

Diplomacy and Democracy:

The Art of the Possible in the Time of Transformations

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An old Moldovan proverb says: “Protect me Lord from my friends, and I’ll protect myself from my enemies” The latest events at the NATO summit in Bucharest (Romania, April 3, 2008) confirmed once again this wisdom. The two key U.S. allies, Germany and France, opposed the inclusion of the two former Soviet republics in the Membership Action Plan (MAP) in spite of strong U.S. support. The main reason behind this position was to avoid destabilizing the fragile political situation in these young democracies and do not antagonize unnecessarily Russia which is harshly rejecting any possibilities of NATO expansion to the east.

This particular case is reflecting controversial stance of American foreign policy and its powerful engine – diplomacy, confronting serious challenges in the age of transformation, How to reconcile national interest with the democracy promotion agenda? How “to work in new ways, in new places, with new partners, and for new purposes” in the words of Secretary C. Rice¹, without prejudicing “old” (classical) mechanisms, alienating “old” (traditional) allies and sacrificing “old” and most important tasks: missile defense, non-proliferation and a nuclear-free world? As Mikhail Gorbachev, the last President of the Soviet Union for whom I had the privilege to work in the end of 80s- beginning of 90s, remarked: how to bridge “the gap between the rhetoric of peace and security and the real threat looming over the world”².

In my presentation I will focus on two, most important in my opinion, problems related to US/NATO – Russia/New post-Soviet states relations: Security and Democracy challenges, and possibilities of diplomacy in addressing these highly important subjects.

It is a well known fact that the world is experiencing a major democratic and freedom rollback. According to January 2008 Freedom House survey, freedom around the world had suffered a net decline in two successive years, and the number of countries whose score had improved to the number whose scores had declined – a key indicator - is the worst since the collapse of the Berlin Wall.³ It is also a fact that Americans are far more polarized over the foreign policy than they were during the cold war, that America

¹ Remarks on Transformational Diplomacy by Secretary Condoleezza Rice. Gaston Hall, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, February 12, 2008.

² The Nuclear Threat by Mikhail Gorbachev, *The Wall Street Journal*, January 31, 2007.

³ The Democratic Rollback by Larry Diamond, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2008.

has seen an unprecedented deterioration of its global image. Out of 33 countries polled by the Pew Research Center's annual survey 26 have less favorable view of the United States than they did in 2002.⁴ I think the veteran of American diplomacy, Chester A. Crocker, Professor of Strategic Studies at the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University is right when he is stressing that "a profound misunderstanding of the relationship between strategy, power, and diplomacy lies at the heart of the current crisis in U.S. foreign policy".⁵

One of the hottest and most disputed issues of the foreign policy agenda is the prospects of further expansion of NATO to the east by offering Ukraine and Georgia "Membership Action Plan". It is an understandable and welcomed aspiration of a new democratically elected and western oriented leadership of these countries to secure pro-democracy and pro-reform choice, to overcome traditional and painful dependence of their countries from unpredictable and provocative behavior of their former "big brother", Russia.

Ukraine, for example is the only non-NATO country that supported all Alliance's missions by sending its troops in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Iraq. It is also unquestionable that the future of these countries is closely linked to their prospects for European integration and that there are no reasonable alternatives to this strategy. Russia, for example, did not propose any kind of a Good Neighborhood Policy for Ukraine or Georgia. Vice-versa, these countries were subject of not so diplomatic treatment: trade wars and blockades involving natural gas disruption to Ukraine, banned import of famous Georgian wines and other agriculture products that badly affected their economies, massive deportations of Georgians from Russia etc.

The question is not "to be or not to be" accepted into the Alliance, but how to make this process of European integration and adjustment to NATO standards smoother and less painful for these countries and for regional peace and security as a whole. As

⁴ See the Economist Special Report on America and the World. March 29th 2008, pp. 4, 6.

⁵ The Art of Peace: Bringing Diplomacy Back to Washington, by Chester A. Crocker. *Foreign Affairs*, July-August 2007

Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves mentioned at a press-conference in Bucharest the “MAP is more of a big stick than a big carrot”.⁶

The problem is how effective could be the “fast track” to the MAP in situation when only 11% of Ukrainians, according to last month poll, supported the idea of NATO membership, while almost 36% strongly opposed it?⁷ In the case of Georgia the situation with accession to NATO is also complex. As my old colleague and friend Tedo Japaridze, former Georgian Ambassador to the US and former National Security Advisor and Foreign Minister of Georgia mentioned recently “what does Georgia really want? A NATO membership without the lost territories or some mystical assumption that with a MAP in its hand, Georgia automatically integrates within the NATO security network, its conflict zones included? Does Tbilisi really expect NATO to fight to recover the secessionist regions of Georgia?”⁸

President Bush during his recent visit to Kiev decisively rejected any doubts and “misperception” that the United States might soften its push to get Ukraine and Georgia into NATO in spite of Russia’s harsh opposition. “There’s no trade-offs. Period,” he stressed.⁹

“The politics is the art of the possible”, - President M.Gorbachev once mentioned. This is even more appropriate for diplomacy that is by “its very nature the art of the possible”¹⁰ and its intelligent power prevails in the end over the “diplomacy of power”. As an economics professor and former ambassador I am always thinking in terms of costs and benefits, of “the next best alternative forgone”, - an opportunity cost of a decision.

