

Foreign policy choices of weak states taking into account existing challenges, examined through the example of Georgia

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Abstract: While all types of nations bear influence on the international system to some extent, the development of global political events is largely dependent on hegemonic and powerful states' decisions. In such conditions, smaller and weaker states often lose the freedom to exercise their will and are unable to ensure national security. However, there are so-called third world countries that have internal political, economic and social challenges more often on their daily agenda than the issue of establishing sovereignty.

The definition of a weak state is not unequivocal. The political power of a state is subject to complex assessment. A state that cannot realize its own forces independently and whose authority/influence in the global political arena is significantly low may be considered a weak state. Each state, taking into consideration its specific challenges, works differently on its own survival strategy, giving rise to a rather chaotic reality in the international arena.

The Republic of Georgia was one of the first bold weak states. Although Russian influence was intensely present in its political life in the 1990s, Georgia openly directed its foreign policy towards the West after achieving independence. As Kenneth Waltz stated: "Freedom is implied in the word 'independence' but so is the necessity of self-reliance" (Waltz, 1954, p. 214).

Keywords: Georgia, state, foreign policy, state, bandwagoning, balancing, governance, self-preservation, sovereignty, independence, choice.

Introduction

Since the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the world's ten most powerful countries, international policy has changed substantially and the political environment has become more and more unpredictable. In such conditions, weaker states always hold subordinate roles because of their military, economic and political impotence. Their choice is often so limited, as far as they must choose it from among the proposed options, that it is a choice between politics of balancing and bandwagoning.

Bandwagoning implies a cooperative relationship with a potential aggressor state with the intention of appeasement, neutralization of existing tensions or receipt of certain benefits, though one does not preclude the others. We can consider geopolitics as one of the most important factors in the selection of bandwagoning strategy, given that if the neighboring state is not an ally, then it is always considered a potential assailant.

Balancing implies allying with a powerful state or international alliance that does not pose a threat. This is a lucrative policy for powerful states, as they try to strengthen their own authority and influence even further through connections and cooperative relations in international affairs; on the other hand, balancing is a high-risk strategy for weaker states as they are often victims of constant attack and harassment, and the allying country (or alliance) may not prove helpful in every critical situation. In addition, considering their limited capabilities, smaller countries are less able to contribute to maintaining balance in the international system.

Professor Randall Schweller of Political Science considers that the assessment of balancing and bandwagoning as mutually exclusive policies is not justifiable, as both of them have different motives. He believes that the result of bandwagoning is a reward in exchange for surrendering, while the motive for balancing is to ensure security (Schweller, 1994).

Numerous observations have been made in the discipline of international relations regarding the strategic steps that the weak and vulnerable state takes in certain political situations. However, it is interesting to investigate in which cases these observations are justified and what are the consequences of different moves calculated by the states. The Republic of Georgia has been selected for comparison. Georgia is a small state with a strategic geographic location and rich political history.

While, on the one hand, the newly independent Republic of Georgia was trying to establish democracy and sovereignty, on the other hand, the Russian Federation yearned to delay these processes by strengthening the separatist movement and supporting the opposition forces. At the same time, the latter demonstrated its power and influence to the West and tried to emphasize that even though the Soviet Union did not exist anymore, its authority on the international arena was not weakened. This was attested by the developing events in Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Don Bass, Crimea, South Ossetia and Transnistria in the 1990s. Forms of these conflicts were substantially similar and in each could be seen a Russian signature. Despite the surrounding factors in Georgia's political life at that period, aspirations in the direction of Europe were apparent and clearly demonstrated.

It can be stated that Georgia was not stereotypical in its decision. Although it was in a vulnerable state after restoring independence, had no resources to deal with foreign and domestic political challenges, bordered an aggressive, powerful state (whose superiority was undeniable and apparent), did not have an official strong ally and/or supporter in the international arena, and the threat was real and indomitable, Georgia was still able to demonstrate a clear will to be a member of the powerful Euro-Atlantic community. At that time, it was a bold decision by the Georgian state.

Even in today's reality, after 25 years since that decision was made, parts of Georgian society deem these aspirations utopian and a skeptical attitude is recurrent. Especially in the 1990s, the choice of a balancing strategy for Georgia as a weak state was the equivalent of walking over a tightrope.

It is interesting to consider the internal and external political factors of the country that made Georgia's foreign policy even more audacious and bold after restoring independence.

Methodology: Considering the specifics of the issue, we will examine the concrete political steps taken by Georgia as a weak state in the aftermath of the restoration of independence in the framework of qualitative research and examine them through the lens of already established views on the scientific level. The author's interview with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the newly independent Georgia for much of the 90s (1995-2003), Mr. Irakli Menagarishvili, will be used as an additional research instrument.

Conceptual Issues

It is not easy for weak states to form a profitable foreign policy. There are a number of factors that are taken into account in the process: military capabilities, geopolitical condition, geographical location, defense capabilities, economic opportunities, level of consciousness of civil society and elite groups... Establishing an institutionally safe and diplomatic environment and a correct and timely evaluation of the domestic and foreign situation of the country are prerequisites for successful policy implementation. In addition, Stephen Walt emphasizes one of the most important factors; he points out that the perception of peril by small states has a significant effect on their choice of foreign policy – whether there is a threat, how realistic it is and what kind of policy is needed in order to balance the threat.

Alliances, unions, and international organizations are considered ways of balancing the threat, as joining them enables countries to balance the main source of threat. On the other hand, using bandwagoning strategy, the state that poses the threat becomes an ally. By reason, the balancing strategy is more secure, as the joint opposition unites against the aggressor state to balance its superiority, however, it is practically more difficult to achieve. Bandwagoning is a policy of dominance in which the source of the threat is a country with greater potential and stability is more easily maintained by achieving an amicable relationship.

It should be noted here that while realists believe that states choose their self-preservation politics considering only their own potential and external material factors, the theory of constructivism approaches the subject differently and considers that states construct their own political history while also considering their own identity, peculiarities, experiences and values. This means that, along with material factors, non-material factors also play an important role in the decision-making process.

It is based on this logic that Alexander Wendt, one of the founding social constructivist scholars, and his co-authors Peter Katzenstein and Ronald Jepperson differentiate the importance of international organizations, formal institutions such as NATO, OSCE, and the UN, and believe that these are means to national security constructively built by the nations united under them around common norms, ideas and values and in this pathos opposes the realist approach that NATO is the only means of protection from a specific threat (Jepperson, Wendt, & Katzenstein, 2007).

Policy choices of weak states

Smaller and weaker states in foreign relations, as a rule, have common aspirations: to establish an influential place in international relations, to increase its authority, to become economically stronger, to form on a European state level, to maintain territorial integrity, to ensure security, and to protect human rights and freedoms... but the main priority, considering the political situation of each state, still differs. In the case of Georgia, the main purpose of international relations is to maintain security and restore and maintain territorial integrity. Taking into consideration that 20% of Georgian territory is occupied by the neighboring, powerful state of the Russian Federation, it is impossible for the country to set any other foreign policy goal.

In his book "International Relations", Alexander Rondeli (2006) writes: "The most important and frequent reason for establishing unions aside from answering threats is the desire to avoid them. When one sovereign state feels threatened by any other state, three choices remain:

- to do nothing;
- to ally with a third state (or group of states);
- to join the side of the state from which the threat is expected.

In international politics, the actual threat or the perception of the threat forces states to either find allies or establish relations with the 'source' of threat in order to tame it or to gain protection from it" (99-100p).

We can discuss the choices offered by the author in regard to the modern foreign political governance of Georgia as a weak state.

After its escape from the rule of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics together with the rest of the post-Soviet states, Georgia restored its independence on the basis of a referendum on 31 March 1991. It can be said that from this period Georgia has existed as a free nation with the ability to make its own decisions. Eduard Shevardnadze, the second president of independent Georgia, stated after his return to Georgia that the nation was not going to discuss proposals such as the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States – established in 1991 by the Russian Republic, thereby uniting 11 states within it), or post-Soviet integration, but would only pave the way independently to the West. As the author states, this can be viewed as the European choice of the country, the same as allying with a third state (or group of states). However, it is one thing to have a sharply expressed foreign policy position and another thing to be able to implement it effectively.

National security is always dependent on the strength of the neighboring country and then on the strength of the world. It is also very important where the neighboring country directs its power in accordance with its own interests. Hedley Bull (2003), a representative of a well-known international community school, states: "war is an organized violence," (162 p) which is used by states to achieve or maintain a specific condition. The ethnic conflict in Abkhazia, which later turned into war, can be understood as an ongoing "violence" implemented by the Russian state to hold on to some of its former power.

