

## **GUAM as a Regional and Security Organisation**

**Dr.Taras Kuzio**

**National Security and Foreign Policy of Azerbaijan conference,  
St Michael's College, University of Toronto, 28 March 2008.**

The regional organisation GUAM made up of four CIS countries – Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova – was established in 1997 and therefore recently completed its tenth anniversary. Uzbekistan, which joined GUAM in 1999 during NATO's fiftieth anniversary summit, suspended its membership three years later and eventually withdrew in 2005. A year later GUAM was transformed into the Organisation for Democratic and Economic Development (ODED) at its Kyiv summit.

The rise of GUAM was part of a gradual division of the CIS into two distinct groups of countries. The russophile group (Russia, Belarus, Armenia and most Central Asian states) supported close all-round ties with Russia and were members of the CIS Collective Security Treaty. The GUAM group of 4-5 countries distrusted Russian policies towards the CIS, opposed the transformation of the CIS into a supra-national organisation, preferred to see the CIS as only an economic and trade structure. GUAM states did not join the CIS Collective Security Treaty instead preferring to focus on cooperation and integration with the Trans-Atlantic community.

An important factor that united GUAM members was Russian-backed separatism. In three GUAM states – Azerbaijan, Moldova and Georgia – so-called

'frozen conflicts' had grown out of Russian-backed covert operations to support secessionist movements in the late Soviet era. These had remained frozen in favour of Russia and the separatists since the early 1990s. In two of the GUAM members – Moldova and Georgia – Russian troops continued to be illegally based despite agreements reached in OSCE forums for their withdrawal. Azerbaijan was worst place because its Upper Karabakh territory was annexed by neighbouring Armenia.

Although GUAM member Ukraine does not have a 'frozen conflict' it does have a Russian naval base and the Crimea continues to be the focus of Russian-inspired separatism. Although the Russian Black Sea Fleet is set to be withdrawn by 2017 Russia's reluctance to withdraw its forces from Moldova and Georgia suggests that Russia could also delay its removal from the Crimea.

While Russia has therefore aggressively campaigned against the independence of Kosovo it has itself supported separatism in the former USSR. Russia's response to Georgia's desire to join NATO has been to increase its support for the two separatist enclaves of Abkhazia and South Ossetia most of whose inhabitants have already been illegally given Russian citizenship.

Although the governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova have used 'aggression' and 'separatism' to describe the 'frozen conflicts' a better term would be state-sponsored terrorism. Although Russia has claimed to be an ally of the US in its Global War on Terror since the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US, in reality Russia is a state-sponsor of terrorism through separatism and murder of Russian citizens abroad.

The GUAM states have always prioritised integration and cooperation with the Trans-Atlantic community over political and security cooperation with Russia and the CIS. GUAM members have been active within NATO's Partnership for Peace, through individual security cooperation relationships with the US, and they have supported NATO enlargement.

A final area of cooperation within GUAM has been in the energy sector. All GUAM members understand the need to reduce reliance on Russian energy and find alternative sources of oil and gas. Since 2007 Georgia is supplied by Azerbaijani gas through the South Caucasus Gas Pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum. Efforts to build the Azerbaijani-Georgian supply of oil to Ukraine and Europe through the Odesa-Brody pipeline succumbed to political pressure and low EU interest under former President Leonid Kuchma. The reinvigorated Polish-Ukrainian alliance is likely to implement the Azerbaijani-Georgian oil pipeline to Ukraine and Europe.

GUAM has greater internal coherence than the CIS which over its 17 year existence has transformed into a glorified talking shop. There are far greater national interests that unite GUAM members than within the CIS. Belarus and Armenia, for example, have no interest in each other's national interests and each craves merely a bilateral security relationship with Russia.

The crucial dividing line between the CIS and GUAM lies in their outlooks. The Russophile CIS group is merely united on the basis of a joint past, rather than any future. GUAM countries, on the other hand, have no nostalgia for the Soviet past and look to a common Trans-Atlantic future.

Not everything is similar within the GUAM group. Georgia and Ukraine underwent democratic revolutions in 2003 and 2004 respectively. In Moldova and Azerbaijan the oppositions are relatively weak and such radical change is unlikely. In Georgia and Ukraine the Shevardnadze and Kuchma regimes were unpopular and the oppositions enjoyed broad support. In Moldova and Azerbaijan the Voronin and Aliiev governments are broadly popular while the oppositions are fractured, unpopular and weak.

Another area where GUAM members are diverse is over their foreign and security policy strategies. As a neutral state Moldova seeks EU, but not NATO, membership. Ukraine and Georgia see NATO membership as a stepping stone to membership in the EU. Azerbaijan supports a strong cooperative relationship with the US and NATO but does not seek NATO membership. Ukraine and Georgia entered NATO's Intensified Dialogue in 2005-2006, the precursor to Membership Action Programme (MAP). While not within Intensified Dialogue and currently not seeking a MAP, Azerbaijan has developed the NATO Planning and Review Programme through an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP).

The final communiqué at NATO's April 2008 Bucharest summit, 'welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO. Both nations have made valuable contributions to Alliance operations'. The communiqué continues in its support for both countries entrance into the MAP prior to which there will be a period of 'intensive engagement', 'We welcome the democratic reforms in Ukraine and Georgia

and look forward to free and fair parliamentary elections in Georgia in May. MAP is the next step for Ukraine and Georgia on their direct way to membership. Today we make clear that we support these countries' applications for MAP'.

The EU has devoted far less attention to the Trans-Caucasus than has NATO and the US. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was expanded to include the Trans-Caucasus in 2006 with Action Plans signed for individual countries the following year. Nevertheless, the EU has not offered any comparable policy to the post-conflict Trans-Caucasus as the EU did in developing Stabilisation and Accession Agreements for the former post-conflict Yugoslavia.

Of the GUAM members Azerbaijan's relationship to the Trans-Atlantic community is neither that of Georgia-Ukraine, who seek NATO membership, nor that of Armenia, which has been reluctant to develop its Partnership for Peace programme with NATO.

Policies over the last fifteen years to resolve the 'frozen conflicts' in Azerbaijan and Georgia have not brought results. If anything the separatist regimes have entrenched themselves deeper. There is a need to increase Western interest in the region, especially the interest of the US.

Azerbaijan has established a close security relationship with the US through NATO and the Global War on Terror. But, this is only aspect of what should be an all-embracing policy of engagement with the US in the region.

Two other areas that could dramatically expand US interest in Azerbaijan would be for it to move to Ukraine and Georgia's position on seeking NATO membership. NATO's Special Representative to the South Caucasus, Robert Simmons, has stated that NATO would welcome such a step by Azerbaijan.

A second step to encourage greater US interest in Azerbaijan would be the issue of democratization. A democratizing Azerbaijan, located in an important geopolitical crossroads, and encouraged in its evolution by US and Turkish allies, would become an important ally of the US and the EU in promoting democracy in the Greater Middle East.

At a time of growing Russian assertiveness and Moscow's continued state-sponsored support for terrorism in GUAM members, the organization continues to have an importance in promoting the national interests of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova.