

**ACTORS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS:  
STABILITY PROVIDERS OR INSTABILITY EXPLOITERS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **ACTORS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS: STABILITY PROVIDERS OR INSTABILITY EXPLOITERS**

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This thesis analyses the developments in the South Caucasus region since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The disintegration brought about the declaration of independence from the states in the region, namely Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. However, the conflicts in the aftermath of independence drawing the region into instability brought about the question of whether the instability in the region is an end result of the policies of regional actors in the region. Whether the stability in the South Caucasus is directly bound to the constructive policies of the main actors? Whether actors act as stability providers or instability exploiters in the region? Are the actors especially since 9/11 Russia and the United States while expressing intentions on regional stability, with their differing interests acts as instability exploiters? In fact, these questions stems from the dilemma of discourse and commitment.

Key Words: Regional Security, Stability, South Caucasus, Russia, the United States

## ÖZ

### GÜNEY KAFKASYA'DA AKTÖRLER: İSTİKRAR SAĞLAYAN VEYA İSTİKRARSIZLIK TÜKETEN

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Bu çalışma, Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra Güney Kafkasya Bölgesi'ndeki gelişmeleri incelemektedir. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılması bölge ülkeleri olan Azerbaycan, Gürcistan ve Ermenistan'ın bağımsızlıklarını ilan etmeleri sonucunu da beraberinde getirmiştir. Fakat bağımsızlık sonrası dönemde bölgede meydana gelen çatışmalar bölgedeki istikrarsızlığın aktörlerin politikalarının bir sonucu mu olduğu sorusunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Güney Kafkasya'daki istikrarın aktörlerin yapıcı politikalarına mı bağlıdır? Aktörlerin bölgede istikrar sağlayıcı veya istikrarsızlık tüketici olarak mı davranmaktadırlar? Aktörlerin ve özellikle 11 Eylül sonrasında Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin ve Rusya Federasyonu'nun bölgesel istikrar yönündeki niyetlerini dile getirirken farklılaşan çıkarlarıyla istikrarsızlık tüketen mi oldukları? Bütün bu sorunlar, özünde, söylem ve icraat ikileminden ortaya çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bölgesel Güvenlik, İstikrar, Güney Kafkasya, Rusya, A.B.D.,

To My Family

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The dissolution of the Soviet Union brought about the transformation of international geopolitical order leading to growing significance of regions which is accepted as the result of sudden withdrawal of Russian overarching authority from the former Soviet republics. In other words, the disintegration resulted in overall shift of the power balance in post-Soviet space and collapse of regional order. ‘Power vacuum’ that was accepted emerged in the post-Soviet space and particularly in the South Caucasus paved the way of re-emergence of deep grievances, ethnic and territorial disputes that was ‘frozen’ by Soviet authorities. Coupled with the dramatic decline in economic production and inevitable poverty, identity crisis leaving these newly independent states weak in their state-building and nation-building processes hampered the stability in the South Caucasus leading to call the region together with the term of instability.

The shift in power balance in the region with the withdrawal of Russian authority brought about growing attention and interests of the regional actors as well. Actors in the region generally express their anxieties on possible spill over of instability to neighboring regions and eventually promote regional order and stability. However, their policies to further their own interests raise the question whether in fact they act as the stability providers or instability exploiters to further their own interests.

In fact this question forms the main idea of this study which analyses the policies of actors particularly Russia and the United States, their policies and perceptions of the region and explores whether their policies with the disguise of stability and security they act as instability exploiters in the region. At this point it should also be noted that though Iran, Turkey and EU is not argued in separate chapters their policies is not downgraded and taken into account in following chapters. The reason behind to argue the policies of Russia and the US, the

assumption that the 9/11 events and the ‘war on terrorism’ has changed the international order giving them relatively high profile policies in the South Caucasus.

In short, this study is trying to answer the question of whether the actors in the South Caucasus act as stability providers or instability exploiters and argues that the stability depends on the policies of extra-regional actors. In other words, to what extent the (in)stability in the region is bounded up with the policies of the main actors.

The existing literature handles the subject from two contending perspective. One perspective analyzes the existing situation centering their arguments on the conflicts themselves and to the state-building process of the states of the region. The explanation and understanding of existing conflicts and instability is accepted as not complete with the analysis of external factors. Accordingly, the conflicts are rooted in the relations between the concerned peoples, not on the actions of regional actors. Moreover, the existing instability leads to the creation of alignments and prepares the environment for penetration of extra-regional actors. In other words, the instability is examined through a closer look to the individual states which are in their transition and state-building process.

Second perspective accepts the existing conflicts as a direct result of destabilizing policies of great powers, or regional actors on the differences of the region for their particular interests and for their rush to create sphere of influence. In other words the power politics among regional actors is widely accepted as the troublemaker. Accordingly the reconciliation of policies of regional actors is accepted as a precondition for a long lasting peace and stability.

In this context, the first chapter of this study is dedicated to draw a conceptual framework and to define basic dynamic of security environment of the region. The growing importance of regions and regional analysis led to start with the ‘level of analysis’ problem and incorporation of regional approach which is based on the formulation of Barry Buzan’s ‘regional security complex’ theory. The need to apply this theory stemmed from the requirement to grab the regional dynamics to properly understand what actually actors do in South Caucasus. This theory also explains why the policies of Russia and the US as actors are more significant than the other regional actors. In accordance with level of analysis the concept of ‘stability’ at the

regional level also discussed in proceeding parts in order to draw by the concepts of stability and instability what this study refers. Lastly the ‘sustainability of stability,’ in other words continuity and change in a regional security complex whether existing relative or fragile stability is sustainable and to which factors – internal and external – does the stability is bounded with. The question is how far actors in the region have the capability to alter the security dynamics and stability.

The second part of the first chapter is deemed to overview security environment in the South Caucasus and regional characteristics as well. In the South Caucasus one can clearly observe two regional alignments forming two axes one of which is called ‘north-south’ axis composing of Russia, Armenia and Iran; ‘east-west’ axis composing of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia which gained relative supremacy with the support of the US and pro-Western in nature. Moreover, the relevance as analytical tools the concepts of ‘Eurasia,’ the ‘New Great Game,’ and ‘Greater Middle East’ is overviewed. The role of international organizations to institutionalize cooperation to overcome regional differences also analyzed, if not international organizations act as a tool to ‘institutionalize differences.’ Regional characteristics that contribute to understand regional dynamics namely, Soviet legacy, weak state structures, state-building processes, identity crisis, religion and personalism also mentioned.

Second chapter explores the security perceptions of three states of the region – Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. How their statehood hampered by inter-state and intra-state conflicts and how their security perceptions evolved with differing geoeconomic and geopolitical factors is analyzed. Mostly, the foreign policy directions, the perception of Russia by the three states and their will to seek security with differing means are the content of this chapter. In fact, the second chapter facilitates to understand regional dynamics more properly and to avoid false analysis by merely regarding Russia in a weakened position away from capable to alter the stability of these states.

In fact, after these two background chapters, the remaining two chapters deal with more empirical and analytical developments in the region. Russia’s policies in the South Caucasus after the disintegration is the subject of third chapter which centered around the question whether the Transcaucasian track of Russian foreign

and security policy performed an active engagement with neo-imperialistic ambitions or Russia's policies has been formulated on legitimate interests and performed constructivist engagement. The shifts between these two types of engagement strategies and profile of Russian policy is closely related with both internal developments where identity fluctuations hampered a well-formulated policy and external factors ranging from energy resources of the region and overall international conditions that was underlined after 9/11 and subsequent 'war on terrorism' brought about the need to examine evolution of Russian foreign policy. This facilitated to understand changing dynamics of Russian foreign policy particularly with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The fourth chapter deals with the United States' South Caucasian policy which evolved from initial ignorance and 'Russia first' policy into strategic engagement in time. The reasons behind the policy switch that the Caspian energy resources played significant role but the war in Chechnya increased the effectiveness of implementation. But the question of this chapter explores how the policies of the US and its strategic engagement is perceived in Moscow and how far Moscow would remain patient with Washington's policies and activities that the 9/11 and 'war on terrorism' acted as a new impetus in strategic engagement of the US at the expense of Moscow. Given the latest developments started with the events in Pankisi Gorge and lately events that resulted with resignation of the Georgia's President Edward Shevardnadze and election with Mikhail Saakashvili as the new President of Georgia points out the changing dynamics in Georgia and in the South Caucasus.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

#### 2.1. Conceptual Framework

##### 2.1.1. The Level of Analysis and Regional Security Complex

The study of international relations theory traditionally handled the issue of level of analysis from two levels; the micro level and the macro level<sup>1</sup>, depending on the formulation of the J.D. Singer. In other words, the level of analysis problem has operated on unit level –state- and system level. However, this formulation of level of analysis, mostly reflecting the global conditions of Cold War period, is deemed not responding the requirements of contemporary international system where apart from states and system, regions also gained a significance in effecting the international system. This regionalized character of international relations brings about a more intense correlation between the states of subsystems than their interrelation with the system. These interdependencies between local states and regional actors lead to locate them in a coherent analytical framework. So the regional level of analysis, as an analytical interface, facilitates to locate the actors, referent objects and to comprehend the local dynamics of interaction that operate in the realm of security.<sup>2</sup> As far as the analytical framework is concerned, the expectations and requirements needed to be fulfilled from were laid down as the power of explanation, description and prediction,<sup>3</sup> thus, levels can be seen as ‘locations where both outcomes and sources of explanation can be located.’<sup>4</sup> In other words, unless the regional level is

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<sup>1</sup> J. David. Singer, “The Level of Analysis Problem in International Relations” in J.N.Rosenau (ed.) International Politics and Foreign Policy, New York:The Free Press, 1969, p.20

<sup>2</sup> Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, “Security: A New Framework for Analysis”, Colorado-London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, p.5

<sup>3</sup> J.D. Singer, op cit, p.22

<sup>4</sup> Barry Buzan et al., op cit.

properly understood, neither the position of local states in relation to each other, nor the character of relations between the great powers and local states, can be analyzed properly.<sup>5</sup>

In this respect, the definition of a region gains importance before reaching a thorough understanding of regional dynamics. Barry Buzan, defines region in security terms as, “a distinct and significant subsystem of security relations exists among a set of states whose fate is that they have locked into geographical proximity with each other.”<sup>6</sup>

This definition of a region which points out the security relations among states, or in other words the security interdependence within certain geographical area bring about the question of the formation of the region. But it should be noted that apart from the geographical proximity, the formation can be thought as an end result of the processes of both integration and competition.

Though traditionally, the regional sub-system idea is relevant to the security analysis in European context, the dynamics of the system analyzed on the balance of power. However, in defining regional security Barry Buzan argues that apart from power relations, the patterns of amity/enmity processes which help to understand the dynamics that could not be answered through simply analyzing the distribution of power should be added.<sup>7</sup> This requirement stems from the susceptibility of balance of power which was clarified in Buzan’s words, “Although local balances of power do operate, and are significant feature of the security environment, they can be easily upset or distorted by movements in the globe-spanning resources of the great powers”<sup>8</sup>.

Another point that was made by Buzan in his work was the introduction of the concept of ‘regional security complex’ defined as “...a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another.”<sup>9</sup> Then the

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<sup>5</sup> Barry Buzan, “People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era”, NY-London: Wheatsheaf, 1991, p.188

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.189-190

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.188

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.190

question is how to discern a security complex at the regional level. According to Buzan, the task "...involves making judgments about the relative strengths of security interdependencies among different countries."<sup>10</sup> The security interdependence that forms the security complex on the one hand might be in varying strength on the other hand, it might be positive or negative as well. In other words, the boundaries of a security complex can be identified regarding the security interactions and interdependencies; where there are few or no one can not alienate a security complex from one another.<sup>11</sup>

Given the security relations and interdependence in the South Caucasus, the three states in the region which are in their transition periods to overcome the deeply entrenched legacies of the Soviet Union, perceive their security in an environment where neighboring states are much bigger and much powerful. Surrounding regional powers, Russia, Iran and Turkey, particularly for Azerbaijan and Georgia and their attitudes toward Russia is dominated by the struggle to preserve territorial integrity and independence; and for Armenia, Turkey is perceived within the context of so-called historical antagonism. In other words, though the constituting states of the South Caucasus have differing threat perceptions posed by differing regional powers, their ability to deal with security threats is limited.

The South Caucasus regional security complex includes minor states and as Buzan pointed out that, "their own securities are intimately bound up in the pattern of the larger state by virtue of the impact of their alignments on relation among the larger states."<sup>12</sup> They have little impact on the essential structure of security complex. And the only way to counterweigh the perceived threat is through making regional alignments with the major states, regional powers, of the subsystem. This type of regional alignments brought about a lower-level and higher-level security complex.<sup>13</sup> In the context of the South Caucasus, Armenian alignment with Russia and indirectly with Iran as constituting the north-south axis; Azerbaijan and Georgian

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.192

<sup>11</sup> Svante Cornell, "Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus", Richmond: RIIA, Curzon Press, 2001, p.23.

<sup>12</sup> Barry Buzan, op.cit., p.195

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.195



alignment with Turkey, bring about on the one hand the complex interactions in the region, and on the other hand lays down higher-level of the security complex.

At the higher-level, if the policies of the extra-regional powers are strong enough to suppress the normal operation of local security dynamics than this condition is defined by Buzan as *overlay*<sup>14</sup> and Buzan also points out the distinction between intervention and overlay; while the former one reinforces the security dynamics the latter subordinates them to higher-level.<sup>15</sup> Hence in the context of South Caucasus, the presence of regional powers and extra-regional actors, such as the US, the local security dynamics should be analyzed from the point of distinction between overlay and intervention. The growing presence of the US in the region and interests of regional powers to secure at least energy exports from the region can be considered as the condition of overlay; however, in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and ‘Russia first’ policy of the West gave Russia a free hand for intervention in the regional security dynamics that ended up with ethnic conflicts. As far as the stability is concerned, given either the weakness of the newly independent states or the interests of the regional actors in the region, security and stability in the region is tight with the policies of the regional actors.

### 2.1.2. The Concept of Stability

In accordance with the level of analysis formulation the concept of stability also can be handled through from differing perspectives. Given the traditional conceptualization of level of analysis, the stability is defined at the system level as “the probability that the system retains all of its essential characteristics; that no single nation becomes dominant; that most of its members continue to survive; and that large-scale war does not occur.”<sup>16</sup> Or from the unit level stability defined as the “probability of continued political independence and territorial integrity of states

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.198

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Karl W Deutsch and J. David Singer, “Multipolar Power Systems and International Stability”, World Politics, Vol.16, No.3 (April 1964), pp.390-406 cited by Enver Begir Hasani, “Self-Determination, Territorial Integrity and International Stability: the Case of Yugoslavia”, Ph.D. Dissertation, Dept of International Relations, Bilkent University, Ankara, July 2001, p.5

without any significant probability of engaging in a war for survival.”<sup>17</sup> As it seen the stability is considered to be an end result of interactions of state behaviors. However, this type of formulation of stability focusing on the states and interactions among them reflects the conditions of Cold War period where the bipolar nature of international system presents overlay on the security relations among constituting actor of the existing system.

In post-Cold War conditions where the globalization and interdependence became more intense and non-state entities gained significance in international relations, the concept of stability should not be taken simply as an end result of power politics.<sup>18</sup> On the contrary, given the security environment in the South Caucasus, the instability in the region is the result of manipulation of differences, mainly the ethnicity and in accordance nationalism. In other words, the non-state entities, ethnic, religious and political groups play significant role in security and stability in the region.

Therefore, the conception of stability that was defined by Karl Deutsch and David Singer is lacking from two facets with regarding the dynamics of the South Caucasus. First one is the exclusion of non-state entities as a potential source of instability. And the second one, with regarding the level of analysis, stability is considered without taking into account regional dynamics, hence, the regional level of analysis. But the common attribute regarding these two aspects of stability is their inclusion to international relations particularly in the post-Cold War period. In other words, the aforementioned conception of stability reflects the Cold War conditions where the systemic level dynamics overplayed the state and regional level dynamics and where in each pole or sphere of influence the superpower played the role of sole arbitrator.

However, the changing climate of post-Cold War era with increasing effects of globalization<sup>19</sup> a new logic of anarchy ushered in focusing not only on interstate relations but also on the internal dynamics of the existing sovereign states. The effectiveness and growing significance of these non-state entities to a degree

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Enver Begir Hasani, op.cit.,p.17

<sup>19</sup> In terms of the effects of globalization and fragmentation on the region see Alexander Rondeli, “Forces of Fragmentation in the South Caucasus”, Insight Turkey, 2/3, 2000.

threatening stability in the region is either closely related with the external support and manipulation. The case in the South Caucasus should be thought under these circumstances as in history, otherwise, non-state factors that contribute destabilization of the region would not reach being a factor threatening overall security and stability of the region.

The external manipulation to gain leverage in order to prevent the domination of opposing states or group of states led to support of these non-state entities to advance their own interest at the expense of regional stability. These types of balance of power policies proved to be counterproductive at the regional level as in the case of South Caucasus, and contribute further fragmentation of the region. In other words, the end result brought about the internationalization of regional crises and as much as the internationalization enhance the spill over probability increase with positive correlation.

On the other hand, apart from fragmentation, the positive effect of globalization primarily in terms of growing economic interdependence is considered to bring about the positive initiatives to cooperate among the states in the South Caucasus. As argued by Micheal Emerson, the stability in the south Caucasus can be obtained through fostering a paradigm shift from *realpolitik* to cooperation and integration based on norms.<sup>20</sup> But the substance of the existing divisions and conflicts should not be pre-negotiated.<sup>21</sup>

Contemporarily, the existing internal divisions within and among states hamper further cooperation and stabilization. Furthermore, the inability to formulate common interests by regional actors in the region, contributes fragile stability and inability to analyze the regional dynamics without reference to policies of the regional actors.

So, the task is to identify, by taking into account the post-Cold War dynamics and produce a regional level conception of stability. At the regional level, within the context of regional security complex theory, the stability at the regional level will be a middle ground compared to system and unit level definitions. Either it will include some common features of them which are the survival of units and system without

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<sup>20</sup> Micheal Emerson, "A Stability pact for the Caucasus", *Insight Turkey*, 2/3, 2000, p.25

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29

any threat or crisis and war disturbing the existing functioning of states. So, we can by taking into account these definitions and by accepting a region as a subsystem – a part of a larger system with its own characteristics – , we can define regional stability as, formation of a regional identity that fosters cooperation among member states; no single regional power or a nation becomes dominant overall interaction of region; the survival of states without any threat to their territorial integrity and political independence; and the preservation of regional security without any threat posed by one or by group of aligned states to the existing regional security system.

### **2.1.3. Sustainability of Stability: Continuity and Change in a Security Complex**

The other question that should be clarified in order to fulfill the conceptual basis of this thesis is to clarify sustainability of stability. The question is closely related with one of the basic debates of international relations theory which is analyzing the continuity and change. But this question can be answered both by taking into account the current situation, frozen conflicts and/or by taking into account the possible settlement of these conflicts by reaching binding agreements between the parties. But given the contemporary situation in the South Caucasus and for the structural coherence of this work, the sustainability of stability will be analyzed with relevance to the contemporary conditions, sustainability of frozen conflicts<sup>22</sup> or fragile stability.

