміри безпеки на пострадянському просторі. Формування інтегрованої системи Заходу і Нових незалежних держав,* Чернівці: Рута, 2005, 336 с.

former includes NATO-EU members and the latter consist of Russia and a couple of post-soviet states.

The essence of security developments is as follows: *both sub-systems are trying to merge without losing their relative independence*. On the one hand, the necessity of security threats and challenges push them to each other, but on the other hand, some fundamental and not only fundamental contradictions do not allow doing it. Therefore, former adversaries are trying to build new security architecture based on redistribution of power between major countries. There are at least two models of cooperation based on West's and Russia's perception of security processes. USA and its allies stand for interactions within existing mechanisms of NATO-Russia and partnerships with possible improvements[2]. These mechanisms are considered as rather reliable and adequate to the current not very high level of bilateral West-Russia relations. On the contrary, Russia proposes new format based on security treaty between OTCS and NATO[3]. The common problem that negatively affects rapprochement is that both sides do not trust each other and they do not want to give their potential partners possibility to interfere into their institutional basis and have veto over the decision-making.

From the very beginning, post-soviet states have to choose the direction of their political and security integration that was reflected in formula: Europe or Russia. Both paths have their benefits and shortcomings. Let's analyse both Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian directions.

Speaking about Euro-Atlantic space, one should mention that during post-cold war period security community has been created as a highest level of foreign policy and security integration that gives the best possible safety for its members, therefore it is rather attractive for post-soviet states. But at the same time, this community puts civilizational barriers on the way of post-soviet states partially due to their prejudices and internal unwillingness for western integration of post-soviet space. In politician's minds there is a kind of "red line" that separates former Warsaw Treaty members that were occasionally a part of Soviet influence sphere and have a chance to become a real West, and new-born post USSR nations incapable for nation and state-building[4]. Another reason for Western politicians for non-violating this above-mentioned line is growing dependence

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[2] See: Strategic Concept For the Defence and Security of The Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, p. 9-10. http://www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf

[3] See: Проект Договора о европейской безопасности. 29 ноября 2009 года http://kremlin.ru/news/6152

[4] Some authors even do not separate Western NIS from Russia and consider NIS as accidental phenomenon. See Daniel Hamilton and Gerhard Mangott (eds). *The New Eastern Europe. Ukraine, Belarus& Moldova.* Washington DC: Center for Transatlantic Studies, 2007, p. 261.

from Russian energy supplies covered by traditional geopolitics and *real politik* rhetoric[5].

Also the process of European integration is accompanied by complicated adaptation and clashes within the EU for power and control over major institutions of the Union. The degree of dissent on important issues within the Union in hole and in its "core" is rather high. In addition, there are also serious and growing differences in security perceptions between Europe and the United States. Unlike the US, Europe is less prone to see security threats stemming from certain countries and it often considers American attempts to involve its European allies into military operations as pulling chestnuts out of fire for Washington. The nature of Europe's belief in soft power is rooted in complicated continental history[6]. Finally, latest developments shows relative fall of EU and NATO "hard" and "soft power" potential because of budget defence cuts as well as the rise of ideological and ethno-cultural contradictions within traditional Western society. As a result, attractiveness of Europe and West in whole for NIS has diminished due to economic crisis supplemented with financial debts and threat of bankruptcy that affected EU integration processes. This combination of apparent disadvantages of Western integration for NIS helps Russia to use the situation for rising of its pressure in order to form new Union by trying to persuade NIS leaders that their countries are not welcomed in Europe[7]. All these circumstances make westward Newly Independent State's integration rather problematic but not completely impossible.

Now let's look at Eurasian space which culturally and civilizationally is more attractive and easier for former Soviet states. But in historic perspective their seemingly easy return into familiar environment will deprive them from full-scale integration into global political and security space. As a result, new-born states will be doomed for backwardness at the backyard of dying empire. As a power centre, Russia has faced growing challenges and threats due to its multi-

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5   See for example, German expert Alexander Rahr's arguments in: Александр Рар. "Геополитический инфантилизм: Европейская неуверенность в отношении России усиливается", Internationale Politik, июль-август 2006, с. 11-17; Александр Рар, *Холодная война – это история.* In: Internationale Politik, март-апрель, 2007, с. 9-12; Александр Рар, *Геополитический инфантилизм: Европейская неуверенность в отношении России усиливается.* In: Internationale Politik, июль-август 2006, с. 11-17.

6   See, for example, NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Relations. 154 PCTR 03 E – Transatlantic Security Perceptions and Europe's Contribution to the Alliance. Report. November 2003 http://www.nato-pa.int/default.asp?SHORTCUT=355.

7   The most popular slogan in official speeches and publications of pro-government experts is "Na Zapade vas nikto ne zhdet" ("In West nobody welcoms you"). or "Na Zapade vy nikomu nie nuzhny" ("No one needs you in West").

dimensional unstoppable decline as well as changing security environment in power shifts in Eurasia mainly caused by the rise of China. Russia is loosing the remnants of its human capital and economic potential especially in hit-tech branches like space industry, weapon manufacturing etc. Its eastern regions are becoming less populated therefore there is a danger of territorial integrity at the context of China's transformation into world nation № 2 with subsequent global and regional expansionist claims. In addition, Russia's attempts to build a competitive integration sub-regional center through promotion of the Custom's Union with its further transformation into the Eurasian Economic Union are not efficient yet due to old imperialist habit of Russian elite to percept its partners as "younger brothers". President of Kazakhstan N. Nazarbayev admits problems of access for Kazakh export in Russia[8]. It would take at least three-five years to see how this Union is working. Here success is mostly dependent on the creation of subsequent political infrastructure in member-countries for stable economic growth like rule of law, competitive political institutions etc. It is evident that authoritarian regime does not promote all theses necessary changes.

