

**Iran and the Caucasian Crisis:
The war between Russia and Georgia
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Abstract

It can be claimed that the most significant international event after September 11 and the fall of Taliban and Saddam, was Caucasian crisis which eventually ended in a limited war between Russia and Georgia. Caucasian crisis was of great significance because it turned into a war of power between two competing poles of power and challenged the concerted international order which had shadowed the international relations for two decades. The continuance of the crisis at that time released, to some extent, the international structural pressure originating from American hegemony against Iranian government. Such changes and Russia's show of power revealed that Moscow intends to prevent by any means the expansionism of the West within NATO's or other similar organizations' framework in the realm of its geo-political boundary. On the other hand, considering the limits of Russia's capacities, the bitter experience of the cold war, and the mutual dependence of West and Russia on one another, one cannot shut the eyes to the possibility of compromise between Moscow and the West. Therefore, Iran's interest lies in carefully watching the changes and adopting a comprehensive approach in regard to both sides of the crisis because Iran's national interests depend on the establishment of balanced relations with both West and Russia. This article deals with Caucasian crisis and the approaches taken by both sides, regions and outside region's powers, the consequences of the crisis, talks and Iran's reaction toward the crisis and its role in it.

Keywords: Crisis, National Interests, Caucasus, Foreign policy, Iran, Russia and Georgia

Introduction

In 2008, 8th August some bloody conflicts happened in insecure regions of Caucasus between Russia and Caucasus. Although these conflicts were short and sectional conflicts and had limited extent but they had global reflex. The reason of this expansion was the conflicts of war period between two camps of West (Caucasus, partisan of west) and East (Russia). Investigation these

events can have benefits for formal politicians and persons who are interested in foreign politics, with regard to efforts of Iran to has some regional important role and the effects of this crisis on national benefits of Iran. This paper wants to say how could Iran use this crisis in order to provide its benefits and was Iran successful in doing its policies through this crisis or not? Of course, this paper cannot investigate all international aspects of this crisis and other reflexes. The aim of this paper is to consider the effects this crisis on Iran foreign politics and the position of Iran's reflex.

Methodology

The writer of this paper uses analytical- explanation method in order to gain real concept of reasons, roots and effects of war between Russia and Caucasus. To investigate the effects of these conflicts on Iran foreign politics, there is used inductive method in order to gather data, investigate insignificant matters and draw a whole conclusion after generalizing.

Main question and research hypothesis

“How could Iran use better Caucasus Crisis (August 2008) for its national interests?” it is main question of present paper. To answer this question we should pay attention to hypothesis of this paper: if Iran has a codified plan, continuous counsellingship with two parts of conflicts and multilateral adoptive approach; it could increase its position in Caucasus crisis and gain its national benefits.

Research Findings

Present research findings are organized into five parts. In part one, geopolitics of Caucasus region will be investigated. In part two, the war between Russia and Caucasus will be investigated. In part three, the approach of Islamic Republic of Iran towards Caucasus crisis will be considered. In part four, the results of this crisis in Iran will be evaluated and finally, in part five, this paper shows the position of Iran towards future events in this region and other regions effectively by reviewing its politics.

The Geopolitics of Caucasus Region

Caucasus is a region between Caspian Sea and Black Sea. Caucasus is divided into south Caucasus and north Caucasus. South Caucasus is included some countries as Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and some limited regions of northeast of Iran and northeast of Turkey. Nowadays, north Caucasus is part of Russia. Caucasus is full of different tribes or nations and has eight self-determined republics in north, three self-determined republics and four independent republics in west. (Wikipedia 2009)

Ossetia is a region in two parts of great Caucasus mountain chains which residents are mainly from Ossetia. Their race is Iranian with Ossetia language which is an east Iranian language from Indo-European tribes. The north of north Ossetia (Alania) is located in some part of Russia. The west of it is self-determined republic west Ossetia which is directed by military support of Russia but is known as a part of Georgia.