The reason behind the need to clarify the concept of sustainability of stability stems from the question how long the prevailing conditions could be sustained. Actually the frozen conflicts or frozen instability rest on the fragile alignments depending on the balance of power politics. However, the sustainability of frozen instability is not believed to be endured for a long time. The risk of seeking a solution by Azerbaijan on the question of Nagorna Karabakh through military means is acknowledged, as the revenue of energy exports is channeled to modernize the

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<sup>22</sup> The term ‘frozen conflict’ was used to illustrate the current situation in the region where none of the conflicts occurred between 1988-1994 reached a political solution, but merely frozen along cease-fire lines.

armed forces.<sup>23</sup> Besides, the possible installation of a pro-Russian government in Georgia though contemporary internal political landscape seems more stabilized with the elections of a new President, the comments before and after resignation of Shevardnadze highlights the susceptibility of the Caucasian States and stability.

The theoretical debates on the notion of change simply focus on the observation of the significant consequences,<sup>24</sup> accepted as the result of causes. On the other hand, the interacting units may not create significant consequences but slight fluctuations in their interaction, for example the evolution of amity enmity processes, may accumulate in certain period which can give the chance to grab the trends. The distinction on the significance of change was also made by Gilpin, pointing out that apart from revolutionary change – systems change –, the interaction change between the units may create an incremental change and can be regarded as the preliminary steps of the change at the system level.<sup>25</sup>

However, the debates on change also points out the need to measure it, and scholars stress the need to have benchmarks in order to understand what was changed. The security complexes defined by Barry Buzan as the sub-systems having their own structures and he argues that the structure or the security complexes may endure for a long time though the changes takes place within and around.<sup>26</sup> In the South Caucasian context, the mood of conflicts remained effectively frozen after 1994 though changes such as the elections of new presidents and the increasing significance of the Azerbaijan in international community, took place within the units of the complex. Therefore,

One can use the idea of *essential structure* as a standard by which to measure significant change in a security complex. The two key components of essential

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<sup>23</sup> The point was made with reference to interviews with Azerbaijani officials by Svante Cornell, “The Caucasian States and Eurasian Strategic Alignments”, *Marco Polo Magazine*, No.1, 1999, available online at <<http://www.geocities.com/svantec/geop1.html>>, accessed on March 13, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> K.J. Holsti, “The Problem of Change in International Relations Theory”, Institute of International Relations: The University of British Columbia, Working Paper.26, Dec.1998 and Barry Buzan, *op cit.*, p.209.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Gilpin, “War and Change in World Politics”, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp.39-44

<sup>26</sup> Barry Buzan, *op cit.*, p.209

structure in a security complex are first, the patterns of amity and enmity and secondly, the distribution of power among the principal states.<sup>27</sup>

In a regional security complex, given the relatively enduring amity/enmity processes, any possible change might be observed through the distribution of power. But unlike system level, shifts in distribution of power might take place either by external or internal reasons.<sup>28</sup> In either ways the rapid changes in a security complex might result in potential crises or conflict.<sup>29</sup> The internal power shifts can occur in different ways for instance the disintegration of a unit, for South Caucasian context Georgia is more susceptible relative to Azerbaijan and Armenia, might effect the overall security environment in the complex. Apart from disintegration the uneven or relative growth and development of a unit might alter the distribution of power, as mentioned above the relative development of Azerbaijan and growing significance and respect in the international community might alter the power distribution. Consequently, the sustainability of stability – frozen instability – might lead to renewed cycle of instability and conflict.

Similar with internal ways the external powers and reasons might alter the distribution of power. Buzan lays down two ways on the external oriented cause in change, “either by joining it, if they are adjacent, or by making alignments within it, whether they are either adjacent and or members of a higher-level complex.”<sup>30</sup> In the South Caucasian context, the presence of regional actors, Russia, Iran, Turkey though extra-regional power the presence of the United States and their alignments with states of the region led to regional balance of power. Before 1997, the year the shifts in US policy took place and in accordance the imposition of cease-fires on conflicts have led to some kind of *overlay* in regional dynamics. The growing positive mood between US and Russia particularly after 9/11 and imposition their presence in the region have contributed to overlay. In the aftermath of disintegration of Soviet Union, Russia’s policies in the region based on traditional ‘divide and empire’ mindset and United States’ ‘Russia first’ policy gave a free hand on Russia

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.211

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Alexander Rondeli, “The Forces of Fragmentation...”, op.cit., 2/3, 2000, p.75

<sup>30</sup> Barry Buzan, op.cit., p. 212

to alter the distribution of power leading to conflicts. However, Bruno Coppieters argues with reference to Barry Buzan that

The policy of '*divide et impera*' can be explained as consequence of the inability of external players to change the pattern of local hostilities. They only may influence the distribution of power between conflicting parties.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, Russia's efforts to mediate between conflicting parties and to manipulate them can be regarded as Russia's tacit approval of her inability to alter existing arrangements between local groups and local security dynamics in the region.<sup>32</sup> Actually, the essential structure of the South Caucasian regional security complex composed of weak states in the inner group is vulnerable to external effects of much stronger regional actors surrounding the region and constituting the higher-level or outer group of the security complex. Therefore, the stability and instability in the region, the mood of structure, depends much on external factors. The domination of external factors on internal factors makes the durability of essential structure hostage to continued involvement of regional actors whose main interests exist out of the sub-system.<sup>33</sup> Since then, the continuity of the essential structure laden with diverse interests of states of the region and their frozen conflicts, in short the stability seems to be bounded to policies of regional actors.

## **2.2. The Security Environment and Regional Characteristics**

### **2.2.1. Security Environment in the South Caucasus**

The security environment in the South Caucasus is closely related with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Immediately after, international factors began to play significant role in the region where, until date the region was Soviet territory. However, the sudden dissolution has transformed this region from a periphery of an empire to one of the focal points of the Eurasian landmass.<sup>34</sup> This points out that the

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<sup>31</sup> Bruno Coppieters (ed.), "Contested Borders in the Caucasus", Brussels: Vubpress, 1996, p.202.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.202

<sup>33</sup> Barry Buzan, op cit., p.216

<sup>34</sup> Alexander Rondeli, "The Reflections of Globalization on the Security and Strategies of the Caucasus", in the proceedings of the First International Symposium on "Globalization and

major strategic dilemmas shifted from Europe to Asia.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore the dramatic changes in the international system have put the newly independent states of South Caucasus into geopolitical calculations of great powers. In a larger context, Eurasia, the significance and geopolitical importance of the region was argued by Brzezinski, in his book, *The Grand Chessboard*.

The significance of the region stems from several factors ranging from geopolitical location of the region bridging the Central Asia with the Europe to energy deposits. On the other hand, “[t]he Eurasian territories is the only frontier zones where to rebuild some kind of empire, where the western parts and territories are somehow stabilized by treaties.”<sup>36</sup> The disintegration of the Soviet Union had left behind geopolitical vacuums particularly in southern flank, Central Asia and South Caucasus. These two regions also experienced several conflicts and inter-communal tensions in the aftermath of independence constituting a ‘zone of instability.’<sup>37</sup>

The instable nature of the region stems from the legacies deeply entrenched to the region and challenges faced by the newly independent states in their transition periods. An important observer and analyst point out that in an unfamiliar security environment and security interdependence, the South Caucasian states understood that their lacking ability in formulation of their security priorities, interests and strategies with their own means, and recognized that their security can only provided by external support.<sup>38</sup> The need for external support for providing security brought about in turn the internationalization of security interaction and paved the way for emergence of regional alignments. But the point that the internationalization of security might have negative effects such as consuming security or exploiting instability. In other words, at the regional level the commitment of regional actors can bring about the dilemma of stability providers or instability exploiters.

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International Security”, The Turkish General Staff Military History and Strategic Studies Directorate (SAREM), Ankara: The Turkish General Staff Printing House, 2003, p.231.

<sup>35</sup> Fiona Hill, “Seismic Shifts in Eurasia. The Changing Relationship between Turkey and Russia and its Implications for the South Caucasus”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 3/3, Sept. 2003, p.56

<sup>36</sup> P. Micheal Wihbey, “The Southern Eurasian Great Game”, *Insight Turkey*, 2/3, 2000, p.47

<sup>37</sup> The concept of ‘zone of instability’ was used by Zbigniew Brzezinski to illustrate the conflictual nature of former Soviet part of Eurasia. Zbigniew Brzezinski, “*The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geopolitical Imperatives*”, NY: Basic Books, 1997, p.124

<sup>38</sup> Alexander Rondeli, “The Reflections of Globalization .....”, *op cit.*, pp.231-232



So, the question is how the regional actors with the discourse of stability might be a cause for destabilization. This question can be answered with broadly as differing perceptions of the region. Indeed, regional actors conceive the region depending on differing cultural and even civilizational definitions.<sup>39</sup> Russia by being ex-hegemon perceive the region as containing its vital interests which conceptualized with the term of 'near abroad'. The presence of Turkish speaking communities and with their cultural and ethnic affiliation Turkey's perception and policies reflects the conceptualization of 'Turkic Community'. Iran, by being an important actor in the region with its geopolitical location conceives the region within religious context and 'New Middle East' concept consisting of Caucasus and Central Asia apart from traditional Middle East. On the other hand, though is not a part of the region but as an important player, the United States perceives the region within the context of 'Eurasia' and lately discussed concept of 'Greater Middle East.'<sup>40</sup>

What is important is that these various definition and conceptions of the region highlights the significance of incompatibility between regional actors and regional identity for the dynamics of ethnic conflicts.<sup>41</sup> Actually the mood of above mentioned conceptualizations based on differing perceptions changing with one another in accordance with the interests of regional actors. However, it should also be noted that all, to a lesser degree the concept of Eurasia, has changed with considerable extent as taking into account the perceptions of other regional actors. For instance the mood of Turkish perception and conceptualization of the region rather than based on solely Pan-Turkism, with the increasing commercial interdependence takes into account the Russian interests when formulating policy goals; and in the case of Iranian 'New Middle East' concept, which have not found

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<sup>39</sup> Bruno Coppieters, "A Regional Security System for the Caucasus", Brainstorming Conference: The Future of the Caucasus after the Second Chechnya Conflict, 27-28 January 2000, Brussels: CEPS.

<sup>40</sup> The 'Greater Middle East' concept is accepted as the new arc of crises and composed of the five groups of states: 1. The countries of the traditional Middle East region, incorporating the Arab countries of North Africa and the Arabian peninsular as well as the fledgling state of Palestine; 2. the Turkish language countries: Turkey, Azerbaijan and four states of ex-USSR Central Asian republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan; 3. the Persian language grouping of Iran, Tajikistan and Northern Afghanistan; 4. Armenia and Georgia, which are situated in the South Caucasus together with Azerbaijan, but stand apart from the Muslim World as Christian countries, both of which have ancient cultures and their own languages. However, via their specific location and historic connections with the surrounding countries, they are part of the region by default, and finally the state of Israel.

<sup>41</sup> Bruno Coppieters (ed.), "Contested...", op cit., p.193

any consent from the international community and coupled with existing tensions with the US, though it has overarching definition with the newly debated 'Greater Middle East' concept, contemporarily the former one has no significance. Though such modifications in the interests of regional actors have taken place, as argued by Bruno Coppieters, has not superseded the incompatibilities between regional actors.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, the differing interests of the regional actors have furthermore brought about the debates of the 'New Great Game' pointing out the renewed version of the Great Game of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the applicability and validity of the 'Great Game' concept to understand the dynamics of Eurasia, Matthew Edwards compare two versions of concept in terms of location, actors, aims, means and scope. The original version of the concept, the 'Great Game', refers to competition for influence whether at political, economic or cultural levels.<sup>43</sup> After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, leaving behind vast territories with newly independent and weak states possessing considerable energy resources have led to interpretations of possible penetration to create some kind of sphere of influences on that 'geopolitical vacuum'. Particularly the reassertion of Russian influence in the region considered as the revival of the Russian power. For the Turkish and Iranian influence, the former with its cultural affinity with the republics of the region and the latter by selling abroad Islamic identity as a substitute to Soviet identity that have already considerable Muslim population have led to debates of a renewed Great Game.

However, the internal dynamics of regional actors and growing interdependence between them caused their penetration to be weak compared to considered competence. Furthermore, the changing mood, in international relations after 9/11 attacks, the mood of relations between the actors has changed considerably as well. Hence, American led 'war on terrorism' brought about reconciliation of policies particularly of the US and Russia. This in turn brought about the need to clarify the debates on the New Great Game.

Firstly, it should be underlined that the new version of Great Game concept compared to the original one has more complex nature and hence, is far-reaching

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.194

<sup>43</sup> Matthew Edwards, "The New Great Game and the New Great Gamers: Disciples of Kipling and Mackinder", *Central Asian Survey*, 22/1, 2003, p.85

concept. Despite the growing interdependence and role of economics in determining policies to the extent that geo-economics played more significant role than the role of geopolitics, some scholars argue that the relevance of geopolitics have not losing ground and geo-economics still takes a back seat.<sup>44</sup> But, on the other hand, Matthew Edwards argues that the events of 9/11 has changed the context that one cannot talk about the game, where even Russia is a part of war on terrorism.<sup>45</sup> In short, Russia and the United States no more define their interest and relations in this way.<sup>46</sup> Suffice to say that the concept of the New Great Game is misleading and used without any academic qualifications and reservations<sup>47</sup> despite the regional alignments still play significant role in determining regional balance of power.

So the dynamics in the region can be summarized as strategic regional alignments to prevent any of actors to create some kind of domination in Eurasia. The same goes within the context of South Caucasus where formation of two axes one of which called as ‘North-South’ axis composed of Russia, Armenia and Iran and the other one ‘East-West’ axis composed of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia which gained a relative supremacy with support of the West and particularly with the US. Another feature of these two alignments is while the former one pursues reactive foreign policy, the latter one prefers a pro-active foreign policy in the region.<sup>48</sup> Actually both the supremacy of pro-Western ‘East-West’ axis and its pro-active nature can be seen as a result of the West’s perception of its strategic and economic interests as complementing each other and harmonizing with the interests of the South Caucasian States.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Stephen Blank, “Every Shark East of Suez: Great Power Interests, Policies and Tactics in the Transcaspian Energy Wars”, Central Asian Survey, 18/2, 1999, p.179.

<sup>45</sup> Matthew Edwards, op cit., p.94

<sup>46</sup> Celeste A. Wallender, “Silk Road, Great Game or Soft Underbelly? The New US-Russia Relationship and Implications for Eurasia”, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 3/3, Sept. 2003, p.102

<sup>47</sup> Matthew Edwards, op cit., p.97

<sup>48</sup> Svante Cornell, “The Caucasian States and Eurasian Strategic Alignments”, op cit.,

<sup>49</sup> Edmund Herzig, “The New Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia”, London: RIIA, Pinter, 1999, p.115.

The regional alignments of South Caucasian states also succeed within the framework of the CIS namely the formation of the GUAM/GUUAM<sup>50</sup> – Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova – presents the diverging views and alignments. For Russian part, the formation of the CIS on the territory of former Soviet Union apart from the declaration of the end of the USSR was an organization to pursue its vital interests. But for the constituting states, the creation of the commonwealth was to be perceived as a mechanism of a civilized way of divorce. Russia while declaring its vital interest and further reintegration in its ‘near abroad’, newly independent states perceived the Russian efforts as the subordination to Russian national interests. And the GUUAM states resisted to any further strengthening of CIS at the expense of sovereignty of member states.<sup>51</sup> Another feature shared by the GUAM countries is the existence of separatist movements on their territories that managed to achieve de facto independence with deadlocked negotiations. As far as the common interest is at play, GUUAM was the platform to institutionalize cooperation<sup>52</sup> – without disturbing Russia – within the framework of CIS, whose interests perceived in “cooperative but not integrative commonwealth.”<sup>53</sup> In the South Caucasian context, as being members of GUUAM, Azerbaijan and Georgia are also on the opposite sides with Armenia in the CIS as in the case of regional alignments, the fact that, GUUAM can also be perceived as an instrument that institutionalize the differences in the region.

The cooperation between member states further deepened with the accession of Uzbekistan and eventual declaration of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan that they would not renew the Tashkent Treaty made it clear that the five states are seeking to improve military strategic cooperation independently both of Russia and

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<sup>50</sup> GUAM/GUUAM was formed by Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova. The four original states began to issue formal declarations and initiatives at the CFE Treaty Conference in Vienna in 1996. The first official document of the GUAM/GUUAM was signed by the member states at the summit of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on October 10, 1997. Uzbekistan accessed to organization on April 24, 1999 at the NATO/EAPC summit in Washington and the acronym was changed to GUUAM. For that matter before April 1999 the organization is cited as GUAM whereas after 1999 organization is cited as GUUAM.

<sup>51</sup> Anatol Lieven, “GUUAM: What Is It and What Is It For?” available online at, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav121800.shtml>>, accessed on 13 April 2004.

<sup>52</sup> Svante Cornell, “The Caucasian States and Eurasian Strategic Alignments”, *op cit.*,

<sup>53</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *op cit.*, p.147

CIS defense structures.<sup>54</sup> Azerbaijan's proposal to create GUUAM peacekeeping battalion – GUUAMBAT – under the UN aegis to avoid reliance in peacekeeping on Russia particularly in Georgia, and prospects for its participation in pipeline defense have been the main themes of their security agenda.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore their will to provide security in the region through Western mechanisms particularly with NATO have led the inclusion of battalion to NATO PfP program in the proposal and eventually, in geostrategic perspective, GUAM/GUUAM was deemed to be institutionalized within NATO through first a 16+4 then a 16+5 formula.<sup>56</sup>

Though Russian response towards GUUAM as warned by Igor Ivanov in September 1999 that Moscow will “draw the appropriate conclusions [if GUUAM] becomes explicitly military by nature”<sup>57</sup> is suspicious and hostile. But “Russia [is] not enough to impose its will”<sup>58</sup> on the constituting states or dissident states.

Despite international organizations generally viewed as the instruments to facilitate the proper grounds for dialogue between parties and to institutionalize cooperation and integration among them, GUUAM like organizations might also institutionalize the differences in the regional level. In the South Caucasus context, international organizations such as UN, OSCE, BSEC, NATO, Council of Europe, also viewed as the instruments to overcome differences<sup>59</sup> and to facilitate security dialogue among them.

However, for the South Caucasus states the ongoing balance of power politics and differing interests of the regional actors gave them a leverage to further their own interests and ambitions. These in turn further the complexity of relations in the region and create the deadlock for all parties involved. Actually the entanglement of regional actors to South Caucasus politics can be seen as result of their weakness and

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<sup>54</sup> Flemming Splidsboel-Hansen, “GUUAM and the Future of CIS Military Cooperation”, European Security, 9/4, Winter 2000, p.98

<sup>55</sup> Tamara Pataria and David Darchiashvili, “Security Regime Building in the South Caucasus”, in Graeme P. Herd and Jennifer D.P. Moroney (eds.), “Security Dynamics in the Former Soviet Bloc”, London: Routledge Curzon, 2003, p.160.

<sup>56</sup> Flemming Splidsboel-Hansen, op cit., p.99; The number of members of NATO has increased to 26 with the accession of Eastern European countries under the enlargement policy of the organization, hence the number given in the text reflects the mood and conditions of the time.

<sup>57</sup> RFE/RL, Newsline, 2 September 1999

<sup>58</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, op cit., p.114

<sup>59</sup> Bruno Coppieters “A Regional Security System...”, op cit.

their eventual quest to provide security and stability through more powerful regional actors which factor come affront as a persistent linkage between regional and international dynamics.<sup>60</sup> The situation performs stability dilemma that on the one hand presents some opportunities for the states to further their relative interests; but on the other hand hampers the possibilities for further cooperation and integration in the region.

The lack of cooperation and integration in the region, the instruments to facilitate as well brought about the deficiency of constraining factor on destabilizing potential. International organizations as mentioned above is deemed to facilitate cooperation at least on the fact that interests though competitive are not necessarily divergent. Certainly “none of the South Caucasus states are now interested in further destabilization; however, an accidental chain of events or external manipulation could lead to instability.”<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, differing priorities set by various actors in conducting policies on both bilateral and multilateral levels do not facilitate their cooperation if not lead competition.

Furthermore, the lack of cooperation and integration moreover brought about the securitization<sup>62</sup> of economics in the region where the economic inequality can be cited as one of the factors in front of stabilization of the region. Particularly the transition to market oriented economy from central planned economy created rapid decrease in GDP’s of successor states, and high rate inflation and unemployment as well. The policies that have being pursued in the aftermath of independence have not overcome poverty and dependency on Russia. Even the expectations of the people in the region have not satisfied and led to a growing resentment against the Western states and policies of great powers as noted by Thomas Goltz; “[p]eople have begun to yearn for the order and relative equality of the Communist period.”<sup>63</sup> To a lesser degree Azerbaijan, both Georgia and Armenia suffer from being economically deprived, the fact that vulnerability give a leverage to Russia on asserting her policies. As in the case of Georgia, the cut off energy and electrical supply was used

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<sup>60</sup> Edmund Herzig, op cit., p.3.

<sup>61</sup> Alexander Rondeli, “The Forces of Fragmentation...”, op cit., p.71

<sup>62</sup> On the concept of ‘Securitization’ see Barry Buzan et al., “Security...”, op cit., p.5.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Goltz, “Remembering a Winter of Discontent: Letter from the South Caucasus”, The Washington Quarterly, 23/3, 2000, pp. 69-76.

to enforce that country to formulate its policies in line with Russia. Azerbaijan by having energy deposits on its territory is seen as the least economically vulnerable to its northern neighbor and lucky to attract to international support to its policies. And the projects to transport Caspian basin energy to western markets is perceived also as the instruments to decrease vulnerability, to further economic cooperation in the region, if not for the strategic goals such as the diversification of energy transportation. Certainly the attracting energy resources in the region and the ongoing instability in the region gave a free hand for regional actors to assert their own policies, and interests and to get a foothold in the region. Nevertheless, for the South Caucasus states, the Western economic engagement and the EU-led projects of TRACECA<sup>64</sup> and INOGATE<sup>65</sup> is not seen sufficient to economic revival of the region.<sup>66</sup>

Apart from the EU-led projects, Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) – all the three South Caucasus states member of the organization – is also deemed to overcome the economic shortfalls and to create a common ground for cooperation which will contribute stability in the region.<sup>67</sup> But as in the CIS, the GUUAM organization is perceived as a sub-group of BSEC<sup>68</sup> and the regional interests of strong powers as members (Russia, Turkey, and Greece) often contradict each other, hampering the success of cooperative approaches.<sup>69</sup>

With regard to OSCE's contribution to regional cooperation among the South Caucasian states, the implementation of the principles of military-political treaties adopted in the framework of the OSCE may help to defuse the mistrust in the region. During the negotiations on the adaptation of CFE Treaty, the process brought about

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<sup>64</sup> TRACECA (Transportation Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia) formally ratified in 1998, encourages mutual cooperation between South Caucasus states in support of the development of transport arteries through the Caucasus. For more information see <[www.traceca.org](http://www.traceca.org)>.

<sup>65</sup> INOGATE (Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe) is designed to modernize energy infrastructure and develop multiple routes for energy exports. For more information see <[www.inogate.org](http://www.inogate.org)>

<sup>66</sup> Jurgen Schmidt, "The State and Perspectives for Economic Cooperation within the GUUAM Group", *Insight Turkey*, 3/4, 2001, p.122

<sup>67</sup> Alexander Rondeli, "The Reflections of Globalization .....", *op cit.*, p.246

<sup>68</sup> Winfried Schneider-Deters, "GUUAM: The Need for a Raison d'être", *Insight Turkey*, 3/4, 2001, p.115.

<sup>69</sup> Tamara Pataria and David Darchiashvili, *op cit.*, p.159

the formation of GUAM, and the negotiations ended up with beneficial to Azerbaijan and Georgia. In 1999 Istanbul summit, OSCE also managed to agree on monitoring and assessment of the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia. Despite the CFE negotiations paved the way for creation of GUAM/GUUAM it has, nevertheless, efficient tools and structures to contribute peace and stability in the region.<sup>70</sup>

In the framework of NATO/EAPC PfP program, all the South Caucasian states have been equally treated and given equal opportunities. A ‘Caucasian Working Group’ was created in the framework of the EAPC in 1999, which was supposed to facilitate the development of a common sub-regional cooperation policy. However, until 2002, Armenian armed forces had not participated the PfP activities and exercises whereas, Georgia and Azerbaijan extensively participated. Nonetheless, Armenia expressed greater interest that can be seen as a positive tendency. In short, NATO can provide the ground for security dialogue for the South Caucasus states. Principally, OSCE and NATO guarantee that the forms of stability building and military assistance in the region will be transparent and acceptable for all parties.<sup>71</sup>

The efforts put forward by international organizations in the region can be seen as the institutionalization of security dialogue which was argued by Bruno Coppieters as it would lead de-securitization of some political and economic issues.<sup>72</sup> But, suffice to say that differing priorities and interests of regional actors hampers the prospects for sustainable stability in the region, though international organizations provide common grounds to overcome differences. In other words, international organizations while on the one hand is dedicated to institutionalize the cooperation and dialogue, on the other hand, institutionalize the differences in the region, the fact that ended up with fragile stability.

### 2.2.2. Regional Characteristics

Another question that must be asked is what factors made the South Caucasus region vulnerable to external manipulation? The answer of this question has two

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp.161-163

<sup>72</sup> Bruno Coppieters, “A Regional Security...”, op cit.



interrelated faces; one of which it lays down the domestic roots of instability and the other, it reveals the characteristics of the region.

As far as the roots of conflicts in the South Caucasus is concerned, from differing point of departure in their analysis, observers argue that; the conflicts and instability in the region is primarily the by-products of imperial break-up of the former Soviet Union and subsequent state-building process,<sup>73</sup> where Svante Cornell argues with reference to Neil MacFarlane that, the region presents a structural instability consisting of several factors such as; the Soviet legacy and lack of political culture, economic inequality and decline, and lack of regional cooperation.<sup>74</sup> All of the arguments reveal that the sources of instability and accordingly regional characteristics are directly related with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the legacies of the past.

The roots of conflicts in the South Caucasus region as in other regions of former Soviet territory were planted during the Soviet era. The sudden dissolution in 1991 caught up the people of the region with ill prepared to independence and coming up dangers from long suppressed grievances which turned out to be intra-state and inter-state conflicts. Though more than decade passed as independent states, the unprecedented quest of adopting a new economic and political system and forging a new national identity still persist in South Caucasus as argued by Mohiaddin Mesbahi, the *structural dependence* and *interdependence* at all levels could not be overcome overnight.<sup>75</sup>

One of the important characteristic of the region contributing tensions within and among states is its ethnic diversity. Coupled with the national delimitation policies and nativization (*korenizatsiia*) process of 1920's to further the power of center and to diminish the actual power of autonomies,<sup>76</sup> ethnicity became as a destabilizing factor in the region. During this period the artificial distinctions cutting across the very similar peoples were created or reinforced. The reasoning behind the

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<sup>73</sup> Barnett R. Rubin and Jack Snyder (eds.), "Post Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State-Building", NY-London: Routledge, 1998, p.165

<sup>74</sup> Svante Cornell, "Small Nations and ...", op cit., pp.52-53

<sup>75</sup> Mohiaddin Mesbahi, "Russian Foreign Policy and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus", Central Asian Survey, 12/2, 1993, p.209

<sup>76</sup> Svante Cornell, "Small Nations and ...", op cit., pp.42-43

isolation of sub-groups was to prevent any probable rebellion against the Soviet state.<sup>77</sup> But, on the contrary, the awkwardly drawn territories and hierarchical ‘federal state structure’<sup>78</sup> brought about the emergence of deep grievances that erupted into conflicts even in the last years of the union. In other words, the autonomous status granted to minorities in union republics seems to have fuelled rather than diminishing minority demands from titular nations,<sup>79</sup> a factor that compared with Central Asia, where there were few autonomous regions, the occasions of ethnic conflicts is fewer than the Caucasus.

The process of nativization and national delimitation was also deemed to serve and facilitate a kind of overarching identity. In the case of Caucasus, the way to obliterate the differences is to introduce or impose another overarching identity that was fuelled by ideology instead of ethnic and religious identities. In other words, by melting ethnic identities and differences into what was called as ‘Homo Sovieticus’, the preservation of the union and socialist ideology to a degree assured. However, even before the dissolution, long suppressed grievances turned out to be conflicting identities.

Religion, particularly Islam was perceived as the strongest identity in front of the Soviet identity and rule and systematically suppressed. The role of religion as a factor affecting the mood and the course of the conflicts should also be discussed in the Caucasian context. Particularly the conflict on Nagorna Karabagh between Shi’i Muslim Azerbaijan and Christian Armenia led to labeling the conflicts arose from religious differences. But apart from Karabakh conflict, the tensions and frozen conflicts in Georgia presents the weakness of such arguments. On the contrary, particularly Islamic identity plays a unitary role in the region.<sup>80</sup> And the role of

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40

<sup>78</sup> Soviet federal structure was organized hierarchically at four levels of autonomy; at the top of there were union republics (SSR) which all became independent states in 1991; the second level was the autonomous republics (ASSR) which were under the jurisdiction of union republics; the third level were the autonomous oblasts or regions which had more limited autonomy; and finally at the fourth level there were autonomous okrugs with a lesser degree of autonomy, mainly in Siberia.

<sup>79</sup> Svante Cornell, “Small Nations and ...”, *op cit.*, p.45

<sup>80</sup> Brenda Shaffer, “It’s not about Ancient Hatreds, It’s about Current Policies: Islam and Stability in the Caucasus”, Brainstorming Conference: The Future of the Caucasus after the Second Chechnya Conflict, 27-28 January 2000, Brussels: CEPS and Svante Cornell, “Small Nations and...”, *op cit.*, pp.56-59

religion affecting the stability in the region is often overplayed. In concrete terms, religion is not accepted as a critical factor in analyzing the stability in the region<sup>81</sup> where “the religious affiliation is only one of the multi-layers of identity of the residents of the region, and not necessarily the primary.”<sup>82</sup> Hence the roots of current frozen conflicts can be answered through the rallying and polarization of ethnic identities or securitization of ethnicity.

In terms of identity, the main consequence of disintegration was the withering away of Soviet identity for the peoples in the South Caucasus. Thus, the overarching identity that assisted to coexistence of ethnically diverse societies was no longer present. Though the Soviet identity not totally achieved to overcome differences at least the official rhetoric of brotherhood and unity alleviated tensions between groups.

However, the quest for identity prompted by the new political restructuring of the region and had far reaching consequences for peace and stability in the region. As argued by Ted Gurr, the two preconditions for ethnic mobilization are a strong group identity and discrimination on communal/ethnic grounds.<sup>83</sup> With the dissolution the resurgence of ethnic identities has been a decisive factor leading to ethnic mobilization turning out to be outright conflict. This was reinforced by the cosmopolitan nature of Caucasian civilization, the reconstruction of the region along exclusivist national lines and bounded territorial units extremely increased the likelihood of conflict.<sup>84</sup> Apart from the Soviet overarching identity, one ethnic identity, that of the titular nationality dominated over those of ethnic minorities within republics. Armenians in Azerbaijan, Abkhaz and Ossetians in Georgia felt deprived while Armenia became more ethnically homogenous.

Though alternatives to national division and exclusivist nationalism existed in the region, ethno-nationalism became the nearly uncontested ideological preference for Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians due to anti-Communist political elites

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<sup>81</sup> Scott A. Jones, “Introduction”, in Gary K. Bertch, Cassady Craft, Scott A. Jones, Micheal Beck(eds.), “Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia”, New York-London: Routledge, 2000, p.8 and Svante Cornell, “Small Nations and...”, op cit., p.47

<sup>82</sup> Brenda Shaffer, “It’s not about Ancient Hatreds...”, op cit.

<sup>83</sup> Ted R. Gurr, “Peoples against States: Ethno political Conflict and the Changing World System”, International Studies Quarterly, 38/3, 1994.

<sup>84</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, “Provisional stabilities”, International Security, 24/3, 1999, p.155.

turned to nationalism as a way to gain support and mobilize the population of their embryonic states.<sup>85</sup>

Given the homogenous population of Armenia, identity has developed mostly around the Karabakh War and its eventual combination with traditional animosity towards the Turks. Azerbaijan's identity dilemma between Shi'i Muslim and Turkic dimensions has hampered the development of strong national identity.<sup>86</sup> Finally and most importantly, Georgia's strong and coherent national consciousness, paradoxically, contributed to the de facto disintegration of the state.<sup>87</sup> Most notably, Gamsakhurdia's policies with exclusivist nationalist discourse fragmented the country into warring ethnicities and social groups. But this trend have relatively reversed with Shevardnadze who eliminated exclusivist nationalist rhetoric and emphasized the country's multi-nationality.

Actually, the mobilization of ethnicity due to strengthening of group identities<sup>88</sup> have led politicization of ethnicity<sup>89</sup> or as argued by Ronald Grigor Suny, politics was ethicized in all republics in the region.<sup>90</sup> However, the absence of an effective unifying national identity where nations are the source of legitimacy for states generally contributes to the state weakness and the greater possibility for instabilities and violence.<sup>91</sup>

As long as the state remains as the main actor in international relations and the guarantor or provider of security to the constituting societies, the relevance of state-building to stability in the region should also be discussed. For the societies and accordingly for the states security means "...absence of threat to core values, though vary, but generally related to survival, welfare and identity."<sup>92</sup> However, the inexperience of modern statehood eventually brought about identification of South

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.154

<sup>86</sup> Fereydoun Safizadeh, "On Dilemmas of Identity in the Post-soviet republic of Azerbaijan", Caucasian Regional Studies, 3/1, 1998

<sup>87</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, "Provisional...", op cit., p.163

<sup>88</sup> Svante Cornell, "Small Nations and...", op cit., p.51

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., pp.56-57

<sup>90</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, "Provisional...", op cit., p.154

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.176

<sup>92</sup> S. Neil MacFarlane, "Democratization, Nationalism and Regional Security in the South Caucasus", Government and Opposition, 32/3, 1997, pp.403-404

Caucasian states as ‘weak states’, ‘failed states’ and ‘contested states’ with slight definitive differences. The existence of underdeveloped sense of state, insufficient to socio-political cohesion of their societies, and an extremely weak national economy, as well as manipulation from outside have opened the South Caucasian states up to domestic disruption and even foreign intervention. Hence, regionally the general weakness of its member states is recognized as one of the main reasons for the existing instability.<sup>93</sup>

Apart from inexperience of modern statehood, the state-building process in the South Caucasus further hampered with severe socio-economic crisis, as well as identity crises, and accompanying it ethnic rivalries and conflicts. Without the formation of stable statehood, the South Caucasian nations will also not able to achieve the development and economic well-being. In the modern statehood, the creation of a democratic society as well as market economy requires the existence of sustainable states. Furthermore, the state itself should play a decisive role in the formation of such civil societies and market relations that would enable economic restructuring and transformation.

However, in the South Caucasian context, the states performed partial success in orchestrating reforms and transformation due to the state institutions that were undergoing change retained mostly the old culture of governance and eventually contributed to mismanagement. Therefore, the legitimacy of state in the eyes of societies was questioned which led to the definition of “[w]eak states, that is, those whose institutions are not considered legitimate by the populations.”<sup>94</sup> Another corresponding definition made by Alexander Rondeli for the ‘failed states’ that is “...non-functioning or very badly functioning states.”<sup>95</sup> In other words, if institutions are not sufficiently developed, the participation is likely to be in forms that threaten social order and state capacity.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, when perceived inequality can be clearly linked to divisions between specific social groups (ethnic, economic, etc.), this leads

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<sup>93</sup> Alexander Rondeli, “The Reflections of Globalization ...”, op cit., p.230

<sup>94</sup> Olga Olikier and Thomas Szayna, “Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and the South Caucasus: Implications for the U.S. Army”, Santa Monica: RAND, 2003, p.11

<sup>95</sup> Alexander Rondeli, “The Reflections of Globalization...”, op cit., p.235

<sup>96</sup> Olga Olikier and Thomas Szayna, op cit., p.11

to tension within society, as well as against the state which further exacerbates the danger of conflict and instability.

Eventually, when weak institutionalization and political mobilization of specific groups combine to question the legitimacy of the state to create instability, the result is termed as the ‘contested state.’<sup>97</sup> The ‘contested state’ is regarded as the last phase on the road to complete ‘state failure.’<sup>98</sup>

Another point made regarding the state building in the South Caucasus is related with the coincidence of ‘state erosion’ in other parts of the world.<sup>99</sup> With the effects of globalization and integration processes states are weakening, as well as internal forces of unleashing nationalist and separatist tendencies contribute to the state erosion. However, the developments in the South Caucasus rather than performing ‘state erosion’, what was witnessed is the ‘state failure’ which is largely responsible for the instability and further fragmentation in the region.<sup>100</sup>

In the South Caucasus, where weakness is related to instability,<sup>101</sup> the vulnerable process of state-building should be strengthened in order to meet stability and democratization.<sup>102</sup> However, the initial ignorance of the West and Russia’s policies towards the region did not contribute to state-building and democratization; “...indeed experiencing transition itself, Russia objectively had neither capacity nor subjective interests to help regional countries build their statehood.”<sup>103</sup> Unless, the authoritative states (not authoritarian states) are flourished, the regional politics would not release from policies of regional actors.<sup>104</sup>

Personalism – one person rule – is accepted as another structural factor related to state-building and retains in the region. One of the reasons for the state weakness in the region is regarded as those policies of leaders to increase

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.12

<sup>99</sup> Alexander Rondeli, “The Reflections of Globalization .....", op cit., p.235

<sup>100</sup> Alexander Rondeli, “The Forces of Fragmentation...”, op cit., p.71

<sup>101</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, “Living With the Other: Conflict and Cooperation among the Transcaucasian Peoples”, Caucasian Regional Studies, 2/1, 1997

<sup>102</sup> Alexander Rondeli, “The Forces of Fragmentation...”, op cit., p.71

<sup>103</sup> Tamara Pataria and David Darchiashvili, “Security Regime Building...”, op cit., p.153

<sup>104</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, “Living With the Other...”, op cit.

centralization of power through mostly increased reliance of the leader on patronage networks. The centralization of power on the one hand simplifies the decision-making process to be effective in dealing with problems related to governance, but on the other hand simultaneously weakens the institutions.<sup>105</sup>

Rather than strengthening the institutions, local elites have developed a kind of ‘neo-patrimonialism’ as a type of authority with the discourse of consolidating stability. This is a type of authority which is called as ‘sultanistic regime’<sup>106</sup> and represents a form of organization in which authority is ascribed to certain groups and elites rather than to an institution.

Hence, despite the level of political institutionalization is very low in this type of regime, the potential for domestic conflict is also very low.<sup>107</sup> However, these regimes are inherently instable in the longer term owing to their lack of institutionalization makes them prone to succession crises when and if something happens to the leader which presents protracted instability.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, since the authoritarian rule generally reproduces or intensifies ethno-social cleavages to the degree to question the legitimacy of the administration, the lack of control over the means of tension and the absence of rule of law and of socio-economic protection for the population becomes the perfect pretext and/or real cause for ethnic violence<sup>109</sup> leading to ‘contested state’.

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<sup>105</sup> Alexnader Rondeli, “The Reflections of Globalization .....", *op cit.*, p.236

<sup>106</sup> Anatol Lieven, “Post-Communist Sultans on the Caspian”, November 8, 2000, available online at <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/culture/articles/eav110800.shtml>>, accessed on March 17, 2004, The author reviewed the book of H.E. Chelabi and Juan Linz (eds.), “Sultanistic Regimes”, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. The ‘sultanistic regime’ defined as quoted by Lieven: “The ideal type of a contemporary sultanistic regime ... is based on personal rulership, but loyalty to the ruler is motivated not by his embodying or articulating an ideology, nor by a unique personal mission, nor by any charismatic qualities, but by a mixture of fear and rewards to his collaborators... The binding norms and relations of bureaucratic administration are constantly subverted by arbitrary personal decisions of the ruler. As a result, corruption reigns supreme at all levels of society. The staff of such a ruler is constituted not by an establishment with distinctive career lines, but largely by people chosen directly by the ruler. Among them we very often find members of his family, friends, business associates, or individuals directly involved in using violence to sustain the regime...”

<sup>107</sup> Olga Olikier and Thomas Szayna, “Faultlines...”, *op cit.*, p.14

<sup>108</sup> Stephan Blank, “Instability in the South Caucasus: Old Trends, New Traits”, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, April 1998, p.14

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14

## CHAPTER 3

### SECURITY PERCEPTIONS OF THE SOUTH CAUCASIAN STATES

The three South Caucasus states, namely Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia gained their independence in the wake of dissolution of the Soviet Union on 8 December 1991. Though the all three had exercised statehood between the years of 1918 and 1920, come across with the difficulties of both state-building and nation-building processes as mentioned in the previous chapter. Their transitions have brought about challenges both domestically and internationally. Democracy, market oriented economy and relatively underdeveloped sense of national identity coupled with inexperience in conducting their foreign relations. Even their ability to formulate national interest performed fluidity and was relatively ill-orchestrated. After the disintegration, and sudden entrance to community of independent states, the question of what factors will determine their national interest and foreign policy direction gained significance in their agenda.

Regarding the foreign policy directions contending views and approaches were expressed and discussed. Given the geographical proximity and with its extensive economic, political and cultural links Russia is considered to maintain its domination on the new directions of NIS, which consideration even influenced the United States to pursue 'Russia First' policy towards the region. The second approach pointed out the declining Russian power and geopolitical vacuums left over to be penetrated by two influential regional powers, Turkey and Iran. As in the case of Russia, this approach also proved its limitations regarding the pressing internal conditions of them.

Consequently, the initial evaluations on the course of foreign policy directions were misleading. For the South Caucasian states their primary interest and determinant was and still is the consolidation of their independence in geopolitically flux region. The structural factors, inherent weakness and powerful neighbors



surrounding the region complicate the consolidation of independence and the formulation of independent foreign policies which in turn brought about the perception of NIS as the pawns in geopolitical games. The deterioration of national security and stability in the aftermath of independence is argued as the conformation of the correctness of this point of view.<sup>110</sup>

Thus the balancing the regional actors – that is so far relatively successful – come affront as another structural factor of the South Caucasian security complex. Engagement of the United States to the region though perceived with suspicion, particularly from Iran and Russia, considered to further the hands of NIS. Even “[t]he leaders of the Caucasus maintain close relations with the United States and have based their sovereignty, independence, and national legitimacy on this partnership.”<sup>111</sup>

However it should also be differentiated that geo-economics and geopolitics have varying degree of effects in perception of security and on the formulation of foreign policy directions.<sup>112</sup> Azerbaijan and Georgia perceive their roles in the region more in geo-economic terms that their security in the region can be provided with regional economic cooperation. Given the ongoing threat perception and conflict with Azerbaijan on Nagorna Karabakh, Armenia sought its security with Russia. Thus, Armenian security perception is mainly based on geopolitical interpretation of regional political and economic conditions.

### **3.1 Azerbaijan**

Azerbaijan among the South Caucasian States is the largest country in terms of both population and territory. Demographically, the state is quite homogenous except the Lezgin, Talysh and Kurdish minorities. Geographically, Azerbaijan is located near the Caspian Sea with considerable coastline and on its soil possesses

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<sup>110</sup> Jonathan Aves, “National Security and Military Issues in the Transcaucasus”, in Bruce Parrott (ed.), “State-Building and Military Power in Russia and New States of Eurasia”, Armonk: M.E.Sharpe, 1995, p.209

<sup>111</sup> Zeyno Baran, “The Caucasus: Ten Years after Independence”, The Washington Quarterly, 25/1, 2002, p.223.

<sup>112</sup> Alexander Rondeli, “Regional Security Prospects in the Caucasus” in Gary K. Bertch, Cassady Craft, Scott A. Jones, Micheal Beck(eds.), “Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia”, New york-London: Routledge, 2000, p.49.

extensive oil and mineral resources. On the other hand, these two factors the demography and geography with natural resources creates both advantages and disadvantages in its foreign policy direction.

Despite the majority of Azerbaijanis in population, Shi'i Muslim majority in terms of religious affiliation creates dilemma in post-Soviet Azerbaijan; on the one side Turkic dimension and on the other side Shi'i Muslim dimension of identity.<sup>113</sup> In other words, there is a polarization between Turkic and Iranian influence on identity and culture,<sup>114</sup> eventually on foreign policy direction.

But, after Aliyev took the power with pragmatic direction in foreign policy, Azerbaijan identity began to be built around Azerbaijan-ness. In fact, Azerbaijanis perceive northern and southern Azerbaijan as a single entity that was divided up by Russo-Persian conspiracy, and as the general religious knowledge is low among the society, which can be called as 'folk Islam' or secular Islam,<sup>115</sup> the gravitation towards Iran seems infeasible. On the Turkic dimension of identity, Azerbaijan had chosen even to call their language as Azeri-Turkish and not to overemphasize the Turkic-ness in order not to alienate non-Turkic groups and minorities. The debate on Azeri national identity is considered not to be settled soon, and thus it will continue to affect some aspects of foreign policy direction.<sup>116</sup>

Among the South Caucasian states, Azerbaijan was the slowest to rush to independence because of the events in Baku, ended with crushing of Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF) by Soviet troops in January 1990. Soviet Defense Minister Dimitri Yazov's statement on 26 January that "the occupation of Azerbaijan's capital was designed to prevent the Azerbaijan Popular Front from seizing power from the communist party"<sup>117</sup> proved that Russia has not accommodated itself to Azerbaijan's

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<sup>113</sup> Fereydoun Safizadeh, "On Dilemmas of Identity in the Post-soviet republic of Azerbaijan", Caucasian Regional Studies, 3/1, 1998

<sup>114</sup> Shireen Hunter, "The Evolution of the Foreign Policy in the Transcaucasian States", in Gary K. Bertch, Cassidy Craft, Scott A. Jones, Micheal Beck(eds.), "Crossroads and Conflict...", op cit, p.37

<sup>115</sup> Fereydoun Safizadeh, op cit.

<sup>116</sup> Shireen Hunter, op cit, p.38

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Svante Cornell, "Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus", Richmond: RIIA, Curzon Press, 2001, p.89

independence.<sup>118</sup> Behind the events, the Nagorna Karabakh question between Armenia and Azerbaijan were believed to play significant role owing to the turmoil in the region would give Russia a free hand to manipulate the region and to extract concessions. In fact, as noted by Edmund Herzig, “like the Georgians, Azeri nationalists viewed the existence of an autonomous territorial entity (Karabakh) within their republic as an artificial lever installed by Moscow to facilitate Russian manipulation of regional politics and to frustrate Azeri national aspirations.”<sup>119</sup>

In the aftermath pro-Russian Ayaz Mutalibov took the power in Azerbaijan. Actually, domestic instability coupled with the undeclared war unleashed by Armenia brought to rapid succession of governments. In the beginning Mutalibov’s close relations with Moscow brought some benefits to Azerbaijan particularly military assistance in operation towards the Armenian populated villages to the north of Nagorna Karabakh. However, the failure of August coup in 1991, left Mutalibov exposed owing to be among the few who supported the coup which meant the end of Mutalibov’s strategy and military reverses suffered in Nagorna Karabakh.<sup>120</sup> The Khojaly Massacres in February 1992 committed by Armenian forces brought about the resignation of Mutalibov and a pro-Turkish president, the leader of APF Abulfaz Elchibei was elected in May 1992. The Khojaly Massacres was also a turning point in the Nagorna Karabakh conflict marking the end of guerilla warfare between neighboring states and the beginning of a conventional war between armies.<sup>121</sup> Elchibei, like Gamsakhurdia in Georgia, miscalculated the interests and stakes of external powers and made serious geopolitical mistakes that cost him presidency. While adopting a clear pro-Turkish stand he antagonized Iran and Russia which had damaged the Azerbaijan’s interest particularly in respect of Nagorna Karabakh

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<sup>118</sup> Philip Petersen, “Security in Post-Soviet Transcaucasia”, European Security, 3/1, Spring 1994, pp.1-57

<sup>119</sup> Edmund Herzig, “The New Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia”, London: RIIA, Pinter, 1999, p.9

<sup>120</sup> Jonathan Aves, “The Caucasus States: the Regional Security Complex”, in Roy Allison and Christoph Bluth (eds.), “Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia”, London: RIIA, 1998, p.178. See also Jonathan Aves, “Politics, Parties and Presidents in Transcaucasia”, Caucasian Regional Studies, 1, 1996.

<sup>121</sup> Thomas Goltz, “Letter from Eurasia: The Hidden Russian Hand”, Foreign Policy, fall 1993, p.101.

conflict. By stating the eventual unification of North and South Azerbaijan<sup>122</sup> and by refusing to join the CIS; the former brought about Iran's close relations with Russia and Armenia and the latter assisted Armenians in Nagorna Karabakh and particularly in their occupation of the region Kelbajar<sup>123</sup> in the winter of 1992.<sup>124</sup> The domestic and external conditions was forced Elchibei to escape who had been criticized to bring country to the brink of dismemberment<sup>125</sup> and Gaidar Aliyev were brought to lead war-torn republic.

The communist past of Aliyev, as a member of *nomenklatura*, 'Russian factor' in the politics of South Caucasus, Russian military that taking part in domestic power struggles<sup>126</sup> and the failure of pro-Russian Mutalibov and pro-Turkish Elchibei have led him to adopt a pragmatic foreign policy without strong ideological elements.<sup>127</sup> As mentioned above he striking similarity between South Caucasus states, geopolitical flux region that have attracted powerful regional actors' competition dictated the need of pragmatism.<sup>128</sup>

Aliyev chose to accommodate with both Russia and Iran without getting subservient to Russia again. The aim was to restore a relative stability – restoration of territorial integrity and consolidation of independence – in Azerbaijan though the full-fledged stabilization depended on the overall stability in the region. His diplomatic efforts were focused on 'internationalizing' the Karabakh conflict by attracting the attention of the West to the conflict mediation process. But without taking into account Russian interests the mediation process would be ill-started.

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<sup>122</sup> The Northern parts of Iran are populated extensively the Azeri Turks.

<sup>123</sup> With UNSC resolution 822, called for the withdrawal of the 'unidentified' forces occupying Kelbajar.

<sup>124</sup> Thomas Goltz, *op cit.*, p.102-104

<sup>125</sup> In the summer of 1993 simultaneously with the mutiny in Ganja so-called independent Talysh Mugam Republic in the south of Azerbaijan was declared by Alikram Humbetov, with the support of local tank regiment. However, soon after the revolt leader was arrested and the revolt collapsed. The Lezgin movement in the north of Azerbaijan to establish their own homeland – Sadval – also presents a major challenge to Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

<sup>126</sup> Thomas Goltz, *op cit.*

<sup>127</sup> Jonathan Aves, "National Security...", *op cit.*, p.227

<sup>128</sup> Shireen Hunter, *op cit.*, p.26

In September 1993, Aliyev visited Moscow and signed CIS charter and CST<sup>129</sup> agreement. Despite at the initial stage the membership to the CIS and CST was considered as a compromise with Russia, there were other strategic calculations behind. In fact Aliyev, after joining CST insisted on activation of agreement also to conflicts among its members referring to Karabakh.<sup>130</sup> Most notably, though Azerbaijan's accession to CIS was considered as Baku's orientation to *pax russica* and a factor harming its independence, by participating all CIS summits Aliyev exposed Armenian irredentist policy. In fact, Baku was among the few members that refused to sign a number of military-political agreements that could threaten Azerbaijan interests. Furthermore, though Azerbaijan accepted the mediation efforts of Moscow on Karabakh conflict ended with cease-fire agreement in May 12, 1994, Baku resisted the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces into the conflict zone conceivably apprehending that Russia-led PKF would just entrench the status quo becoming in effect a buffer zone for the self proclaimed so-called 'Nagorna Karabakh Republic' while consisting a leverage for Moscow to extract further concessions from Baku.

Aliyev also sought to improve relation with Iran that was disturbed by statements of Elchibei regarding the rights of Azerbaijani's in Iran.<sup>131</sup> The warming in relations with Iran marked by the visits of Iranian president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsancani to Baku in October 1993 and Aliyev's return visit to Tehran on June 29, 1994. However Aliyev's visit had taken place after visits to Russia, Turkey and a number of Western countries that the sequence showed the relations with Iran is not highest priority.<sup>132</sup> Particularly, the US containment on Iran set limits on Azerbaijan

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<sup>129</sup> Tashkent Collective Security Treaty (CST) was signed by six CIS countries – Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) on 15 May, 1992 and get into force 20 April 1994 for five year period. Azerbaijan joined CST in September 1993 and Georgia in December 1993, however, together with Uzbekistan, Georgia and Azerbaijan announced in the early 1999 that they would not renew the treaty expiring in April 1999. Currently with Belarus and five original signatories CST have six members. On May 14, 2002, on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the treaty the member states decided to institutionalize their cooperation and to create the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), formed on April 28, 2003.

<sup>130</sup> Andrey Zagorski, "Regional Structures of the Security Policy within the CIS", in Roy Allison and Christoph Bluth (eds.), "Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia", London:RIIA, 1998, p.284

<sup>131</sup> Jonathan Aves, "National Security...", op cit., p.229

<sup>132</sup> Shireen Hunter, op cit., p.41

Iran relations. In short, though Aliyev intended to improve relations it has remained strained, but better than the period of Elchibei's presidency.<sup>133</sup>

Just a year after it became member of the CIS, Azerbaijan initiated its 'oil strategy' by signing the 'contract of century'<sup>134</sup> on September 20, 1994, with the consortium of western oil companies that envisaged joint exploration of Azerbaijan's oilfields. Aliyev unequivocally demonstrated foreign policy direction of Baku, thus rendering the accusations about pro-Russian stand groundless. Instrumentally, by attracting the western companies and generating common economic interests of their respective governments, Baku sought to attract the international community to the Nagorna Karabakh conflict. Certainly, the Caspian energy projects provided the grounds for independent political direction for Baku. Beside its importance was not limited to Azerbaijan as the transportation of energy provided Tbilisi a hand in relations with Moscow as Georgia became the hub of energy transportation to Europe.

The initial results of 'oil strategy' had presented its prospects in Budapest summit of OSCE in December 1994 that a decision was made to deploy peacekeeping mission in Nagorna Karabakh under the aegis of OSCE. Furthermore, this initiative brought about the question whether the international community should play a role in the region.<sup>135</sup>

NATO's initiation of security dialogue in the framework PfP program with South Caucasus states since 1994 underlined the growing Western interest and attention to the region and particularly to Azerbaijan. Apart from security dialogue with Euro-Atlantic structures, financial institutions such as IMF and World Bank provided financial assistance to Azerbaijan. During the CFE negotiations in 1997 as mentioned above the formation of GUAM in order to balance Russian efforts to dominate the CIS increased Moscow's unhappiness with Aliyev. The failed coup attempts against Aliyev in October 1994 and March 1995 indicated Russian uneasiness with Baku's independent and pragmatic foreign policy course. As noted

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<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42

<sup>134</sup> On the 'Contract of the Century' and Aliyev's 'internationalization' of Karabakh conflict see, Elkhan Polukhov, "Contract of the Century", *Caucasian Regional Studies*, 2/1, 1997

<sup>135</sup> John Maresca, "Why an OSCE Role in the Caucasus?", *Security Dialogue*, 27/1, 1996

by Ariel Cohen, those who want Aliyev dead were aware of the role of Aliyev factor in regional politics.<sup>136</sup>

Despite these events brought about deterioration between Azerbaijan and Russia, to the degree complicating the domestic situation, continuing economic dependence on Russia and the need for not antagonize Moscow, Baku preferred a balanced policy. Despite its strained relations with Moscow, Baku interested in normalizing relations in order to limit further militarization of Armenia and prevent formation of an overt anti-Azerbaijan bloc consisting of Russia, Armenia and Iran.

In fact, both Putin and Aliyev sought the ways to normalize relations the fact that was underlined by the Putin's visit to Baku in January 2001. During the visit the Baku has managed the postponement of visa regime from its citizens, an objective Georgia failed to achieve. In addition, Russia withdrew its demand to deploy border troops on the Azerbaijan-Iran border. But in return on January 25, 2002, Aliyev signed an agreement renting the Gabala early warning station to Russia for a period of ten years.<sup>137</sup> In fact Aliyev managed not to allow Russia troops to be deployed on its territory except the radar station of Gabala and it is only Azerbaijan managed to remain outside the *pax russica*.

As far as the Karabakh problem is concerned Azerbaijan's perception is sharpening even the negotiated proposals of 1990's have become increasingly 'defeatist'<sup>138</sup> and military means to liberate the occupied territories come affront as a destabilizing factor. President Aliyev reported on 25 October 2001 as saying; "[e]ither the Organization for Security and Cooperation for Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group takes a principled position in this question or we will have to liberate our lands by military means...So, I think in this case the international community should take more active responsibility."<sup>139</sup> However on the other hand Russia is seeking to

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<sup>136</sup> Ariel Cohen, "Moscow's Hunt in the Caucasus", The Heritage Foundation, April 7, 1998

<sup>137</sup> The operation capability of this radar station is limited to tracking ballistic missile launches from Indian Ocean, so it can not follow aircrafts and is useless against cruise missiles navigating close to ground. Nevertheless, Russia has accepted to pay \$4 millions a year for rent to Baku for keeping operational the station. On the deal see, Nailia Sohbetqizi, "Pragmatism Guides Russian-Azerbaijani Deal Making", Eurasia Insight, January 11, 2002.