Against the backdrop of heavy military actions in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, by the decision of the parliament, Georgia became a member of the CIS on 1 March 1994. The then President of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze consented to joining the CIS, which he later assessed as "kneeling". Besides the aforementioned, he signed a collective security agreement and the Georgian side was forced to agree to the Russian armed forces' presence on the borders to Russia and Turkey and went on to yet another important compromise and agreed to accept staff recommendations by the Russian authorities without

any alternatives. Considering the main assumptions of bandwagoning, this outcome can be a typical example of the fact that weak states often choose bandwagoning because they do not have any alternatives.

But what happens if your neighboring state is an aggressor state, and you choose bandwagoning because you see international salvation in this action, although this powerful state is at the same time a potential attacker and the real threat is expected from this state itself. This is the third option discussed by the author - the transition to the side of the state from which the danger is expected.

However, we should also consider different assessments by researchers in regards to the mentioned case. They believe that because Georgia's entry into the CIS in itself included not only foreign policy strategy but also the ability to prevent the inner turmoil and maintain the political regime, this step, based on its essence, was more balancing than bandwagoning. Eduard Shevardnadze killed two birds with one stone with this decision. As Revaz Bakhtadze (2007, as cited in (Gvalia, 2013) explains, first, he appeased the foreign aggressor and second, through the same actor managed to establish internal stability to an extent and keep its own regime alive.

"It is noticed that in days of peace, states usually use balancing, and in times of war, when there is a question of survival, countries do not refuse bandwagoning either; and then, when the winner is identified, it will suddenly find many new allies in the war" (Rondeli, 2006, p. 101). Georgia's decision of 1 March 1994 to join the CIS supports this argument by the author.

So far we have discussed what theoretical choice a weaker state has in its survival against a threat, but it is the subject of a separate discussion as to how free this choice is. Considering the above example, it is easy to see that Georgia's entrance into the CIS was a political decision forced by the matter of its survival, which was conditioned by the events developing independently of Georgia.

Discussion regarding the Georgian example can be summarized as follows: it is a weak state that sees its survival and advancement in the international arena in the West, in European and Euro-Atlantic integration, but there is always the hinderance of the revanchist policy of the powerful neighboring state, which has been constantly pursued since Georgia declared its independence. And as long as the stronger state is trying to oppress the weaker one with its superiority, the latter is unable to achieve its desired goal and compelled to give up its foreign policy positions against its will and bandwagon with the oppressor. If we follow this line of reasoning, we can come to the conclusion that the second option that the author offered – "to ally with the third state (or the group of states)" only exists theoretically and is practically impossible. However, if we continue the discussion considering the current political situation of the country, we will find that Georgia opted for this very option as a survival strategy as early as the 1990s.

Irakli Menagarishvili, who was also the Deputy Prime Minister of Georgia from 1993 to 1995, interestingly puts the later events developed in Georgia during a personal interview: "In the second half of the 1990s, the country's leadership started orienting it in a pro-Western direction, gradually showing Western aspirations. The conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia seemed to have subsided and the following scenario has materialized: Georgian authorities are trying to keep the country's internal and external relations in line through balancing. Eduard Shevardnadze's words, 'I see Georgia in Europe,' were a turning point, which answered many questions at that time. A historic document was developed in the year 2000: Georgia's foreign policy strategy. The amendment of the foreign policy course resulted in the withdrawal of military

bases from Georgia which was the unwavering will of not only the country's leader but also of all Georgians."¹

President Shevardnadze was more and more convinced that even entering into international level negotiations with Russia was not a guarantee of specific results. However, if not for favorable international developments, it is hard to know when Georgia's foreign policy course towards European and Euro-Atlantic would be strengthened.

- The interests of international actors, especially those of the United States, were expressed due to the strategically important geopolitical situation in the Caucasus region, including Georgia. Consequently, Georgia gained an alternate ally, which, according to Walt's view, is a necessary condition for shifting from bandwagoning to balancing.
- The political/economic crisis of the Russian state, caused by its unsuccessful war with Chechnya, demoralization of the armed forces, financial crisis, weakening of central and regional government cooperation and internal clashes between the elites, allowed Georgia to escape from its influence.