In last years of government of Union of Soviet Socialist, tribe conflicts happened between Ossetia's people and Georgians in previous self-determined Georgia and caused bloody conflicts. By mediating Russia and supervising of cooperation and security organization in Europe; in 1992, it reported the ceasefire in west Ossetia. But struggles between them were not resolved and peace plan of Georgia government, which gave a self-determined promise to west Ossetia in order to decrease mentioned struggles with the help of international capacities; was not effective in solving problems. Simultaneously, separatist officials in west Ossetia wanted to unify to north Ossetia under political domination of Russia. But word community restrained identifying west Ossetia to other countries as an independent country and announcing it as a part of Georgia. At that time, Ossetia wants separating from Georgia. Because of these conflicts and external inflammatory, this region confronted to crisis. (Vaezi 2007)

War between Russia and Georgia

Previous history of crisis in West Caucasus region

Georgia in east part of west Caucasus region is multi pieces country consist of several national and geographical regions. In 12 century, there was unifies political sovereignty in this region but in before and after centuries, every part had separate governmental and kingship structure. From 1801, Georgia became some part of Russia. After falling apart Russia Empire in 1917, provisional government was formed because of not being power in this region and conducted by Georgian Mensheviks from 1918 till 1920. At that time, another subject was formed. On the one hand, separation of Ossetia, Abkhazia and Ajaria from Georgia and on the other hand, bloody conflicts with Georgian government were important issues. With dashing of Russia to Caucasus in 1920, this region was governed by Russia. In Russia period, the independence of Abkhazia was forgotten but there was considered self-determined governments for west Ossetia, Abkhazia and Ajaria in the framework of Georgian of Russia.

After falling apart Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, again the independence of these regions was considered and Georgian and other separatists running about this issue. These unpleasant events had no benefits for Ossetia, Abkhazia and Georgia except war, homelessness and death.

Russia always exploited these regions as pressure points on Georgia. Also, Georgia used these regions as tools to take vengeance from Russia. (Amirahmadian 2008, 38-50)

The reasons of starting the war between Russia and Georgia

In periods of cold war, Georgia was the region of conflicts between West and East based on the framework of NATO and Warsaw treaty. The reason of difference between Georgia government and national forces with Russia was evacuation of Russia statues in Georgia. Another difference was the combination of Abkhazia and west Ossetia interim forces and most military soldiers were Russian. Russia was accused of military and economical supporting from separatists by Georgia government. Starting color revolution with the help of west and Georgia, known as orange revolution of Ukraine in 2005, and positioning two countries among dissidents of Russia made Moscow to become angry. Also Moscow showed reactions about Guam Treaty with efforts of Georgia and Ukraine.(Amirahmadian, Op. Cite,58)

Also, Michael Saakashvili started joining to NATO in 2003 and at the beginning his presidential period. As a rule, the supporting of USA and Europe from Georgia in order to connect to NATO Organization had some expectations and these circumstances made worry Russia. Another issue which made worry Russia is UAS Missile Defense Shield. With regard to this plan, some missile statues were installed in different regions of world by USA in order to preserve its country and some countries out of ballistic missiles of enemies. Another problem between Russia and Georgia is to transmit pipelines of energy from Caspian Sea because Russia wanted to transfer Caucasus energy from Russia to international markets in order to grasp tools of energy forever.(Akraminia 2008)

As whole, some factors affected in mentioned war are as follows:

- The evaluation of strategies Georgian governors on war was false and has not any real technical-tactical base.
- After finishing term of presidency “Putin”, the president of Georgia thought new president of Russia, ”Medvedev”, cannot make strategic decisions and use rapid development forces.
- Georgian governors thought starting Olympic Games would be best opportunity to consider Russia, attack peace forces and send out Russian from west Ossetia.

The conflicts of Georgia with west Ossetia: the war starts

Early moments 8th August 2008, when most media in all over the world were talking about opening of Olympic Games in China; the military forces of Georgia attacked Neskhinawi, the capital of west Ossetia, with the help of West. The reports stated hundreds people killed or

injured. After passing hours from the attacks of Georgian military to west Ossetia, Russia supported Ossetia and entered war, opposite of expectation and evaluation of Tiflis. Air, ground and sea attacks were so severe that Georgian Army had to withdraw.(Omidi 2008, 85-89)

After 5 days, in 12 August 2008, European forces specially France, mediated and therefore reported ceasefire. In 26 August 2008, Russia announced not recognize form a quorum the right of sovereignty of Georgia over west Ossetia and Abkhazia and these two regions are independent republics.(Kozegar Kaleji 2008, 74-75)