<sup>138</sup> Arif Yunusov, "Azerbaijani Security Problems and Policies", in "The South Caucasus: a Challenge for the EU", Chaillot Papers, No.65, December 2003, p.144

<sup>139</sup> Turkish Daily News, 25 October 2001

delay the conflict settlement in Karabakh in order to retain the issue as a leverage to promote its other interests in Azerbaijan and in the region.<sup>140</sup>

On April 21, 2003, Aliyev appeared at a commemoration and collapsed. The ongoing health problems Aliyev raised the concern over Azerbaijan's and thoroughly region's future stability. However, the inauguration of the son-Aliyev, Ilham, as the new president of Azerbaijan in October 2003 and the absence of far-reaching internal tensions in Azerbaijan eased the anxieties and it was concluded that the new president will pursue the political line of Heidar Aliyev.

### **3.2 Armenia**

In general terms, Armenians security perception has evolved around its geographical location – a landlocked country – and historical narratives. Without taking into account these two factors the determinants of its foreign policy direction will be ill-conceived. Besides the ethnic and religious composition of the country also play significant role.

Armenia contemporarily is a small, and a landlocked country which factors lead the country to feel to be isolated and vulnerable to neighboring countries to access to outside world. On the other hand, Armenia doesn't share border with Russia which factor both performs pros and cons.<sup>141</sup> In one respect, the absence of direct access to Russia and Northern Caucasus prevents possible spill over any probable instability to Armenia but on the other hand hampers a real source of supply, foods, energy, and raw materials. In other words physical isolation while giving an important lever for Azerbaijan, Armenia suffers deficiency in economic development.<sup>142</sup>

The feeling of isolation also been felt both in terms of religious affiliation and ethnicity. However, it should also be noted that the relations between Armenia and

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<sup>140</sup> Arif Yunusov, op cit, p.145

<sup>141</sup> Jonathan Aves, "National Security...", op cit, p.222

<sup>142</sup> Shireen Hunter, "Armenia: the Challenge of Viability", in "The Trans-Caucasus in Transition: Nation-Building and Conflict", Washington DC: CSIS, 1994.



Iran underlines the fact that religion plays minor role in isolation and vulnerability, and hence, in foreign policy direction.<sup>143</sup>

On the contrary, the historical narratives nourished the sentiments of isolation and vulnerability. Particularly, the traditional animosity towards the ‘Turks’ and allegations on the so-called genocide of 1915 contributed in developing a negative perception of neighboring states. Irrespective to negative effects on Armenia, the historical narratives has to a great extent contributed in the revival of national consciousness.<sup>144</sup>

This historical narrative has deeply affected post-independence foreign policy of Armenia in many ways.<sup>145</sup> First, it has created serious barriers in the way of normalizing relations with Turkey which further exacerbated with refusing the recognition of Turkish-Soviet Treaty of 1921<sup>146</sup>; second, it has made Armenian wary of possible Turkish penetration and influence in the region; third it has led Armenia to counterbalance the Turkish influence by forging alignments with Russia, Iran and even with Greece; fourth, it has exacerbated other problems between Azerbaijan and Armenia, particularly on Nagorna Karabakh, due to Armenians tend to identify Azerbaijan with ‘Turks’, thus creating links with so-called genocide.

Another facet of sentiment of isolation is further exacerbated in respect of relations with the West. Particularly the Western interests on the energy resources of Azerbaijan and Western encouragement of high Turkish profile in the region brought about suspicion and doubts. Thus, though being aware of relations with the West carry a significant importance, it nevertheless leads Armenia to feel that its fate shouldn’t be tied to relations with the West. Consequently, Armenia proceeded in forging alliance with Russia in spite of its relative weakness.

Regarding the foreign policy schools in Armenia, particularly affecting the post-independence period two schools come affront; one of which is revisionist

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<sup>143</sup> Shireen Hunter, *op cit.*, p.30

<sup>144</sup> See Richard C. Hovanissian, “Historical Memory and Foreign Relations: The Armenian Perspective”, in S. Frederick Starr (ed.), “The Legacy of History in Russia and the New States of Eurasia”, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

<sup>145</sup> Shireen Hunter, *op cit.*, p.30

<sup>146</sup> The Kars Treaty of 1921 between Turkey and the Soviet Union draws the borders between Turkey and Armenia, hence the Armenian resistance to ratify the 1921 Treaty is perceived in Turkey as an act that not recognize the current borders with Armenia.

thinking and the other traditional thinking – that based its perception on historical narratives. The revisionist thinking<sup>147</sup> which was influential within the intellectual circles of Armenian National Movement (hereafter ANM), assumed power in 1990 and controlled Armenia until 1997.

President Levon Ter Petrossian and some of his key advisers were among the adherents of this revisionist thinking and believed that relations with Turkey should be reestablished on a more constructive manner. As a landlocked country, Armenia's over-reliance on a third power, traditionally Russia, should be eliminated by forging good relations with neighbors, particularly through ending animosity in Turkish-Armenian relations. They resisted the demand, mostly emanating from diaspora, that recognition of the so-called genocide to be placed at the top of foreign policy agenda. Later Armenia joined the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) Organization, and Ter Petrossian even attended to the funeral of Turgut Ozal.

However, good intentions could not overcome the historical narratives of Armenia. Turkey consistently refused to establish diplomatic relations unless Armenia relinquished the allegations on the so-called genocide and territorial claims on Turkish soil which meant the recognition of treaty of 1921. Apart from these historical strains, the new ones have added with the Nagorna Karabakh conflict and the clashes on the border between Armenia and Nakhchivan in the summer 1992.<sup>148</sup> According the Soviet-Turkish Treaty of 1921, Turkey is the guarantor of the autonomous status of Nakhchevan and treaty stipulated that the region's status could not be altered without Turkey's explicit approval.

In the early 1990's, the presidency of Elchibey in Azerbaijan with a clear pro-Turkish stand, and the war on Nagorna Karabakh have further hampered the relations and added new suspicions in Armenian perception of Turkey. The growing strategic cooperation between Israel and Turkey which was perceived as enhancing Turkey's regional power and increasing Israeli influence in Azerbaijan complicated the relations of Armenia and Turkey to the extent exacerbating the low possibility

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<sup>147</sup> On the revisionist thinking, see Shireen Hunter, *op cit.*, pp.30-31

<sup>148</sup> For an insightful discussion on the question of Nagorna Karabakh and Nakhchevan, see Svante Cornell, "Small Nations ...", *op cit.*, pp.74-78

prospects for reconciliation.<sup>149</sup> And inevitably Armenia found itself to further the consultation and cooperation with Iran and Greece. Consequently, the evolution of regional and international politics undermined the arguments of revisionist school of thinking in its foreign policy direction.<sup>150</sup>

Regarding the relations with Iran that has not serious historical and psychological barriers, the strategic and economic factors enhanced cooperation on bilateral level.<sup>151</sup> For Armenia, Iran can provide an outlet the outside world a factor decreasing the isolation and vulnerability to Turkey, hence, a counterweight to Turkey. This factor also reinforced by Armenian much-needed energy supply from Iran as long as the absence of direct access to Russia and an economic factor easing Azeri-Turkish embargo. Furthermore, both Iran and Armenia share the concern over Azerbaijani ambitions to unite the north and south Azerbaijan and for Iran, Armenia plays the role that hampers the emergence of Turkic group by blockading direct access between Azerbaijan and Turkey and Central Asian Turkic states. Finally, about the two hundred thousands Armenians in Iran contribute on this relations.

However, on the other hand, the United States policy against Iran hampers further deepening any cooperation with Iran. In fact, though seems infeasible, this factor might be reversed with an improvement in US-Iran relations.<sup>152</sup>

Consequently, Yerevan chose to bandwagon with Russia to guarantee its very existence from the beginning of independence. Relations with Russia from the very beginning were close and performed to be a loyal ally of Russia. Even among the newly independent states, Armenia was among the first states that signed the CIS charter and all its military-security treaties, actually hoping that it would allow Armenia to activate CIS security structures in its war with Azerbaijan.<sup>153</sup> As noted by Thomas Goltz, Armenia has thus “...more willing to cooperate with Moscow – even to the extent of playing the Moscow’s regional proxy against the other two Caucasian

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<sup>149</sup> See Bülent Aras, “Israel’s Strategy in Azerbaijan and Central Asia” in “The New Geopolitics of Eurasia and Turkey’s Position”, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, pp.53-69

<sup>150</sup> Shireen Hunter, op cit., p.32

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p.32

<sup>152</sup> Nur Bilge Criss and Serdar Güner, “Geopolitical Configurations: The Russia-Turkey-Iran Triangle”, Security Dialogue, 30/3, 1999.

<sup>153</sup> Andrei Zagorski, op cit.

states.”<sup>154</sup> In turn, for Moscow, Armenia became the main instrument of Russian assertive policy in the region. Aiming at increasing Armenia’s warfare capabilities since 1993 Russia began to secret shipments of military hardware to Armenia and Karabakh that became known as a result of investigations of Russian Duma Defense Committee in 1996-1997. The militarization of Armenia was confirmed by the Armenian Defense Minister Serzh Sarkissian stating “over the last two years we have doubled our defense capacity at no cost to the budget.”<sup>155</sup> Indeed, with the military support of Russia, Armenia managed to occupy 20% of Azerbaijani territory. Armenians authorities preserve their tough stance on the Karabakh conflict by arguing that Armenians in the Karabakh used their right of self-determination to gain their independence and they act in a sense on the preservation of *status quo* that gives a time for further military build-up. This line of argument was confirmed with the constitutional coup – ‘palace coup’<sup>156</sup> – against ex-president Levon Ter-Petrosian giving way Robert Kocharian in February 1998 that happened after he advocated a more conciliatory approach on the Nagorno Karabakh problem, furthermore, it proved the argument that the survival of any Armenian leadership in power is linked to the *miatsum* – the forceful incorporation of Karabakh region of Azerbaijani to Armenia.<sup>157</sup>

A landmark treaty, with full title, ‘Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia’ signed in August 29, 1997 formalized the alliance between Moscow and Yerevan and furthered militarization of Armenia.<sup>158</sup> In fact this agreement marked for the first

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<sup>154</sup> Thomas Goltz, *op cit.*, p.96

<sup>155</sup> RFE/RL, *Caucasus report*, 30 October 1998

<sup>156</sup> Edward W. Walker, “Armenia’s “Constitutional Coup” and Nagorno Karabakh Conflict”, available online at <<http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~bsp/caucasus/articles.html>>, accessed on February 18, 2004.

<sup>157</sup> He reportedly declared that “We [Armenians] must take what we are given today, because tomorrow we’ll not be given even this.”

<sup>158</sup> On 11 October 2000 at Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), the presidents of the six member states of CST (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Russia) agreed to lift barriers to the supply of Russian military hardware amongst all member states; In April 1999, Armenia and Russia formally completed the integration of their air-defense systems with the ‘joint command point’ near Yerevan going on duty. Armenia thus became part of an integrated air defense system that also includes Belarus and Kazakhstan. The joint air defense has been substantially reinforced recently with the deployment in Armenia of Russian S-300-V anti-aircraft systems and MIG-29 fighter jets Russian air force squadron, which consists of 13 MIG-23 fighters, providing air cover to local Russian bases from a possible air attack; On 1 March 2000 a protocol on the transfer without compensation of the territory and property

time in the post-Soviet era, Russia committed itself by a treaty to defend an ally militarily if attacked by foreign country, in practical terms; an attack on Armenia would be considered an attack on Russia, or vice versa.<sup>159</sup> If for Armenia, cooperation with Russia was deemed to deter Baku from resorting military means of liberation of its occupied territories, for Russia military presence in the region was aimed to fulfill the military triad – bases, borders, peacekeeping.<sup>160</sup>

Though Armenia tended to legitimize and justify its militarization by security concerns, in reality its security policy in the last decade only increased its insecurity and isolation. Being dependent on import energy Armenia was forced to abandon its outcry about ‘Muslim encirclement’ and improve relations with Iran.<sup>161</sup> Armenia fearing to find itself in complete isolation<sup>162</sup> was forced to find a *modus vivendi* with Georgia and downplay territorial claims on Georgia. Actually mutual vulnerability with Georgia also forced Armenia in quelling Armenian separatist aspirations in Javakheti region.<sup>163</sup> In fact, the existing mutual vulnerability between Georgia and Armenia come affront as a stabilizing factor in the region.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless, Armenian irredentist policy that resulted in the shift of overall regional military balance even

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of the 102<sup>nd</sup> Russian military base from Kafan to Gyumri for a period of 25 years, was signed between Armenia and Russia; On 17 April 2001 during the meeting CIS CST Armenia and Russia agreed to create a joint rapid reaction military unit, command and control of which would be carried out from Yerevan; In May 2001, joint Armenian-Russian air-defense system was activated in Armenia which is reported to monitor air space of Armenian border particularly Turkish-Armenian border; November 17, 2003, Russian Defense Minister and Sergei Ivanov and Armenian counterpart signed a number of agreements on the Russian military base as well as on bilateral military cooperation in 2004 and stated “We will rearm and re-equip Russian 102<sup>nd</sup> military base in Armenia”, Sergei Blagov, “Armenia and Russia Reassert Bonds amid Georgia’s Crisis”, *Eurasia Insight*, November 17, 2003

<sup>159</sup> Harry Tamrazian, “Armenia/Russia: Landmark Treaty Includes Provision for Mutual Defense”, *RFE/RF Newslines*, 29 August 1997

<sup>160</sup> On the Russian military triad ‘bases, borders, peacekeeping’ – maintenance of military base on the territories of Transcaucasian Republics, participation in the guarding of CIS external borders and the participation in peacekeeping operations on the conflict zones – see Vitaly Naumkin, “Russia and Transcaucasia”, *Caucasian Regional Studies*, 3/1, 1998

<sup>161</sup> In December 2001, Armenian President Kocharian visited Iran where he discussed with the counterpart Muhammed Hatemi further cooperation in the sphere of regional security and stability as well as \$120 millions worth gas pipeline project from Iran to Armenia.

<sup>162</sup> Georgia is the only outlet for Armenia’s trade except Iran because since 1988 when Armenia unleashed undeclared war against Azerbaijan and occupied the Azerbaijan territories Turkey sealed off its borders with Armenia making the issue of opening of the border conditional to restoration of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity.

<sup>163</sup> Svante Cornell, *op cit.*, p 180

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p.181

further complicated the situation in the region and contributed to the regional instability.

### 3.3 Georgia

The internal ethnic composition that was mobilized ending with intra-state ethnic strife to the extent of threatening territorial integrity have played significant role in evolution of Georgian foreign policy directions and security perceptions. The ongoing high level of internal tensions from the state-level of analysis is considered to be the result of ethnic and cultural diversity.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, the existence of significant numbers of ethnic Armenian and Azeri minorities in the border areas creates a possible source of tension in the country.<sup>166</sup>

However, the mobilization of differences is accepted as the manipulation of outside powers most notably Russia at the regional level.<sup>167</sup> These lines of arguments lay down interdependence between internal and external conditions and vulnerability of Georgia to external powers mainly to Russia as pointed out by Jonathan Aves;

The failure of the Georgian government to impose a monopoly of the legitimate means of coercion on its territory had a debilitating effect on its national security, leaving it weak in the face of secessionist movements and providing a lever by which hostile external forces could attempt to exert pressure.<sup>168</sup>

In the Georgian context, as in the case of Azerbaijan, Russia had not accommodated itself to Georgian independence<sup>169</sup> the perception was underlined by suppression of national movements in Tbilisi in April 1989.<sup>170</sup> Despite its vulnerability Georgia was adopted most radical stance in asserting its independence

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<sup>165</sup> According to 1989 census Georgia population consist of Georgians 70.1%, Armenians 81%, Russians 6.3%, Azeris 5.7%, Ossettians 3.0%, Greeks 1.9%, Abkhaz 1.8% and Ukrainians 0.9%.

<sup>166</sup> Jonathan Aves, "National Security...", op cit, p.214

<sup>167</sup> Thomas Goltz, op cit.

<sup>168</sup> Jonathan Aves, "The Caucasus States: the Regional Security Complex", op cit, p.181

<sup>169</sup> Philip Petersen, op cit, pp.1-57

<sup>170</sup> The events in Tbilisi in the beginning was a counter protest staged by Georgian radicals against inter-ethnic violence in Abkhazia; however the protests changed its orientation and turned out to be a massive demonstration for Georgian independence.

from Moscow<sup>171</sup> and thoroughly was the first state that declared independence on April 9, 1991.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia, as the new Georgian president while pursuing a nationalistic policy to consolidate the independence refused the existence of minority problem arguing that it was artificially installed by Russia to destabilize and manipulate the situation in Georgia.<sup>172</sup> In fact this line of argument also reflects the general public sentiment towards Russia that “[t]he Soviet Union created in Georgia three autonomous regions; these areas were created to divide Georgia and prevent it from being a unified entity.”<sup>173</sup> The policy of discounting minority problem in Georgia led extremists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to perceive their very existence was endangered and prompted them to demand succession from Georgia or reunification with Russia. Gamsakhurdia’s refusal to join the CIS and his readiness to lend aid to the Chechen nationalist movement in the autumn of 1991 brought about the eventual overthrow by Russia. Actually, he deemed to play the North Caucasus card against Moscow<sup>174</sup> and miscalculated the geopolitics of Georgia by anticipating the aid of the West. At the time Russian relations with the West was exercising its honeymoon.

Then Eduard Shevardnadze came to power in March 1992 and as in Gamsakhurdia period main foreign policy problem was to improve relations with Russia. Kozyrev’s visit to Tbilisi in April 1992 and negotiations were begun to reach a wide-ranging bilateral treaty. Further improvement in relations with Russia was marked signing the Dagomys agreement which stipulated Russian mediation and the deployment of Russian troops in South Ossetia which on the other hand meant Georgia lost effective control on the sovereignty of South Ossetia.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Jonathan Aves, “The Caucasus States: the Regional Security Complex”, op cit., p.176

<sup>172</sup> Svante Cornell, op cit., pp.142-163

<sup>173</sup> John F.R. Wright, “The Geopolitics of Georgia”, in John F.R. Wright, Suzanne Goleberg and Richard Schofield (eds.), “Transcaucasian Boundaries”, New York: St.Martin’s Press, 1995, p.140. This chapter presents a good account of the Georgian geopolitical perceptions and the positions of parties on the conflict on Abkhazia.