The official announcement of the president at the NATO summit in the city of Prague in 2002 has been viewed as the main start towards Euro-Atlantic integration, where the president openly identified the country's political will to enter into the alliance, which was followed by Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) in 2004. From Georgia's perspective, the IPAP entailed taking on a number of obligations that were subject to annual review and assessment by NATO. At this point in time, Georgia has already moved on to the graduate level of the membership candidacy. We can acknowledge this historical fact as an example of the country's expression of free will - the first step towards collaboration with a powerful alliance, which is a starting point for balancing itself.

The influence of Eduard Shevardnadze, as president of Georgia and leader of the "Citizens' Union," significantly weakened during the second convocation and developing events in the country became unmanageable and chaotic. The 2003 Parliamentary Elections had a special intent, as it was a prerequisite to the 2005 presidential election, where the then current president could no longer nominate his candidacy a third time within the framework of the constitution. During the pre-election period, tensions were building as to what could follow the election results, as there were a couple of high-profile parties with real leaders and the ruling party's influence was weakening day by day.

The leader of the "National Movement" Mikheil Saakashvili led mass protests against the results of the 2 November 2003 parliamentary elections. Nino Burjanadze (leader of the party "Burjanadze-Democrats") and Zurab Zhvania (leader of the party "United Democrats") led these processes alongside Mikheil Saakashvili. Twenty days of peaceful protests resulted in the country's second president Eduard Shevardnadze's "going home". Extraordinary presidential elections were set up, where Mikheil Saakashvili, former Minister of Justice of Georgia and the leader of "National Movement" became the country's third president with 96% of the votes (2004 – 2013). The "Rose Revolution" was written down in the modern history of Georgia as a peaceful way to change the government (Nodia, 2005).

¹ . Private interview with Irakli Menaghrishvili, Date conducted: 31.01.2018

The ruling period of Georgia's third president, Mikheil Saakashvili was vast and varied, in both domestic and foreign policy directions. The country's pro-Western political course became more intense and evident. The newly elected president made loud and bold statements about the strategy to take back occupied territories. He frequently noted in his speeches that South Ossetia and Abkhazia would return to the composition of Georgia, resulting in aggression from Russia, which took specific steps to establish collaborative relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They realized that only through such action would they be able to manage the situation.

The peace initiatives by the Georgian side to resolve the Georgian-Ossetian conflict were announced in Strasbourg in January 2005 in the framework of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and in December 2005, the country summarized three concrete phases and the terms of their implementation at the OSCE Ljubljana Ministerial:

- Demilitarization of the conflict zone;
- Socio-economic rehabilitation;
- Definition of the final status of South Ossetia.

The term of fulfillment of the specified stages was determined as the year of 2006, which sounded more dangerous than it did realistic (Open Society Georgia, 2005).

"After the Rose Revolution we started to think more seriously about what we need foreign policy for. If our main goal is to build a modern state and society, then we need a strategic partner that will help us achieve this. But the reason for our foreign policy is different, we try to distance ourselves from the Russian state as much as possible. The form of governance of the Russian state is modern feudalism. Consequently, if we select pro-Russian foreign policy, naturally, the same model that is in Moscow will spread to Georgia: corruption and organized crime" (Gvalia, Siroky, Lebanidz, & Iashvili, 2013, p. 113).

The 2008 August War, also known as the Russo-Georgian War, was another tragic event in the history of Georgia under the rule of Mikheil Saakashvili. This event has been evaluated in different ways by the international community. Two scenarios of the war exist: the script written by the then ruling party of Georgia and the Kremlin script. Events of that time that have been seen in the eyes of the West is subject to a separate study. It is a fact that it was yet another awakening of a frozen conflict. For centuries the relationship between Russia and Georgia has never been amicable at any point. Russia has always been trying to gain and maintain control over Georgia, which is often explained by Georgia's strategic geopolitical location.