Ukraine’s and Georgia’s eventual accession to NATO already provoked a deep crisis in Russia’s relations with these two countries with potential painful repercussions for other countries in the region. Russian Duma (Parliament) recently recommended to government seriously consider recognition of Georgia’s separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Duma proposed also to tear up the Russian-Ukrainian Treaty or to extend it if Ukrainians will extend the Russian Black Sea Fleet’s presence in Ukraine for

⁶ Bush Supports Ukraine’s Bid to Join NATO, by Steven Myers, *New-York Times*, April 2, 2008.

⁷ Moscow, April 1, *RIA Novosti*

⁸ Inside Track: Roses for the Bear by Tedo Japaridze. March 28, 2008, www.nationalinterest.org

⁹ Bush vows support for Ukraine, Georgia NATO hopes over Russian objections by Matthew Lee, *AP*, April 1, 2008

¹⁰ Keynote Address at the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum. Secretary Condoleezza Rice. Davos, Switzerland, January 23, 2008

another 20 years. I would mention also the Russian withdrawal last December from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), signed in 1990 and adapted in 1999, which served as cornerstone of European security, marking the end of the Cold War. Everything has a cost.

Volens-nolense these “local crises” are affecting American-Russian relations jeopardizing the prospects for Mr. Bush’s new “strategic framework” idea for Russia. This happened in the time when Russians seems to be inclined to accept it, especially if the American interceptors of eventual Iranian or Middle Eastern missile attacks on European allies will not be deployed in Poland and Czech Republic until a threat is verified, and if Russians will be invited to be part of control of this system. There are some other priorities in the American-Russian agenda discussed by the two presidents at their last official meeting on April 5th, 2008 in Russian resort Sochi. I would mention just few of them:

- extension (or replacement) of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty of 1991 that is scheduled to expire in December 2009;
- further reduction of thousands of fielded weapons agreed upon in the 2002 Moscow Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reductions;
- advancing their Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism and
- a new joint initiative in the field of nuclear energy and non-proliferation, approved last July in Kennebunkport.

Probably the best and most comprehensive exposition of these foreign policy priorities was done recently by George P.Shultz, William J.Perry, Henry A. Kissinger and Sam Nunn in an article entitled “Toward a Nuclear-Free World”¹¹.

The U.S. and Russia are facing a challenging choice between a new partnership that could transform missile defense into an area of strategic cooperation, and a new spiral of confrontation, sacrificing all other bilateral and multilateral peace and security agreements. “The ‘moment of truth’ is coming. Meeting in Sochi might either lead to a new long-term confrontation, or open the way to forming new partnership relations”, as noted Sergei Rogov, Director of the Institute of the USA and Canada of the Russian

¹¹ Toward a Nuclear-Free World by George P.Shultz, William J.Perry, Henry A. Kissinger and Sam Nunn, *The Wall Street Journal*, January 15, 2008

Academy of Science.¹² It should be mentioned that the U.S. and Russia special responsibilities for making this historical choice derived from their “tragedy of commons”: they possess 95% of the world’s nuclear warheads. The Bucharest NATO session and Sochi Russian-American Summit might provide a chance to escape finally from the Cold War doctrine of “mutual assured destruction”.

Along with the strategic defense and the “war on terror” another key idea at the heart of the current U.S. foreign policy doctrine is the “democracy promotion agenda”. Undoubtedly, in the long run democratization is the prerequisite of economic development and social justice and the United States made an essential contribution to promotion of these values to the world, particularly to the Newly Independent States emerged on the ashes of the Soviet Union and communist block.

The democratization was one of the most important criteria and stimulus for the European integration of the ten former communist countries through NATO/EU enlargement process during last decade. Paradoxically, after this mission was accomplished a reverse movement started: democracy recession in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. “EU conditionality works best until you get in, noted Jacques Rupnik, Director at the *Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques* in Paris, but once you have joined there are few incentives or means to induce further reforms or the observance of democratic norms”¹³. How to explain for example the fact that after almost two decades from the collapse of communist regimes and almost a decade of EU integration three quarters of Poles consider democracy too indecisive or incapable of maintaining law and order and about half consider that it does not really matter whether the government is democratic or undemocratic?

The Central and Eastern European political turmoil, - the region of the world where citizens are most skeptical about the merits of democracy (Voice of People global survey)¹⁴, along with Russia’s increasing authoritarian transformation, the priority of “building capitalism” over “building democracy”, political instability and exclusion of

¹² U.S. to Face Choice: Partnership or Confrontation, by Sergei Rogov. *Kommersant*, March 28, 2008

¹³ From Democracy Fatigue to Populist Backlash, by Jaques Rupnik, *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 18, N.4, October 2007.

¹⁴ The Strange Death of the Liberal consensus, by Ivan Krastev, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 18, N.4, October 2007

economic policy from the democratic process represent a bleak and depressing picture of the crisis of democracy in newly independent states.

This is also a challenge for American democracy-promotion component of foreign policy. It is treated with increased reservations by many experts, considering that democratization, especially in weak and unstable states, can play into the hands of nostalgic (pro-communist) and extremist forces, bringing them to power on fair and democratic elections. It happened, for example in Moldova in 2001 when unrestructured communist party won elections and started the mass purge campaign against their opponents. This happened in the Middle East when Islamic extremist forces, such as Hamas, won Palestinian elections, or with Hezbollah in Lebanon etc. Importantly, only 20% of polled Americans agreed that spreading democracy to other countries was “a very important” goal of American foreign policy and 42% consider that the country should stop playing in other people backyard.¹⁵

What are the prospects and limits of American diplomacy in transforming this great Democracy idea into a meaningful and self-sustainable political mechanism of the Newly Emerged Democracies? I think that the key answer is in the American assistance, in making this assistance more effective on the base of conditionality (selectivity) principle, in re-directing it from corrupt élites to civil society, in an effective check-and-balance mechanism of assessment its impact.

One of the most important innovations of President Bush’s administration, and surprisingly – less heralded, is the Millennium Challenge Account that is providing generous aid payments to newly emerged democracies on competitive basis and in function of performances in three key areas; a) implementation of the rule of law, b) investment into healthcare and education and c) promotion of economic freedom.

Georgia is one of a few countries from former Soviet block qualified for such a program. During last four years of Rose Revolution Georgia undoubtedly changed. The capital Tbilisi and even the most remote locations are illuminated, which is a novelty in Georgia’s almost two decades of transition. Everything that could be liberalized and privatized was. In spite of the Russian embargo on import of famous Georgian wines and agricultural products and double increase of Russia’s prices for natural gas and other

¹⁵ The Economist After bush. A Special Report on America and the World. March 29th 2008, pp. 6, 14.

energy recourses, Georgia's economy is booming with a robust almost two digits increase in GDP and foreign investment¹⁶. Georgia improved tremendously its position in the list of business friendly countries: from 112 in 2005 to 32 in the 2008 Index of Economic Freedom¹⁷.

In promoting democracy principles as a major component of American foreign policy in the former communist countries it is important to not overuse it "to lecture" partners, or to force them "to be like you". In geopolitics of 21st century this is just counterproductive, especially in the case of Russia even if this policy is pursuing with a noble intentions to "rescue" it from authoritarianism. The new Russia's President-elect Dmitry Medvedev in a recent interview speaking about Russia's democratic development said it would take 30-50 years to assess its results. He stressed that "the most difficult thing is to find the interrelationship between a universal nature of a democratic form and the national historical component". The priority of any of these components, in his opinion, is dangerous.¹⁸ The art of possible of diplomacy in this case is to engage Russia in a new strategic partnerships and cooperation in various areas, for example in creating a modern open collective security system. This would have positive multiplied effect on the other Newly Independent States, on the regional and international peace and security as a whole.

In conclusion I would like to emphasize the importance of "democratization" of diplomacy, which is the right way to increase its efficiency. Sir Harold Nicolson, the famous British diplomat in his book "Diplomacy" confessed that "democratic diplomacy has not yet discovered its own formula"¹⁹. Today, almost 70 years later, we, as well as other democracies, are still in search of this magic formula.

¹⁶ Russia bought almost 90% of Georgia's products, Georgia: Sliding towards authoritarianism? *International Crisis Group, Europe Report* N 189, 19 December 2007

¹⁷ The real key to Development, by Mary Anastasia O'Grady, *The Wall Street Journal*, 01.15.08

¹⁸ Dmitry Medvedev interview with Nicolai Svanidze, *Itar-Tass*, March 27, 2008

¹⁹ David D. Newsom. *Diplomacy and the American Democracy*, Indiana University Press, 1988, p.10.