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Leon T. Hadar

Journalist and foreign affairs analyst

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Welcome to the Post-Unipolar World: Great for US and for the Rest

The traditionally pro-Western Georgia has been strengthening its ties with Islamic Republic of Iran, according to a recent report in Newsweek. The author of the article titled, "Washington's new friendship with Moscow has one very clear casualty: Georgia," is blaming the efforts by the Obama Administration to "reset" the relationship with Moscow for what the magazine describes as the "Tbilisi-Tehran love-in."

So how did that happen? President Barack Obama has discarded his predecessor's campaign to promote pro-Western regimes in the former Soviet Union and to extend NATO membership to Georgia and Ukraine as part of a strategy to improve cooperation with Russia over nuclear cooperation, Iran sanctions, and missile defense, culminating in the June 24 "hamburger summit" in Virginia between Obama and Russian President Dmitri Medvedev.

But the U.S. détente with Moscow has made Georgia and its President Mikheil Saakashvili who had gone to war with the Russians in summer 2008 - a military confrontation that resulted in Russian occupation of Georgia's two breakaway republics, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. So it is not surprising, concludes Newsweek, that Tbilisi "is clearly hedging its bets by making new friends in the region," including with Iran and another rising Middle Eastern power, Turkey, whose own policies towards Tehran have been raising some eyebrows in Washington.

What the magazine seems to be implying is that Washington if Washington would have continued the policies of President George W. Bush - which were enthusiastically backed by Republican Presidential candidate John ("Today, we're all Georgians") McCain and his neoconservative advisors, Georgia would have remained exclusively committed to its alliance with Washington while refraining from flirting with Tehran and Ankara.

In fact, notwithstanding McCain's neo-Cold War rhetoric, the U.S. government has lacked either the power or the will to use military power to help Georgia recover Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a geo-strategic reality recognized even by President Bush who ended-up putting the efforts to bring Georgia (and Ukraine) into NATO on hold.

Overextended militarily in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere and trying to re-adjust to the post-

financial-meltdown erosion in its global economic power, the American people and their representatives are not in a mood to engage in a diplomatic and military confrontation with Russia over its territorial dispute with Georgia, an issue that has no major effect on core U.S. national interests.

Moreover, in the context of the evolving international system under which America is gradually losing its post-Cold War unipolar status, trying to reset U.S. relationship with Russia as part of an overall policy to improve ties with other rising global players, like China, India, Brazil and Turkey makes a lot of sense.

This is a cost-effective strategy that could help Washington win support from Russia for policies that actually strengthen U.S. national security and economic interests. At the same time, the fact that Georgia is also improving its ties with Iran and Turkey - and Russia -- should not be considered as "loss" for Washington. By establishing close economic ties with Iran and Turkey, Georgia is helping facilitate economic cooperation in the region that could lead to diplomatic collaboration and provide for more stability in the Caucasus and the Middle East.

Why should Washington be opposed to such a process that brings more economic prosperity and secure a regional stable balance of power? Georgia may or may not regain control of its lost territories, not unlike, say, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Serbia, etc. who seemed to have been able to cope with their territorial contraction. But the U.S. does not have the strategic interest or the moral obligation to change the new status-quo or for that matter, to invite Georgia to join NATO - remind me again why that organization still exists? - and commit American military power to provide that country with what would amount to disincentives for improving its relations with its close neighbors.

In a way, the collapse of the American-controlled unipolar system - and before that, the end of the bipolar system of the Cold War - should help us recognize that international relations have ceased to be a zero-sum-game under which gains of other global powers become by definition a loss for America, and vice versa. It was inevitable that former members of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Bloc like Ukraine, Poland, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia will try to stabilize their diplomatic and economic ties with Russia, while at the same time deterring powerful Russia by expanding cooperation with other players: Poland with Ukraine with Germany; Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia with Turkey and Iran, and all of these countries with the U.S and the European Union (EU).

Similarly, Washington should welcome - not discourage -- the growing diplomatic and economic role that Turkey is playing in the Middle East, which could help bring stability to Iraq (and allow for American military to start withdrawing from there), moderate the policies of Iran (and prevent a military conflict with the U.S.), encourage negotiations between Israel and Syria, and lead eventually to the creation of a more stable Middle East where Turkey, Iran, the Arabs states and Israel will be more secure and prosperous.

It is not surprising those representatives of economic and bureaucratic interests in Washington and some of America's client states that draw benefits from American interventionist policy operate under the axiom that the U.S. should always be prepared to "do something" to "resolve" this or that conflict, here, there, and everywhere. That kind of never-ending American interventionism only discourages regional powers, counting on Washington to come to their aid, from actually taking steps to resolve those conflicts that end-up drawing-in other regional and global players, ensuring that America will never leave Japan and Korea (to help contain China), Iraq (to deter Iran), Afghanistan (to deal with Pakistan). And that is exactly what the pro-interventionists in Washington want when they suggested that America is the "indispensable power."

In any case, the notion that American hegemony is a pre-condition for global peace and security and that Washington needs therefore to extend its military commitments in Europe, the Middle East, Caucasus, East Asia and elsewhere is not very practical - America does not

have the resources in order to play that ambitious role - and is not very helpful, considering the most recent U.S. experience in the Middle East. The U.S. should not retreat from the world. But by embracing a policy of constructive disengagement" from some parts of the world, America could help itself and the rest of the world.

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