Islamic Republic of Iran and the war between Russia and Georgia

The approach of Iran toward central Asia and Caucasus

When Union of Soviet Socialists Republics fell apart and new borderlines were opened, military menaces were decreased and new opportunities formed in Iran. Islamic Republic of Iran has historical, cultural and racial bonds with most central Asia Republics in spite of common religion. Based on geopolitical issues, none of these republics has accessibility to free waters and central Asia and Caucasus are as an intervening line between Iran and Russia. Then, Iran could gain new political relations and security with new neighbors and improve his regional position. The expansion of economical relations and substructures in these countries and the communication with international markets cause the economics of these countries and Iran to reinforce. Caucasus always was important for Iran. When three countries being independent in Caucasus and with regard to events happened after cold war; this region gained more importance just as some experts believe Caucasus is a geopolitical supplementary for Iran. The security and firmness of these republics after their independence are important for other countries in the region. Iran believes his national interests in region have direct relation with firmness of Caucasus countries. This point of view provides political interests of Iran and neuters political – security plans against national security of Iran. On the other hand, it causes to increase Iran position in regional forces.

Iran stances towards Caucasus crisis

The war between Russia and Georgia causes to attract the attentions of most world and regional group and Iran has stances in this crisis as a suitable regional part. At the beginning of war between Russia and Georgia, Iran wants stopping military conflicts and solving problems peacefully. The spokesman of foreign affairs ministry, Hassan Ghashghavi, stated: Iran was worry about military conflicts in west Ossetia because these conflicts made human damages and many non defense people were killed. Iran wants stopping these conflicts rapidly and helping

damaged people. Ghashghavi describes the results of this crisis and stated: continuing these crises can change the firmness and security of all through region in Caucasus. Iran is ready to help countries of region in providing peace and firmness based on the framework of his political stances and solves this crisis in west Ossetia peacefully.

Some groups claim Iran plays as a peacemaker between two conflicting groups, but Iran dose not mediate between them. Minister of foreign affairs mentioned the diplomacy of Iran between Russia and Georgia as a Caucasian diplomacy and said: these activities are not mediation. Iran has some plans in order to remove crisis through the region. (Moazzemi Goodarzi 2008, 142) As a whole, Islamic Republic of Iran has different stances in Georgia crisis. Sometimes, Tehran, in some stances, wants to solve Georgia crisis peacefully but Ahmadi Nejad, president of Iran, in his speech in Shang High meeting on this crisis said that some interferences of forces out of region made Caucasus conflicts and increased by permission of Georgia government. The statements of Iran President were interpreted by some media as a kind of support from activities of Moscow against Georgia. But in September 2009, the spokesman of foreign affairs ministry denied every mediation from Russia against current crisis in Caucasus. Also, Manoocher Mottaki said: Georgia events should be an alarm for other countries in the region. This crisis is made of false considerations from reactions and using military forces by Georgia government. It is natural every action has special reaction (but he did not mention military attack of Russia to Georgia).

Supporting approach of Iran from Russia caused Moscow to promote in using nuclear dossier instruments to gain some points from West through Caucasus crisis and Russia governors showed several contradictory stances about nuclear dossier of Iran. With regard to statements of Russia authorities about Georgia crisis and its effects on nuclear dossier of Iran, the expansion of tensions between Russia and West caused to provide new tools in management process of Iran nuclear dossier which can help in realizing positions better and increasing the force of Tehran. (Hosein poor, akram and others 1994, 37).

Understandable issues in deployment of some authorities of Iran about Caucasus crisis are not realizing new position because reprimanding Georgia by Ahmadi Nejad made Iran to enter in one of these fronts. Some countries pretext this matter and figure in talks the nuclear dossier of Iran. Tehran approach increased several critics. Previous ambassador of Iran in Paris, Sadegh Kharrazi, criticized the positions of Iranian authorities and said: our aim is to use circumstances not produce ourselves a pretext for communication of America and Russia.

The plan of Iran to solve this crisis

Islamic Republic of Iran negotiated with world and regional groups in order to solve this crisis and delivered a plan about it. By traveling minister of foreign affairs, Mottaki, to Russia and negotiating with Russian authorities, Iran started his activity seriously. The diplomacy continued by traveling Mottaki to Bakoo, Germany and Georgia. Under minister of foreign affairs in Europe affairs, Mahdi Safari, after visiting Britain authorities told about this plan that Iran has delivered a plan in 3x3 frames to solve conflicts of Georgia which are formed among groups. Iran designed this plan by help of 3 republics Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan and 3 countries Russia, Turkey and Iran.