The first actual signal of the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 was the unilateral withdrawal of the Russian state from the decision of the CIS leaders of "the resolution of the conflict in Abkhazia". It seemed to be the answer to the aggressive pro-Western politics of that time, which caused negative assessment not only from Georgia but also from the international community. The Georgian side viewed the situation as a new challenge and linked it to the Bucharest Summit, where NATO member states underlined that Georgia would definitely become a member of the alliance. Russia viewed this message as a real threat, after which excessive tensions were felt in the official statements of Russian and Georgian authorities. Neither side wanted to give up its position and, moreover, they were discussing specific and peremptory future steps.

A special committee was created to study the 2008 Russo-Georgian War in detail. The committee consisted of military personnel, lawyers and political experts and was headed by diplomat Heidi Tagliavini. The report

noted that the war did not solve the conflict in any context, only worsened an already grave political situation. In terms of international relations, both sides violated main values of international law: sovereignty, territorial integrity, human rights and freedoms... in this sense, the international community also suffered a defeat. Finally, on the basis of the committee's report, the 2008 Russo-Georgian War was assessed as ethnic cleansing. In this resolution, the EU definitively assessed Russia as an occupant of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

With the mediation of French president Nicolas Sarkozy, Russia and Georgia signed a ceasefire agreement on 12 August 2008. However, the fact remains that the August War was not over then and still continues as a creeping annexation. The creeping occupation policy started in 2009 and accelerated considerably in June and October of 2013 (Kogan, 2013).

There is an impression that, if Georgia had an opportunity to just go with the flow before and thereby win a little more time for developing a new survival strategy, in the state of creeping occupation the situation is constantly fatal. In this way, the occupant side tries to show that it does not change its revanchist attitude, does not plan to be more loyal and immediately needs a specific foreign policy decision from Georgia. The creeping occupation is an opportunity for Russia to remind Georgia of its superiority silently and without becoming subject to backlash from the international community and to persuade the country that its final choice for survival is subordination.

Conclusion

The complexity of the international system lies in the fact that every state has different tactics of action given their capabilities, potential, and history. In singular cases, what a powerful country or an ally of a powerful country can allow itself to do, a weaker country may never dare. Political process in the international arena is quick, impulsive and uncontrollable. Although there is a common goal, organizations or associations created by the nations/powers united around peace and justice, the events still unfold chaotically, which is only natural. People with different interests and opinions living under one roof cannot get along without incidents, even though all of them agree on the necessity of peace, idealism and freedom. Smaller and weaker states find it especially difficult to find and establish their place in such a competitive environment. They are often in a confused and helpless position. Georgia is one such nation. It was to overcome this difficulty that the idea of establishing an international community first came to life (Bull, Kingsbury, & Roberts, Hugo Grotius and International Relations, 2003).

American professor Stephen Walt, a follower of the school of realism, explains that bandwagoning is mainly the choice of countries with more vulnerable and unstable capabilities. The stronger and the more dangerous the assailant state potentially is, the higher the probability that the smaller state will opt for a cooperative relationship. In contrast to the theoreticians who view the selection of balancing by the weak states in a negative light, the author states that weaker states that become members of the alliance are not only balancing power but also balancing the threat and that as soon as they see the opportunity to be free in their political decisions, they choose to balance existing threats through friendly relations with a more powerful state and/or an alliance than with the source of the threat (Walt, 1985).

At first glance it can be stated that balancing and bandwagoning are alternative ways to survive for weaker states, but if we consistently analyze their peculiarities, we will understand that balancing can be a logical continuation of bandwagoning. We have already discussed that the more vulnerable and defenseless the state is and the closer it is located to the source of threat, the more likely it is to opt for the bandwagoning strategy, as the weaker state does not have the luxury of using the balancing strategy in such a hopeless and difficult political situation. We also reviewed the characteristics of the balancing strategy and agreed

that powerful states are more likely to be united around common interests, because they thus increase their influence and authority in the international sphere and avoid not only existing tensions in today's reality but also anticipated ones. We thus have a picture: vulnerable states bandwagon with the source of threat, try to maintain their territorial integrity, diffuse existing tensions, and avoid attacks (even through war) and as soon as they are able they try to cooperate with states with similar interests to balance the source of the threat.

Where domestic and foreign factors of the country are different in all states, their priorities may be different as well. However, there are values that are relatively easy to define since they are shared by nations of any type and capacity: territorial integrity, inviolability, sovereignty, independence, international reputation.... Although weaker states approach survival politics in a variety of ways, each of them directs its foreign policies towards protecting and ensuring the mentioned values.

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