In these circumstances, Russia's real major interest in re-integration of post-soviet space is based on necessity "to pour new blood" into frailing body through exploitation of material and human resources of neighbouring countries with the aim to prolong life of Russia's ineffective social and political model. Therefore, Russian-tailored integration for Newly Independent States and pro-Russian orientation of their foreign and security policy is really the worst option. Not only do not these countries obtain real protection, but they also will be unwillingly involved into potential big power rivalry. Despite the level of mutual sympathies as well as political and economic dependency from Russia, ruling elites of the post-soviet states will be always looking at Moscow with vigilance and suspicion. As a result, they will try to dilute Russian presence with countries outside of the former USSR in current and future integration unions[9].

Overall, situation in security sphere at the moment is as follows: Firstly, the security split in Greater Eurasia is an indisputable fact. Institutionally there are two major security sub-systems: Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian ones with growing influence some outside participants. Secondly, there is a possibility for the international system to return to redistribution of "spheres of influence" even in new post-modern wrap. Russia actively invites its Western partners for this option, and it seems that they are more and more prone to discuss Moscow's

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[8] Назарбаев предложил распустить ЕврАзЕс и расширить Таможенный Союз за счет Турции. Газета.ру. 24 октября 2013 г. http://www.newsru.com/finance/24oct2013/minsk-nazarbaev.html

[9] Ibidem.

proposals. There is one more circumstance that prevents both sides from closer integration: common security interests together with the lack of common strategic vision between Russia and West stemmed from common ideological values which is not sufficient for the creation of security community. Therefore, any acting and potential common security institutions in Europe and Eurasia will have limits of cooperative security aimed at attack prevention rather than establishing long-lasting security. AMD negotiations between USA and Russia have failed because different and somewhat opposite strategic perceptions of each other.

Also analysis shows that despite security community functioning, there are still problems with finding reliable design for NATO and the EU institutional integration. Both of them stand for regular consultation as well as the use of expertise and assets of each other and there are no sings of closer mutual institutional rapprochement. OSCE will be limited with soft security issues.

In Eurasia, level of institutional integration in security sphere seems also insufficient due to potential rivalry between Russia and China with involvement of other big actors. Shanghai Cooperation Organization is mainly concentrated on cooperation in anti-terrorist activity. Hidden competition for leadership between Russia and China at a certain stage could become open and capable to block institutional activity. Treaty on Collective Security Organization does not demonstrate unanimous agreement and complete mutual security understanding at conceptual level as soon as Russia considers this institution as a tool for general control over allies without any clear security obligations. At the same time, TCSO members see this organization as a certain insurance against domestic unrest.

As a result, newly independent states are doomed to balance between two power centres choosing various models of multi-vectoralism or selective engagement as a means of manoeuvring in the processes of political and security integration. The longevity of this balancing depends on radical shift of power within or beyond the society but this might happen in medium or long-term perspective.

What to do in order to overcome clashes between two power centers? It is worth to mention that no one should talk about real fighting but existing confrontation could have a latent impact on security situation in Greater Eurasia and certain frameworks will be necessary.

Firstly, there is a sense for both to discuss the possibility to unify both institutions as much as possible in order to work out common policy in security sphere towards Eurasia. For better efficiency this policy should presuppose redistribution of issues and at the same time mechanisms of common activity.

Realistically it is a matter of long period. Probably it could have been started after presidential elections in the USA in Spring 2013. Now it seems unrealistic because of freezing bilateral relations but both sides will definitely return to discuss Eurasian security agenda.

Secondly, both sub-systems should reconfirm their commitment to basic principles of international law and indivisibility of security. They must really agree about a certain *status quo* that includes non-violation of existing interstate borders in Eurasia. In this context Georgia case, if not rerun, should be considered as a single incident. For this, it seems that there is a sense for certain written agreement either on bilateral or on interinstitutional bases. And finally, they have to try to form common institutions in addition to existing ones like Board of Big Four which includes NATO, EU, SCO and CSTO. It will be a forum for consultations within Greater Eurasia. In different situation OSCE could have served as such place, but now there is a deep distrust towards this structure from some countries (USA and Russia). Other institutions like Black Sea Cooperation can only play supplemental role. NATO, EU, OSCE and OTCS will remain in the foreseeable future the main institutions on which the security of Eurasia will depend.

Conclusions

Twenty years of post-soviet developments have demonstrated ambivalent results in security sphere. On the one hand, certain and even adequate institutions have been created. But on the other, NIS are still in the process on geopolitical and security identification. Cooperation between western and post-soviet security institutions is possible and even desirable but there are serious differences in security perceptions based on different strategic interests of major players. As a result, Newly Independent States are still balancing between two sub-regional power centers: West and Russia.