By studying the results of this event in Iran, four important notes are considered:

- 1- The crisis of Georgia causes to attract West attention toward him.
- 2- Answering Russia to America's support from Georgia and providing nuclear relations in new level between Iran and Russia. Russia announced his opposition with issuing every new resolution by Security Council of UN and exerting new economical sanctions against Iran.
- 3- Russia is worry about the NATO and acceptance of Ukraine and Georgia. Russia wants to use bargaining chip, Iran, in his relations with West.
- 4- Russia wants to accouter Iran to new military weapons made in Russia in order to produce security relations. (Omidi 2008, 62)

Consequences of Russia's invasion of Georgia

After falling apart Union of Soviet Socialists Republics, Russia was lost his role as a challenging power for USA in the world. Near 18 years, this country was involved with political, social and economical problems and then became a serious pretender over political map of world. The answer of Russia to Georgia was important because this country had very important position in oil transferring chain. The conflict between Georgia and Russia caused to weak unilateral ruling system continuing from 11 September 2001 by USA. After this, we will observe an international one aspect system influenced by Russia and Europe over world issues. After velvet revolution in Georgia in 2003 and selecting Michael Saakashvili as western oriented president, the worries of Russia were increased because of expansion of political and social changes to other republics and Russia and exchanging political balance in region. (Akraminia 2008)

On the other hand, the efforts of Russia to introduce him as a new country with foreseeable politics were encountered to serious damages. Russia economical programs, entered into new path on order to produce this country to fifth economy of world in 2020; was affected these damages. After that, Baltic and small countries in central Europe will be mobilized against

Russia strongly. Based on Europe, some security structures formed in Europe like cooperation and security organization in Europe was affected by Georgia crisis and Europe tries to solve this crisis.(Malaek 2008,126)

As a whole, Georgia considered the supports of USA and West about the war in west Ossetia. Although USA is continuing tensions in Russia and Georgia relationships, but he does not want to encounter to Russia in regions which known as back yard, because of different reasons and activities with Moscow.

The results of Caucasus war in Iran

Iran considered some issues for national interests to exploit this crisis better. Politically, this crisis is positive phenomena for Iran in short term because Russia opened a kind of front, known second front against west countries, and stopped pressure of west countries on Iran. It was not clear Russia is following politics of west countries. Russia had a cooperation period with these countries about issues of Iran. It seems Russia decides not to limit his relations with Iran, in his framework of interests; but expands his relations with regard to his needs in region and world. Then, this issue causes Russia and Iran has closer relations.

On the other hand, west countries had no expectation about attitudes of Russia and they supposed in this situation they cannot increase political pressure over Iran, cannot request Russia to increase political pressures in long term on Iran or have an attack to Iran based on an agreement with Russia. Iran has common borderline with Caucasus and the expansion of war and non firmness has no benefit for Iran. At the same time, one week war made military power of USA and West to become weak in region of Caucasus and this event was pleasing for Iran.(Shirmohammadi 2008)

Conclusion

It seems saber rattling of Russia in West Ossetia was a reaction to expansionism of West and conducting USA in Russia traditional sphere of influence. Therefore, Russia wanted west to identify the position of Russia in the world with his saber rattling. It seems this gap between West and Russia causes to decrease international pressures over Iran in short term and Iran gains better conditions to provide its stances. But, it was better Iran did diplomatic affairs without any biased activities from Russia in order to get his long term interests.

To exploit better from this crisis, Iran should consider some aspects to gain his national interests:

- a- Although providing gap between Russia and west caused to form conditions which used differences but we should know if Iran has harmonized relations with Russia and USA,

this kind of diplomacy will be successful. But some dependencies and affiliations of Iran to Russia made hard using this kind of diplomacy.

- b- In relation to crisis of nuclear technology, doubtless Russia used instrumental diplomacy of Iran and did his aims in two ways with regard to that situation. First, as told Russia President, Russia may have different stance on Iran towards previous approach in Security Council if crisis continues. This statement was threatening and could be avoided West in doing excessive reaction. Second, Russia does not consider beneficial the crisis in Georgia, therefore; he wants to use Iran in changing situation. In this manner, Russia supports suggestions of west governors in Security Council in order to open a way for suitable talks with west.

With regard to mentioned issues, Iran should have friendly relations with all countries, consider political equilibrium and national interests in these relations and should not limit him for a special country and not lost his liberty of conscience and political power towards events and opportunities. In this crisis, Iran had no weltanschauung, political rationalization and reliability which are essential to substantiate his national interests in foreign diplomacy.

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