<sup>174</sup> Jonathan Aves “National Security...”, op cit. p.226

<sup>175</sup> Jonathan Aves, “The Caucasus States: the Regional Security Complex”, op cit., p.179

However, the broke out of Abkhazian war hampered the further progress, owing to Russian assistance on behalf of Abkhazian forces.<sup>176</sup> Russian assistance even led Shevardnadze to describe the Abkhazian war as a conflict between Russia and Georgia.<sup>177</sup> The collapse of Georgian resistance in Abkhazia left Shevardnadze and his government vulnerable against the reinvigorated offensive of ‘Zviadists’ – supporters of ex-president Zviad Gamsakhurdia – in Mingrellia, western Georgia. After Georgia accepted to join the CIS in October 1993, the Russian troops helped the government forces and the rebel advance was terminated.<sup>178</sup>

On February 3, 1994 during the official visit of Yeltsin to Tbilisi, under the ‘*Framework Treaty of Friendship and Good Neighbourness*’, Georgia made major concessions to Russia by allowing to deploy CIS peacekeeping forces and by accepting the joint patrol of Georgian-Turkish border by Russian and Georgian military forces. The treaty signed in October 1995 granted the basing rights to Russia<sup>179</sup> and effectively reduced Georgia to the status of ‘strategic satellite’.<sup>180</sup>

However, Shevardnadze’s reservation on the presence of Russian military on the condition of resolution of the Abkhazian conflict and restoration of Georgia’s territorial integrity had strengthened Tbilisi’s hands leading to refusal of parliament the ratification of treaty. Furthermore, the legal status of Russian military presence while provided a bargaining chip Shevardnadze also raised the issues of replacement of CIS mandated PKF by UN or OSCE mandated force, veto on the extension of the peacekeeping mandate, and Georgia’s withdrawal to persuade Russia to take into account Tbilisi’s stakes.<sup>181</sup> Nevertheless, Russia’s inability or unwillingness – in order to preserve the key mediator role and leverage on Georgia – to resolve the conflict have led Shevardnadze to be convinced that there was little prospect for

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<sup>176</sup> Thomas Goltz, *op cit.*, pp.104-109

<sup>177</sup> Jonathan Aves, “The Caucasus States: the Regional Security Complex”, *op cit.*, p.180

<sup>178</sup> Svante Cornell, *op cit.*, pp.168-174

<sup>179</sup> According to treaty Russia was to set up four military bases in Vaziani, Guduatu, Batumi, and Akhalkalaki and Naval Bases in Poti and Batumi. For more information see, David Darchiashvili, “The Russia Military Presence in Georgia: The parties’ Attitudes and Prospects”, *Caucasian Regional Studies*, 2/1, 1997.

<sup>180</sup> Jonathan Aves, “National Security...”, *op cit.* p.227

<sup>181</sup> Edward Walker, “No War No Peace in the Caucasus: Contested Sovereignty in Chechnya, Abkhazia, Karabakh”, in “Crossroads and Conflict...”, *op cit.*, p.158-168



resolution of Abkhaz problem and disappointed with Russia in fulfilling the certain obligations it had towards Georgia.

Indeed, since 1994, Shevardnadze had tried to improve relations with the West, Turkey and with other CIS countries who had grievance with Russia in order to decrease influence of Moscow. Georgia's grow into a crucial component of trans-regional energy transportation corridor have furthered Shevardnadze's hands in relations with Moscow.

The growing Western interest in the region and eventual recognition as a part of European security zone<sup>182</sup> brought about Western assistance<sup>183</sup> to the country and eventually Shevardnadze too began to pursue more independent foreign policy course. However, the uneasy Moscow with Aliyev and Shevardnadze factor in the regional politics and failed to overthrow Aliyev turned to displace Shevardnadze and allegedly sanctioned unsuccessful assassination attempts on August 25, 1995 and February 9, 1998.<sup>184</sup> Interestingly, there is a good reason to look at the 'Six Day War' in the Gali district in May 1998, and military revolt in Senaki in October of 1998 as links of one chain in Russia's conspiracy aimed at preventing the Main Export Pipeline to pass through Georgia.<sup>185</sup> As noted by Svante Cornell, "unable to oust Aliyev, Russia might have thought that destabilizing Georgia would do very much the same effect for oil transportation as destabilizing Azerbaijan itself."<sup>186</sup>

On the question of Russian bases on Georgian territory Shevardnadze showed flexibility on time frame for closing that according 1999 OSCE Istanbul summit Russia agreed to close the two – Vaziani and Gudautu – by the July 2001 and agreed to set the time frame for Akhalkalaki and Batumi.<sup>187</sup> In fact, behind the Georgian patience the location of these two bases the former in Javakheti and the latter in

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<sup>182</sup> Stephen Blank, "Russia and Europe in the Caucasus", *European Security*, 4/4, 1995

<sup>183</sup> Given the economic conditions of the country IMF and World Bank gave financial assistance, but, in 2003 IMF announced the end of economic cooperation with Georgia due to the uncollected taxes and corruption in the country.

<sup>184</sup> Ariel Cohen, "Moscow's Hunt in ...", *op cit.*

<sup>185</sup> For an overview of recent wave of instability see Ghia Nodia, "A New Cycle of Instability in Georgia", in "Crossroads and Conflict...", *op cit.*, pp.189-193

<sup>186</sup> Svante Cornell, "Small Nations and ....", *op cit.*, p.359

<sup>187</sup> Russia withdrew the base at Vaziani by July 2001; the planned withdrawal of Gudautu was delayed due to the protests of Abkhazians. Russia also offered to vacate of Akhalkalaki and Batumi bases within 15 years referring to financial problems.

Abkhazia where the two regions occasionally demand for more self-rule from central authority is perceived as providing Russia with additional lever to exert pressure on Tbilisi. Perhaps fearing that Javakheti<sup>188</sup> can become the ‘next Karabakh,’ Shevardnadze pursued a strategy of postponement playing down the uncertain situation in this region with potential centrifugal aspirations. Most notably given the proximity to the transportation projects such as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, Baku-Erzurum gas pipeline Kars-Marabda railway connection that are supposed to pass through Javakheti, a possible spill over of instability to the region may jeopardize these projects.

Though after the violent incidents in Abkhazia<sup>189</sup> in October 2001 Georgian Parliament voted for withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers from Abkhazia<sup>190</sup>, Shevardnadze chose to hold back fearing that a “Russian pullout from the breakaway region could spark another military conflict there.”<sup>191</sup> Shevardnadze seem to be aware that though Russia’s conflict resolution capabilities are ambiguous and its destabilization capabilities are not exhausted.

The November 2001 political crisis in Georgia proves these fears. As Paul Goble has noted, “political situation in Georgia is at least in part a product of forces beyond its borders.”<sup>192</sup> Being suspicious that Russia is willing to play the ‘anti-terrorism campaign card’<sup>193</sup> for its own interests just like it used ‘peacekeeping,’<sup>194</sup> Shevardnadze refused to allow Russia to carry out anti-terrorist operations in Pankisi

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<sup>188</sup> See Voitsekh Guretski, “The Question of Javakheti”, Caucasian Regional Studies, 3/1, 1998.

<sup>189</sup> UN incident occurred on October 8, 2001 when a group of guerillas raided three villages in Kodori Gorge killing 14 people and shooting down helicopter with UN observers. Later unidentified helicopters and planes launched bombing raids in the region. Georgian authorities blamed Abkhaz and Russia forces in attempts to destabilize the situation and sent troops to the gorge.

<sup>190</sup> RFE/RL Newslines, October 11, 2001

<sup>191</sup> RFE/RL Newslines, January 30, 2002

<sup>192</sup> Paul Goble, “Caucasus: Analysis from Washington, What Next in Georgia?”, RFE/RL Research Report, November 2, 2001.

<sup>193</sup> See RFE/RL Newslines, October 3, 2001

<sup>194</sup> Miriam Lansky, “Anti-Terrorism As Pretext: Russia Taking Aim at the South Caucasus?”, John Hopkins University, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, (SAIS), February 2, 2000, <[http://www.cacialayst.org/Feb\\_2\\_2000/RUSSIA\\_and\\_SOUTH\\_CAUCASUS.htm](http://www.cacialayst.org/Feb_2_2000/RUSSIA_and_SOUTH_CAUCASUS.htm)>, Accessed: February 18, 2004

Gorge.<sup>195</sup> Instead Georgia asked the US Government to train Georgian counter-terrorism units – Georgian Train and Equip Program (GTEP) – that would carry out special anti-terrorist operations on the Territory of Georgia.<sup>196</sup> Despite Russia seems uneasy about the presence of American military instructors in Georgia Putin’s reluctance to accentuate further on this issue should be looked through the broader context of geopolitical shift in the world after 9/11.<sup>197</sup> Whatever the real intentions of Putin in supporting the US-led anti-terrorist coalition, at least two strategic goals that are directly linked with post-Soviet space and particularly to South Caucasus played significant role. Firstly, an immediate goal the elimination of international terrorist networks that potentially threatens Russia’s own security.<sup>198</sup> Secondly, no less pressing issue for Russia is the relations with the CIS particularly by cultivating a ‘common threat’ such as terrorism and extremism is believed in Moscow to provide new basis for further integration of CIS states into a single political-military security system – long-sought-after goal of Russia.

The ‘Rose Revolution’ in Georgia that compelled Shevardnadze<sup>199</sup> to resign and election of Mikhail Saakashvili brought about the suggestions that a new period have started in Georgia. The question concentrated on whether Saakashvili would achieve to bring stability to the country and to project central control on the breakaway territories remained illusive when he elected as the new president of Georgia on January 4, 2004. Saakashvili initially focused on the resolution of Adjara problem which ended up with flee of the leader Abashidze to Russia, the control if not achieved the legitimacy of president would put under question potentially leading to country to a new cycle of instability. This initial success of Saakashvili brought

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<sup>195</sup> Jean-Christophe Peuch, “Caucasus: Russia May Benefit from September 11 Fallout”, RFE/RL Report, October 30, 2001

<sup>196</sup> See RFE/RL Newswire, 20,25, and 27 February 2002

<sup>197</sup> Rick Fawn, “Russia’s Reluctant Retreat from the Caucasus: Abkhazia, Georgia and the US after 11 September 2001”, European Security, 11/4, 2003, pp.130-150

<sup>198</sup> Russia was quick to stress that the terrorist attacks against the US only vindicate Russia’s ‘anti-terrorist’ campaign in Chechnya, arguing that terrorist cells of the Caucasus, Central Asia, Afghanistan, and the Middle East are the components of a well coordinated extremist terrorist networks that poses a grave security threat not only to the stability of Russia and its southern CIS neighbors but also to the international security. See Igor Torbakov, “Moscow Moves to Wage its Own War Against Terrorism”, Eurasia Insight, September 27, 2001

<sup>199</sup> On the ‘Rose Revolution’ See the interview with the Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, “It Could Have Gone Badly”, Newsweek, December 8, 2003, p.60

about the question what next?<sup>200</sup> In fact Georgian president is deemed to incorporate the lost territories of Georgia and foster the territorial integrity. But the Georgian president indicated that it could prove easier to reintegrate South Ossetia than Abkhazia stating, “Ossetia will take place sooner than that [Abkhazia’s reintegration].”<sup>201</sup> On the other hand, during these developments Russian response to Georgian moves was observed with anxiety since the resolution of South Ossetia and Abkhazia would deprive Russia of important leverage over Tbilisi.<sup>202</sup> Nevertheless, it seems after the meeting of Saakashvili and Putin on February 11, a considerable warming has been observed in Russia-Georgian relations and comments that the relations with Russia directly linked with the future of the Russian bases.<sup>203</sup> Following his meeting with Putin, Saakashvili said “Georgia will not allow ‘third countries’ to have military bases on its territory once Russia removes its military bases...Georgia will take no actions contrary to Russia’s interests”.<sup>204</sup> Putin also referring the statements of Sakashvili has made in Georgia and abroad, noted the positive mood in bilateral relation as stating these were “very positive signals oriented toward reviving relations between Georgia and Russia.”<sup>205</sup> As understood from the statements of Saakashvili, Georgia seems to be reluctant on the question of Russian bases in exchange of providing the territorial integrity of the country. This line of argument, if not embody a confrontational sense, was also reaffirmed by the statements of Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov told journalists in Moscow on 31 March, that “the Russian bases in Georgia will not be withdrawn until alternative infrastructure is built in Russia.”<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> “Can Saakashvili Repeat the Adjar Success”, RFE/RL Press Releases, May 25, 2004

<sup>201</sup> Igor Torbakov, “Whither Saakashvili’s Reunification Efforts in Georgia?”, Eurasia Insight, May 17, 2004; Jaba Devdariani, “Georgia Keeps Pressure on South Ossetia”, Eurasia Insight, July 6, 2004

<sup>202</sup> David Darchiashvili, “Georgian Security Problems and Policies”, in Dov Lynch (ed.), “The South Caucasus: a Challenge for the EU”, Chaillot Papers, No.65, December 2003, p.110

<sup>203</sup> Igor Torbakov, “Moscow Views Military Withdrawal Issue as Litmus Test for Georgia-Russian Relations”, Eurasia Insight, January 28, 2004,

<sup>204</sup> See RFE/RL Newswire, February 12, 2004

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> See RFE/RL Newswire, April 01, 2004

## CHAPTER 4

### RUSSIA AND TRANSCAUCASIA<sup>207</sup>

#### 4.1 Evolution of Russian Foreign and Security Policy

The most pressing direct consequences of the disintegration of the Soviet Union had probably been felt by the Russian Federation, successor state. Transition and its challenges in adopting totally different political and economic systems pushed Russia also in flux in defining identity, national interest and accordingly its foreign policy objectives. Caucasus as a region both having territories in Russian federation and three NIS in the southern part performs differences in conducting its policies. But the Russian approach and relationship differs in this regard where the relationship with Northern part of the region performs horizontal type of relationship, the Transcaucasia performs vertical relationship.<sup>208</sup> Due to the nature of this relationship security concerns, threats and accordingly policies perform differences. Though until the dissolution the Transcaucasia and problems was issues related to internal affairs, the mood has changed. Relation with Transcaucasia no more can be handled as domestic affairs on the contrary; the problems and concerns emanating from the region transformed to be issues of foreign policy.<sup>209</sup> This line of argument does not claim the absence of links between these two regions. Actually the Russian perception of Transcaucasia mostly depends on existing links that the instability bears the risks of triggering ‘domino effect’ and blow up vertical federal structure of

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<sup>207</sup> The term ‘Transcaucasia’ reflects the Russo-centric perspective of the South Caucasus region when looked from Moscow. In this regard, the region will be addressed as Transcaucasia to reflect Russian perception

<sup>208</sup> Svante Cornell, “Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus”, Richmond: RIIA, Curzon Press, 2001, p.333. This distinction analytically facilitates to grab the dynamics of these two regions in terms of both similarities and differences.

<sup>209</sup> Shireen Hunter, “The Trans-Caucasus in Transition: Nation-Building and Conflict”, Washington DC: CSIS, 1994, p.142.

Russian Federation, particularly volatile Northern Caucasus. Thus by identifying the spill over effect and by naming this region with Central Asia as ‘soft underbelly’, Moscow considers this fact among major reasons that made it imperative for Russia to preserve decisively military, political and economic presence in Transcaucasia.

However, Russia’s policies in the region have not performed consistency, on the contrary; it passed several stages ranging from benign neglect, assertiveness and acceptance of *status quo*. In this context, the discussion of evolution of Russian foreign policy and the reasons behind the realignment will facilitate the understanding of Transcaucasian track of Russian foreign policy.

#### 4.1.1 Yeltsin Era:

Russian perception and foreign policy towards the region have passed phases. In the first place Gorbachev’s reform process and ‘new thinking’ in foreign policy led Russia in a conceptual void. The elimination of ideology – world revolution approach – a determining factor brought about the debates on the re-conceptualization of foreign policy direction. Most notably with the dissolution, traditional Russian national interests gained significance that conceptualized as ‘pragmatism’. Despite the consensus on de-ideologized conduct of foreign policy, the same consensus is not at play on what constitutes vital Russian national interests. The question is related with domestic political factions and their perception of world and Russia’s place; foreign policy schools.

In the aftermath of 1991, under Yeltsin and foreign minister Andreii Kozyrev, rapprochement with the West and cooperation in political and economic terms had been appraised. By close partnership and even integration with the West was considered to solve the internal problems and would promote the efficiency of domestic reforms. Kozyrev’s foreign policy thinking was deemed to enable Russia to become a democratic, market-oriented and civilized nation. Actually his statement that “Russia’s greatness on the threshold of twenty-first century is determined not by the scale of its empire, but by the level of its people’s well-being”<sup>210</sup>, and the statement of Yeltsin that “Russia considers the USA and other Western countries not

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<sup>210</sup> Quoted in Mohiaddin Mesbahi, “Russian Foreign Policy and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus”, *Central Asian Survey*, 12/2, 1993, p.182

only as partners but also as allies”<sup>211</sup> illustrate the mindset of this approach, Westernizers (*Zapadniki*).

The pro-western mood of Euro-Atlanticist school, nevertheless, not totally discarded Russia’s Eurasian character. They promoted the role of bridge between Asia and Europe without imperial ambitions. Tailored role for Russia in the former Soviet Union was considered as civilizer and guarantor of security in the context of broad partnership with the West. However, the pro-western mood in Russia soon began to be criticized by opposition and hardliners.

The reasons behind critics and growing anti-Western sentiments were twofold. Firstly, the continuation of severe economic crises and the failure of ‘shock therapy’ led to critics on Yeltsin and its foreign policy which became more publicly discussed. Secondly, the Western steps to enlarge NATO at the expense of Russian opposition and the NATO bombing of former Yugoslavia increased support for the militant-nationalists inside the political circles. Opposition and hardliners even accused the president Yeltsin and his associates in conspiracy with foreign states. They accused Yeltsin betraying Russia’s national interests and argued that the financial aid of the West did not worth the unilateral concessions.<sup>212</sup>

Furthermore the benign neglect towards the former Soviet states, and inability to be a powerful center of the CIS owing to economic conditions of Russia brought about the critics on inability to protect Russia’s national interests in the ‘near abroad’ (*Blizhnoe zarubezhe’e*). The growing anti-western sentiment was marked by the victory of Zhirinovsky’s Liberal Democratic Party with the popular ultra-nationalistic discourse. And Yeltsin eventually distanced himself from the pro-western group and chose to accommodate the left-dominated Duma rhetoric, despite the new constitution adopted in 1993 gave him considerable power. After Kozyrev’s resignation from his post, in 1996 Yeltsin appointed Yevgenii Primakov, former head of External Intelligence Service (SVR) as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Primakov’s appointment brought about a visible shift in overall Russian foreign policy. Though the neo-Eurasianist school began to increase its weight in

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<sup>211</sup> Ludmilla Selezneva, “Post-Soviet Russian Foreign Policy: Between Doctrine and Pragmatism”, *European Security*, 11/4, 2003, p.13

<sup>212</sup> Mary Buckley, “Russian Foreign Policy and Its Critics”, *European Security*, 11/4, 2003, p.30

Kozyrev's foreign policy by mid-1992 onward, suffice to say that Eurasianism gained significance within Primakov's foreign policy direction. Neo-Eurasinists, despite the differences from their adherents of the traditional Russian school of Eurasianism, nevertheless share some common underpinnings of their philosophical outlook.<sup>213</sup> They believe that the philosophical outlook of Atlanticism have led to a naïve, confessional and confused foreign policy, and romantic relationship with the West had been exaggerated.<sup>214</sup> Their principal goal is the establishment of international environment conducive to Russian reform and revitalization without getting into confrontation with the West as underlined by Mesbahi as not hostile but certainly non-euphoric.<sup>215</sup> Therefore, their approach to Russian foreign policy is more broaden and pragmatic. Actually the nature of Primakov's foreign policy called as 'policy of alternatives' – global foreign policy –, and used the concept of 'Eurasia' as its philosophical background.<sup>216</sup>

Primakov's 'policy of alternatives' was deemed to reassert Russia's Great Power status, however, realizing the threat of isolation as a result of Russia's inability to influence international affairs that was the developments in the Balkans, Primakov adopted 'inclusive multi-polarity'. Apart from envisaging Russia as center of power (pole) in the international system with the United States, European Union, China and Japan, Primakov also stressed the need to defend Russia's interest without getting into a new Cold War with the West. The mood found expression in Russian policy towards NATO; while emphasizing OSCE's role as a counterweight to NATO, Russia also sought compromise with NATO bringing about the 'Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and Russian Federation' that was signed on 29 May, 1997.

'Primakov doctrine' also envisaged the increasing Russian role in Eurasia and particularly in the CIS by reiterating the relations with CIS countries were a priority

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<sup>213</sup> Ilya Vinkovetsky, 'Classical Eurasianism and its Legacy', Canadian-American Slavic Studies, Vol.34, No.2, 2000, pp125-126 and Igor V. Podberezsky, 'Between Europe and Asia: the Search for Russia's Civilizational Identity', in Gennady Chufirin (ed.), Russia and Asia: Emerging Security Agenda, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p.51

<sup>214</sup> Shireen Hunter, op cit., p.149-150

<sup>215</sup> Mohiaddin Mesbahi, op cit., pp.187-188

<sup>216</sup> Ludmilla Selezneva, op cit., pp.15-16



for Russia. The ‘Near Abroad’ was asserted as a de facto Russian sphere of influence and any foreign intervention into this region was perceived in zero-sum terms.<sup>217</sup>

In this regard, the growing Western and particularly the US activism and engagement to the Caspian basin by promoting ‘silk road strategy’ as well as diversification of energy transportation networks bypassing Russia were viewed as a renewed containment of Moscow.<sup>218</sup> Furthermore, from the Russian perspective, the use of force by NATO without UN authorization in Bosnia and later in Kosovo were interpreted as Washington’s intended world role and as a serious threat to Russia’s vital military-political interests.<sup>219</sup> Principally, NATO’s Kosovo operation was perceived as a precedent for future ‘out of area’ operations in the regions where Russia has traditional interests.<sup>220</sup>

But on the other hand, Western deployment of large-scale forces in the Balkans paved the way for Russia to use of force as an instrument in resolving ethnic problems and conflicts that followed the first war in Chechnya of 1994-1996.<sup>221</sup> Thus, the developments in international affairs and Moscow’s decreasing role shaping them and the first war in Chechnya brought about Russia’s ‘push southward’.

#### 4.1.2 Putin Era:

In early 2000, Vladimir Putin ran his presidential campaign with the discourse of ‘Great Russia’ (*Derzhava*) – Russia’s gradual resurgence as a great power – and ‘strong Russian statehood’. The new government of Putin faced with the challenge to merge military potential, geopolitical opportunities and economic resource-base. In his ‘State of the Nation’, President Putin stated that although “the

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<sup>217</sup> Ariel Cohen, “The ‘Primakov Doctrine’: Russia’s Zero-Sum Game with the United States”, Heritage Foundation, FYI No.167, December 15, 1997, <<http://www.heritage.org/library/categories/forpol/fyi167.html#2>>, accessed on February 17, 2003.

<sup>218</sup> Thomas Ambrosio, “Russia’s Quest for Multi polarity: A Response to US Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era”, *European Security*, 10/1, 2001, p.51

<sup>219</sup> Mary Buckley, *op cit.*, p.30

<sup>220</sup> Stephen Blank, “Threats to Russian Security: The View from Moscow”, SSI, United States Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, July 2000, p.4

<sup>221</sup> Alexei Arbatov, “The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine: Lessons Learned from Kosovo and Chechnya”, George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, Paper No.2, July 2000, p.2

era of confrontation is over, the bitter competition – for markets, investments and political and economic influence – is a permanent fixture of the present-day world. In this struggle Russia must be strong and competitive.”<sup>222</sup> Putin seems to realize that any successful foreign policy should be based on domestic reforms and improvement in the economic conditions; otherwise, as he argued, “we [Russia] will always be on the losing side while our political and economic opportunities in the world will be shrinking.”<sup>223</sup> President Putin stressed that “Russia’s foreign policy would in the future continue to be built on purely pragmatic basis, in line with [Russia’s] capabilities and national interests – military-strategic, economic and political.”<sup>224</sup> In other words, Putin is trying to formulate such a foreign policy that the country cope with.<sup>225</sup>

In fact, Putin’s realistic approach to foreign policy formulation in accordance with country’s resource-bases interpreted as the economization of Russian foreign policy and hence renunciation of great power ambitions in order to become a real nation state like the others. However, this misconception derives primarily from confusion between means and ends. Putin’s foreign policy reflects the understanding that “...it is only on the basis of a strong economy that Russia can hope to regain its position as global power.”<sup>226</sup> In other words as noted by Bobo Lo “...gloeconomics has become for the Moscow the geopolitics of the new millennium, giving fresh impetus to thinking about strategic space, balance of power, and spheres of influence by introducing a hard edge of practicality.”<sup>227</sup>

The connection between gloeconomics and geopolitics come affront most clearly at the regional level, where economic factors are increasingly shaping the conduct of foreign policy and its outcomes. In Moscow’s relations with Europe, where the latter’s dependency in Russian energy, and where energy is thought as a

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<sup>222</sup> See President Putin’s “State of the Nation” Annual Address to the RF Federal Assembly, April 18, 2002, English translated version appeared in International Affairs (Moscow), 48/3, 2002, pp.1-16.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Vitalii Tretiakov, “Putin’s Pragmatic Foreign Policy”, International Affairs (Moscow), 48/3, 2002, p.17

<sup>226</sup> Bobo Lo, “Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy”, Chatham House Papers (RIIA), London: Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p.65

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p.67

strategic good that is not simply related to economics but carry political, security and civilizational consequences as well, may bring about the acceptance and integration of Moscow to Europe. Likewise, in the Asia Pacific region where most importantly modernizing China seeking diversification of its energy supply create opportunities for Russia to become a strategic player in the region.

Furthermore, and particularly in former Soviet Union, Putin Administration has managed to pursue what might be called ‘geopoliticization’ of foreign economic policy – that is, the conversion of economic triumphs into political-strategic capital.<sup>228</sup> In fact, unlike from Yeltsin period that the relations with former Soviet republics was not successful at all, Putin has transformed the motives and results that is the increasing role of economics in the protection and promotion of Russia’s geopolitical interests in the region. The clearest example of this transformation is Moscow’s exploitation of economic vulnerability of certain CIS member states, notably Georgia, to ensure being taken into account of Russian foreign and security policy interests. Rather than with a geopolitical discourse Putin put the squeeze with Tbilisi’s energy vulnerability to Moscow. Instead of speaking ‘sphere of influence’, Putin has resorted to very Western arguments of economic rationalism that unless debtor has not fulfilled its financial responsibilities, the supplier has the right to cut off. In other words, Putin use the economic means to extract strategic results. Thomas Goltz’s words that “[t]here is now an indigenous movement that openly says ‘so what’ to all the high concepts of democracy, free market economy, and structural reform...freedom of thought...who can eat those things or use them to heat their homes”,<sup>229</sup> prove the effectiveness of Putin’s policies where in the South Caucasus an indigenous anti-Western sentiment is growing.

The same mindset also prevails in Moscow’s dealing with major regional energy projects and pipelines. In the 1990’s the pressure of Moscow had not thwarted the ‘contract of the century’ and the agreement on the construction of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline project. With Putin, economically oriented method to show that Russian controlled pipelines between Tengiz and Novorossisk is more

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Thomas Goltz, “Remembering a Winter of Discontent: Letter from the South Caucasus”, The Washington Quarterly, 23/3, 2000, p.71

profitable for everyone than the more expensive BTC pipeline even brought about the questioning of rationality and survivability of the latter. In this regard, generally speaking, the Putin administration's strategy in the 'near abroad' can be defined as one that seeks to achieve traditional objectives by modern means.<sup>230</sup>

Nevertheless, Putin is not out of critics that his foreign policy being as pro-American due to the warming in relations with the US even accusing him as the 'third stage of treason' after Gorbachev and Yeltsin.<sup>231</sup> The Russo-American relations evolved into more cooperative mood with Putin and particularly with the 'war on terrorism' but at the same time relations with Europe also gained significance as the developments before and during Iraq War have demonstrated. In fact, Putin's foreign policy approach aimed fostering close relations with Europe in order to counter balance the relations with the US on the issues of international politics, hence it can be argued Russian foreign policy is more European oriented rather than US oriented. But at least Putin managed to overcome two foreign policy failures of Yeltsin period relations with the US and CIS which were pointed by Bobo Lo as "[i]f the relationship with the United States was seen by many as the greatest foreign policy failure of the Yeltsin period, then Moscow's handling of affairs in the former Soviet space came a close second."<sup>232</sup>

Putin well aware of the ineffectiveness of CIS integration and desired Moscow leadership on the CIS member states developed a differing approach aiming to develop bilateral relations with them in order to overcome the ineffectiveness CIS multilateral structures and to provide more flexibility in relations with them. Putin also thought economically developed and prosper Russia would attract the CIS member states and eventually they would come by themselves.

Putin in the short-term formulated Russia's strategy as to prevention at all costs marginalization of its status of multi-regional power. In this regard, the CIS, where Russia is still influential, has given special consideration. In fact Putin considers the CIS to be "a major factor of stability in a large part of the world."<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Bobo Lo, op cit., p.69

<sup>231</sup> Mary Buckley, op cit., p.35

<sup>232</sup> Bobo Lo, op cit., p.25

<sup>233</sup> Putin's "State of The Nation", op cit.

Robert Legvold, explaining this prioritization of the CIS in Russia's foreign policy, argues that;

Russians realize that they still have potent influence within their immediate neighborhood and that if that neighborhood is important to the larger world, Russia must be important as well. Russia elites, including president, quite consciously see their capacity to shape events in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova as key to strengthening their international standing.<sup>234</sup>

## 4.2 Active Engagement or Constructivist Engagement

Transcaucasian track of Russian foreign policy has evolved in line with domestic political developments, the overall foreign policy direction and geopolitical conditions. However, though different foreign policy schools gained significance in different periods their eventual consensus that Russia should reassert or preserve its dominance in the former Soviet territory. This doesn't mean Russia from 1991 have pursued a coordinated and well formulated policy in the region; on the contrary, particularly the period of 1991-mid 1992, Russia predominantly focused on relations with the West and its domestic political and economic reforms. In this period Russian foreign policy in the region had been "...passive, reactive and, often, conducted on ad hoc basis."<sup>235</sup> Simply the approach was to 'get rid' of the 'Caucasian Problem'.<sup>236</sup> The growing popularity of new-Eurasianists in Russian political discourse and their view of former Soviet territory brought about the debates on reformulation of a policy. The events in Abkhazia were became the main catalyst for greater appreciation of the region's importance for Russian security. The growing instability and ongoing conflicts underlined geopolitical realities and security dynamics in Russian perception; one of which the possible spill over of instability from Transcaucasus into the Northern Caucasus, and the other the stability in the

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<sup>234</sup> Robert Legvold, "Russia's Unformed Foreign Policy", Foreign Affairs, September-October 2001, pp.63-64

<sup>235</sup> Maxim Shashenkov, "Russia in the Caucasus: Interests, Threats and Policy Options", in Vladimir Baranovsky (ed.), "Russia and Europe: An Emerging Security Agenda", Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.436

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p.442

region could not be reached without Russia.<sup>237</sup> In fact the South Caucasus was supposed to be a *cordon sanitaire* against instability emanating from the south.<sup>238</sup> Therefore “[t]he question for the Southern Tier was not whether there would be a strong Russian presence but what kind of presence it would be.”<sup>239</sup>

Regarding the type of presence, the way to deal with the challenges and threats emanating from the region Russia have several policy options which were formulated as disengagement options that was already abandoned by mid-1992 and engagement options having to types as ‘active engagement’ and ‘constructivist engagement.’<sup>240</sup> These two engagement policy options stemmed from the realization of Russia needed a preventive and pro-active policy in the region.

Active engagement is inherently an assertive neo-imperialist policy with the goal of creating a belt of satellite states that closely tied by enforced economic, military and political links.<sup>241</sup> In a sense it embody integrationist trends in itself but a direct coercive integrationist policy will only destroy the natural integrationist trends on the territory former Soviet Union, particularly in Transcaucasia, and backfire against Russia. This fact stems from the perception that the “[p]ost-soviet states had some difficulty perceiving Russian involvement in their affairs as positive factor, given Russia’s past imperialism and present ineffectiveness”<sup>242</sup> despite the pursuit of policy is dedicated to provide stability and to secure Russia. Another factor namely the perception of insecurity leads to the increase in temptations to turn to an active engagement, in other words, actively engaging in the conflicts by military means. In the conflicts throughout the Transcaucasia, Russia while by engaging into them and eventually freezing without political solutions also fall into the danger of confusing long-term stability with the maintenance of a particular regional order.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.436-437

<sup>238</sup> Duygu Bazoglu Sezer, “Russia and the South: Central Asia and the Caucasus”, *European Security*, 5/2,1995, pp.303-323

<sup>239</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, “Provisional Stabilities”, *International Security*, 24/3, 1999, p.150

<sup>240</sup> Maxim Shashenkov, *op cit.*, pp.442-451

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p.445

<sup>242</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, *op cit.*, p. 154

<sup>243</sup> Maxim Shashenkov, *op cit.*, pp446-447

In contrast to active engagement, constructivist engagement promotes long-term stability as a key Russian priority and aims encouragement voluntary integrationist trends in the CIS. Though, at the first sight, Russian willingness to provide stability and guarantor of regional security order as in the active engagement policy, constructivist engagement promotes collaborative effort in stability rather than ‘enforced stability.’ By this way Russia is considered to assure continuing and long-term role as a major stability provider in the South Caucasus.<sup>244</sup>

The Russian engagement strategy towards the region composed of triad – *bases, borders, and peacekeeping* – which meant respectively, maintenance of military bases on the territory of the Transcaucasian republics, participation in the guarding of the CIS external borders, and participation or preservation of peacekeeping mandate in the conflict zones.<sup>245</sup> In fact this triad coincides with the goal of CIS integration and contributes it as well.

The growing significance of the region for Moscow paved the way to intervene into the region. Interestingly, escalation of conflicts in the South Caucasus coincided with Russia’s policy shift towards the Caucasus. The fact that the conflicts in the South Caucasus were instigated by Moscow in late 1980’s in order to prevent the region from slipping away is well documented.<sup>246</sup> In other words, the ethno-political conflicts on the territory of Georgia and Azerbaijan perceived as invaluable tool to reassert Russia’s dominance in the region. This line of argument was also underlined by Thomas Goltz stating; “Moscow uses the tacit threat of dismemberment of those states that wish to leave Moscow’s orbit.”<sup>247</sup>

#### 4.2.1 **Aggressive Reintegration: Mid 1992-late 1993**

Transcaucasia, as mentioned above, began to gain significance in Russian foreign policy since mid-1992 and viewed as formulation of a policy to reassert

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p.448

<sup>245</sup> Vitaly Naumkin, “Russia and Transcaucasia”, Caucasian Regional Studies, 3/1, 1998.

<sup>246</sup> See Igor Nolyain, “Moscow’s initiation of the Azeri,-Armenian conflict”, Central Asian Survey, 13/4, 1994, pp.541-563; John Colarusso, “Abkhazia”, Central Asian Survey, 14/1, 1995, pp.75-96; Robert Bruce Ware, “Conflict in the Caucasus: an Historical Context and a Prospect for Peace”, Central Asian Survey, 17/2, 1998, pp.227-352

<sup>247</sup> Thomas Goltz, “Letter from Eurasia: The Hidden Russian Hand”, Foreign Policy, fall 1993, p.92

Russia's dominance in the region. Nevertheless, the period of incoherence was extended until 1993 and was called as 'picking up the pieces' from Russian perspective.<sup>248</sup> In fact, as argued by Svante Cornell, Russia's reasserting its dominance in Transcaucasia – '*reconquista*' – had begun in this period, in other words shortly after dissolution and independence.<sup>249</sup>

In practice, Moscow first attempted to reassert its dominance on Armenia that logically Yerevan's involving in warfare with Azerbaijan on Karabakh. Turkey's increasingly pro-Azerbaijani stance and the embargo enforced on Armenia compelled Yerevan to accept any support it could receive, and Russia was more willing to provide. Hence, Armenia was the only South Caucasian states that willingly joined the CIS and its Collective Security Treaty on May 16, 1992. After Armenia, Moscow returned Azerbaijan and Georgia to bring them 'into the fold.'<sup>250</sup>

Georgia by being most independent-minded republic, declaring its independence in April 1991 that even before the August coup, and its reluctance to participate in CIS and its structures raised the concerns of Russia towards Georgia that paved the way for Moscow's focus its energy on after a succeeded in Armenia.

In fact, Georgia's location bordering Turkey, having a coastline on the Black Sea, and providing land access route to Armenia made strategically irreplaceable for Moscow. Russian concerns on Iranian and Turkish influence in the Caucasus, most notably perceiving Turkey as a threat to its dominant position contributed to Georgia's significance for Moscow. Armenia, as not questioning the Russian border troops on its Turkish border, Moscow focused on Tbilisi to control the feared Turkish influence.

Regarding the Black Sea region, after dissolution and Ukrainian independence, Russian coastline along the Black Sea dramatically reduced to roughly 300 kilometers. This in turn increased the need for Russia to preserve its military control over the Georgian coastline. Certainly, the Turkish Navy that in practice controlling the Black Sea today contributed Moscow's concerns. Grachev's words underline this fact as stating;

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<sup>248</sup> Cited in Svante Cornell, "Small Nations...", *op cit.*, p.341

<sup>249</sup> Svante Cornell, "The Caucasus under Renewed Russian Pressure: Realities on the Ground and Geopolitical Imperatives", *Caspian Brief*, No.10, January 2001.

<sup>250</sup> Svante Cornell, "Small Nations...", *op cit.*, p.342



I will only say that this is a strategically important area for the Russian army. We have certain strategic interests here and must take every measure to ensure that our troops remain: otherwise we will lose the Black Sea.<sup>251</sup>

Moscow's reassertion of its power on Georgia had begun with the conflict in South Ossetia. Interestingly, Russian involvement came with the upsurge in fighting in May-June 1992. With the discourse of Russians abroad even implying South Ossetians as Russian citizens, and threatening to possible bombing of Tbilisi and recognition of South Ossetia,<sup>252</sup> Moscow managed to impose a ceasefire agreement in July 1992. The ceasefire instrumentally paved the way for de facto independence of South Ossetia and the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces along the South Ossetian-Georgian border separating the former autonomous region from the rest of Georgia. Tbilisi's ongoing refusal to join in the CIS and demands to withdraw Russian troops coincided with the instigation of another conflict in Abkhazia.

Abkhazia problem had started with the reintroduction of 1925 Abkhaz constitution describing Abkhazia as a sovereign state on July 23, 1992. Though legal implications such a declaration was doubtful, nevertheless, it was perceived by Georgia as a declaration of independence distancing Abkhazia from Georgian sovereignty.<sup>253</sup> The war broke out in August 1992 with the invasion of uncontrolled and undisciplined Georgian paramilitary forces. Despite the Abkhaz inferiority in number, Georgia forces faced a well armed Abkhazian counteroffensive supported by heavy artillery, North Caucasian volunteers, and air support. The origins of these support and weapons particularly the way to be acquired by Abkhaz forces raised the question of Russian assistance.<sup>254</sup> Russia's direct involvement was blatantly exposed when an unmarked Sukhoi fighter shut down, whose pilot identified himself as a major in Russian Air Forces.<sup>255</sup> By October 1993, Abkhazia had militarily gained the upper hand, evicted the Georgian forces as well as over 200,000 ethnic Georgians

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<sup>251</sup> Quoted in Dov Lynch, "Russian Military Approaches to the Near Abroad", in Dov Lynch, "Russian Peacekeeping Strategies towards the CIS", London: MacMillan Press (RIIA), 2000, p.137

<sup>252</sup> Alexei Zverev, "Conflicts in the Caucasus 1988-1994", in Bruno Coppieters (ed.), "Contested Borders in the Caucasus", Brussels: Vubpress, 1996 p.46

<sup>253</sup> Svante Cornell, "Small Nations...", op cit., p.347

<sup>254</sup> On the account of Russian assistance see Thomas Goltz, "Letter From Eurasia...", op cit., pp-104-110

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., p.108

from the territory of Abkhazia. During the war Russia offered Georgia direct military assistance in exchange of Tbilisi's consent on Russian demands but Shevardnadze kept refusing and hence lost Abkhazia which meant the loss of nine percent of territory and nearly half of Black Sea coast for the Georgia. The loss of Abkhazia furthermore threatened the Shevardnadze regime leaving no option except appealing to Russia for help.<sup>256</sup> Eventually Shevardnadze announced the on October 8, 1993, to join the CIS. But Russia avoided the overthrow of Shevardnadze regime, in fact, "by propping up Shevardnadze, Russia has essentially produced a compliant regime in the most anti-Russian region of the former Soviet Union."<sup>257</sup>

In respect to Azerbaijan, Russia's meddling into have started with the election of pro-Turkish Abulfaz Elchibei in May 1992 after the resignation of pro-Russian Ayaz Mutalibov. Elcibei's inauguration as Azerbaijani president coincided with the policy shift, or at least, the period of 'picking up the pieces.' The center of events however started in early 1993 when a successful Azerbaijani commander, Surat Huseinov had withdrawn his troops from the front, bringing about the loss of Kelbajar region to the west of Karabakh. Huseinov then retreated to his town Ganja, where the Russian 104<sup>th</sup> regiment was based. In May 1993, Russian 104<sup>th</sup> regiment ordered to withdraw from Ganja leaving behind the military equipment which was used in the rebellious under the command of Huseinov against the Baku demanding the resignation of Elcibei. Huseinov's march to Baku has not faced any resistance by the army forcing Elcibei to resign. Nonetheless, Elcibei's last move calling Aliyev to return to Baku and appointing him as parliamentary speaker had left the coup attempt of Huseinov with failure. Aliyev's presidency though is considered as Aliyev had stolen the coup from Huseinov, as noted by Thomas Goltz, "if there was a Russian element in the coup, Huseinov was it."<sup>258</sup> After Aliyev seized the power made a deal with Huseinov by appointing him as prime minister. Unlike from his predecessor that resisted to join the CIS, Aliyev implemented Azerbaijan's accession to the CIS in September 1993, negotiated with Moscow on basing rights and border troops, but

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<sup>256</sup> Pavel Baev "Russia's Policies in the Caucasus", London: RIIA, 1997, p.47

<sup>257</sup> Quoted in Svante Cornell, "Small Nations...", op cit., p.352

<sup>258</sup> Thomas Goltz, "Letter from Eurasia...", op cit., p.110

demanding the wait until the end of Karabakh war.<sup>259</sup> Thereby, Aliyev managed further Russian manipulation in Karabakh war and used Russian equipments in offensives against Armenia which ended up with the signing of ceasefire in early 1994. Russia has not managed the desired influence on Azerbaijan as in the case of Georgia and Armenia due to growing significance of Caspian oil and accordingly Western attention which gave initial positive outcome at the Budapest summit of OSCE in 1994 which announced the deployment of peacekeeping force in Karabakh. Nevertheless, it can be argued that by the end of 1993, the Russian dominance in the region was on the verge of being re-established.

#### 4.2.2 Consolidation of Influence: 1994-1996

Russia after freezing conflicts in the South Caucasus and managing to extract concessions from Georgia and Armenia and to a lesser degree from Azerbaijan focused on construction of the triad – bases, borders and peacekeeping. The ‘forward basing’ strategy and ‘peacekeeping strategy’<sup>260</sup> can be seen as the instruments in carrying out the triad. It should also be noted that the process triad actually have started with the policy shift of Russia. In January 1993, the formation of GRVZ (group of Russian Troops in Transcaucasus) with the ultimate aim of preventing total withdrawal of the Russian forces from the region can be seen as the initial step in the process. At a meeting of CIS in January 1994, Kozyrev emphasized the need to preserve the Russian military presence in the former Soviet Union and called the proposals to withdraw Russian troops from the CIS “extremist.”<sup>261</sup> In April 1994, Yeltsin issued a decree for the Russian Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Defense to negotiate and sign agreements on setting up some 30 Russian military bases, in the

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<sup>259</sup> Svante Cornell, “Small Nations...”, *op cit.*, p.357

<sup>260</sup> The Russian phraseology does not differentiate peacekeeping and peacemaking, the word *mirotvorchesvo* literally used for both of them, the fact that, Russian concept involves much more active involvement according to C. Royen, See Micheal Orr, “Peacekeeping: A New Task for Russian Military Doctrine”, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 6/7, 1994, pp308-309; Christoph Royen, “Conflicts in the CIS and their implications for Europe”, in Vladimir Baranovsky (ed.), “Russia and Europe: An Emerging Security Agenda”, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp.238-239.

<sup>261</sup> Tatiana Shackleina, “Russian Policy toward Military Conflicts in the Former Soviet Union”, in Bruce Parrott (ed.), “State-Building and Military Power in Russia and New States of Eurasia”, Armonk: Sharpe, 1995, p.93

CIS states. This decision marked the Russian effort to establish the basic infrastructure for a forward security zone in the CIS region.<sup>262</sup>

The second part of the ‘forward basing’ strategy was deemed the deployment of border troops along the outer ‘non-CIS’ borders. The Chechen war provided the legitimate reason to Russia claiming that Chechen guerilla fighters received logistical support from Muslim countries in the south, which was carried out through poorly controlled Russian border with Transcaucasian states. Threat of Islamic fundamentalism was also cited among the reasons for Russian protection of borders in the region. Despite these immediate threats were a source of anxiety for Russia, in the long-term Russia’s preoccupation was to seal off the South Caucasus from external influences and ties that potentially could marginalize Russian influence in this region.

At the CIS summit of May 1995 held in Minsk, Yeltsin announced that Russia desired the stationing of Russian troops along all external borders of the CIS<sup>263</sup> and proposed an agreement on the protection of CIS external borders. Five states namely Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan refused to sign the document. Motivation of these states was clearly expressed by Ukrainian president Kuchma who was quoted to say that “there is no external border of the CIS but each state has its own external and internal borders.”<sup>264</sup> Consequently Russia managed to develop cooperation in the border protection only with the states that were willing to accept Russian border-guards.

In the South Caucasus, only Armenia willingly – guided by its traditional ‘Turkphobia’ – allowed Russia to protect its border with Turkey and Iran. Georgia, due to the Russian pressure that brought the country on the brink of dismemberment compelled to accept Russian border troops in February 1994 along its border with

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<sup>262</sup> Roy Allison, “The Network of New Security Policy Relations in Eurasia”, in Roy Allison and Christoph Bluth (eds.), “Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia”, London: RIIA, 1998, p.14

<sup>263</sup> Cited in Svante Cornell, “Small Nations...”, op cit., p343

<sup>264</sup> Taras Kuzio and Jennifer D. Moroney, “Ukraine and the West: Moving from Stability to Strategic Engagement”, European Security, 10/2, 2001, p.118

Turkey.<sup>265</sup> Azerbaijan until recently was also subjected to Russia's pressure to agree on the deployment of Russian border troops.

Another component of triad and an instrument in carrying out the Russia's goal of extended security zone was the so-called 'peacekeeping strategy' that was gradually developed to deal with the numerous conflicts throughout the CIS and to further the interests of Russia in the South Caucasus. Through the peacekeeping operations Russia sought to bolster its role as the key security guarantor in the CIS. Moreover, it secured Russian military presence in strategically important regions, while rebuffing the West's accusations of Russian neo-imperialistic ambitions. In other words, from the outset, Russian peacekeeping developed within the framework of Moscow's evolving perspectives of the 'near abroad' and the traditional geopolitical considerations to maintain influence in the strategically important Eurasia. Otherwise, in case of inability of Russia to take the lead in the conflict resolution in the FSU could prompt the direct military engagement of Western powers and NATO in the CIS.<sup>266</sup> Russian strategists also believed that Russia's failure to settle conflicts and its ability to lead CIS peacekeeping operations would put the CIS at the risk of disintegration.<sup>267</sup>

Russian peacekeeping operations, however, failed to comply with the principles set forth by the UN such as consent of all parties concerned, impartiality and the use of force only is self-defense arguing that the conflicts on the territory of former Soviet Union could be contained by traditional principles.<sup>268</sup> Russian analysts based Russian/CIS armed operations on the international law principle of 'legitimate

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<sup>265</sup> The deployment of Russian border guards was under the treaty between Russia and Georgia with full title '*Framework Treaty of Friendship and Good Neighbourness*' signed on February 3, 1994. The Treaty of October 1995 granted the basing rights to Russia and effectively reduced Georgia to be 'strategic satellite.' For more information see, David Darchiashvili, "The Russia Military Presence in Georgia: The parties' Attitudes and Prospects", *Caucasian Regional Studies*, 2/1, 1997. However, currently the Georgian border troops guarding the country's border independently since 1999 when Russian troops withdrew from Georgia. See Tamara Pataria and David Darchiashvili, "Security Regime Building in the South Caucasus", in Graeme P. Herd and Jennifer D.P. Moroney (eds.), "*Security Dynamics in the Former Soviet Bloc*", London: Routledge Curzon, 2003, p.163.

<sup>266</sup> Maxim Shashenkov, "Russian Peacekeeping in the Near Abroad", *Survival*, 36/3, 1994, p.50

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, p.51

<sup>268</sup> Anna Kreikemeyer and Andrei V. Zagorski, "The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)", in Roy Allison (ed.), "*Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*", Boulder: Westview Press, 1995, p.157; Bakhtiyar Tuzmukhamedov, "The Legal Framework of CIS Regional Peace Operations", *International Peacekeeping*, 6/1,2000.

intervention' into a conflict in another nation's territory at the request of that nation.<sup>269</sup> This line of argument raises the question as there is solid evidence suggesting that Russia using domestic instability in Georgia forced the central government to request Russian peacekeeping forces that in reality meant an open involvement of Russian troops on the side of separatist communities.<sup>270</sup>

Russia with its peacekeeping strategy deployed force on the hot spots wherever possible on the territory of FSU except along the line of Azerbaijan and Armenia after brokering cease-fires and initiated peace negotiations. Nevertheless, it seems that the peace talks were held mainly for external consumption, the fact brought about the argument that the situation of 'no war no pace' best served the Russian interests. But, in the longer-term this policy turned out to be counter productive where all states in the region began to formulate its relations with Moscow by taking into account its relations with belligerent. Thus, on the one hand by supporting separatist movements in Georgia compelled Tbilisi to participate in CIS, to grant peacekeeping mandate and basing rights, on the other hand, by reluctance or unwillingness to solve Abkhazia problem Russia alienated Georgian leadership. Eventually, Georgia and Azerbaijan as well, sought to foster security ties with Euro-Atlantic structures even demanded the resolution of conflicts through international organizations which in turn brought about the internationalization of conflicts – an outcome that was desperately tries to be prevented and disturbed Moscow.<sup>271</sup> Consequently, Russian 'peacekeeping strategy' achieved to frozen the conflicts but failed in producing political solutions leaving the engagement 'dead-end.'<sup>272</sup> In fact, Pavel Baev, an important analyst on Russian policies in the region illustrated the way of engagement and conflict management as noting;

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<sup>269</sup> O.N.Khlestov and A.I. Nikitin, "Using Armed Forces in International Relations and Russia's Point of View: International Legal Aspects", Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement, 5/1, 1996, pp.45-62

<sup>270</sup> For a detailed analysis of Russian Peacekeeping strategies see, Dov Lynch, "Russian Peacekeeping Strategies towards the CIS", London: MacMillan Press (RIIA), 2000.

<sup>271</sup> Stanislav Cherniavskii, "The Caucasian Track of Russia's Foreign Policy", International Affairs (Moscow), 46/5, 2000, p.156

<sup>272</sup> Pavel Baev, "Russia's Experiments and Experience in Conflict Management and Peacemaking", International Peacekeeping, 1/3, 1994, p.247

Russia is able to exert influence in the so-called 'Near abroad' only as long as it is able to exploit its military instruments, so any permanent resolution of a conflict situation would essentially mean the shrinking of Russia's sphere of influence. Open-ended peace-keeping operations, which are perceived as an undesirable option in Western Political thinking, are, in fact, the norm in Russian conflict management.<sup>273</sup>

Nevertheless, Russia achieved its main strategic aim by gaining a strategic decisive measure in the region by keeping Georgia and Armenia reliant on Russia<sup>274</sup> and thus more compliant to Russian demands.

#### 4.2.3 Gradual Retreat: Mid 1996-2000

Since 1996, Russian analysts started to realize that over reliance on the military tools in pursuing Russian interests in the South Caucasus was counterproductive and while it did not prevent external penetration into the region, on the contrary it even further pushed Georgia and Azerbaijan to seek security guarantees in Western security arrangements. One of the factors that contributed this re-evaluation was the disastrous performance of Russian Army in Chechnya.<sup>275</sup>

In fact, the war in Chechnya<sup>276</sup> has brought about the questioning of Russian power and its influence and dominance in the region by August 1996 when the Chechen rebels achieved to conquer Grozny. The event perceived as a watershed in Russia's abilities to affect the regional affairs, if not the most important event in the Caucasus save the dissolution, leading the states in the region to pursue more independent policies and growing extra-regional penetration to the region due to changing perception of Russia and their eventual security calculations ending with more flexible and independent policies.<sup>277</sup> It was the 'defeat syndrome' that

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<sup>273</sup> Pavel Baev, "Conflict Management in the Former Soviet South: The Dead-End of Russian Interventions", *European Security*, 6/4, 1997, p.113

<sup>274</sup> Jonathan Aves, "The Caucasus States: the Regional Security Complex", in Roy Allison and Christoph Bluth (eds.), "Security Dilemmas...", *op cit.*, p.186

<sup>275</sup> Pavel Baev, "Russian the Caucasus: Sovereignty, Intervention and Retreat", in Col. Michael Crutcher (ed.), "The Russian Army at the Dawn of the Millennium", Carlisle Barracks: The US Army War College, 2000, pp.239-260

<sup>276</sup> For an extensive account on the war in Chechnya and its effects on Russia and its policies see Anatol Lieven, "Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power", New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998

<sup>277</sup> Pavel Baev, "Conflict management...", *op cit.*, p.119

questioned the military component of Russian power which traditionally was the most useful, was broken without repair.<sup>278</sup>

On the other hand, in respect to the three states of the region, differing effects have been observed. Azerbaijan, though had begun to pursue more independent policies thanks to its natural resources, deepened its relations with extra-regional actors mostly with Western states facilitating its ability to pursue more independent policies. On the other hand, Chechnya slowed down the implementation of oil-related projects. Shevardnadze supported the intervention due to Abkhazia that the military intervention of Russia in Chechnya perceived as a pretext for a possible military solution to Abkhazia. But Georgia as well joined the process of Baku on pursuing more independent line of policy, despite the presence Russian troops, border guards and vulnerable to the northern neighbor due to internal conflicts threatening territorial integrity. Armenia, fearing the new escalation of Karabakh conflict maintained the close security ties with Moscow and kept the Russian troops on its territory as security guarantee.<sup>279</sup>

By the late 1997, Russian military admitted that military relations with the CIS states existed on two levels – bilateral and multilateral –, according to the extent of military integration with Russia. At the bilateral level Russia promoted extensive network of treaties of cooperation, which envisaged pre-positioning of Russian troops in the form of military bases, joint border protection troops. The bilateral military cooperation was given to those states that willing to limit their sovereignty to some degree in order to obtain ‘reliable security guarantees from Russia.’ However, the extent of this willingness from the CIS states not reached to a considerable numbers; even that fact was underlined by Igor Sergeyev (ex-Minister of Defense) when stated that Russia had only three allies, namely Armenia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.<sup>280</sup>

At the multilateral level, security integration and cooperation in the CIS has developed on the Collective Security Treaty, May 1992. Nevertheless, in April 1999, Azerbaijan and Georgia together with Uzbekistan announced that they would not

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<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, p.118

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.119-120

<sup>280</sup> Rajan Menon, Yuri E.Federov and Ghia Nodia (eds.), “Russia The Caucasus and Central Asia: The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Security Environment”, New York: M.E. Sharpe, EWI 1999, p.41



renew the treaty. The withdrawal of three CIS states from CST was interpreted as a major blow to Russian efforts to create extended security zone throughout FSU territory. The factor behind the failure of creation single security space was due to varying security needs internal conditions and anxiety over Russia's neo-imperialistic ambitions. Furthermore, as mentioned before (see Chapter 1) the creation of GUUAM as a sub-group of CIS to foster geopolitical pluralism in the CIS further deteriorated Russia's ambitions.<sup>281</sup> Another no less important factor was the lack of the common threat for all post-Soviet states.<sup>282</sup> Thus Russia faced this reality and gradually developed a 'selective engagement' strategy that meant the diversification of the political, economic, military policies that varied from region to region and even from the state to state.<sup>283</sup>

From mid-1996 to the election of Putin as the new president, Russian foreign policy has demonstrated a considerably low profile in the Caucasus. Even by the end of 1990's the triad of Russia started to crack<sup>284</sup> that Azerbaijan and Georgia have began to pursue more independent policies thanks to the Western silk road projects and they gained importance by providing access to Eurasia and particularly to Central Asia. By 1999, even Armenia began to question the excessive reliance on Russia and Armenian leaders became frequent visitors of Washington. The Armenian government sought conciliatory approach in the resolution of Karabakh conflict which was deemed to make Armenia less depended on Russia and therefore decrease the Russian influence in the region. However, the developments on October 27, 1999, that the assassination against the Defense Minister Serzh Sarkissian and Parliament speaker Karen Demirchian shooting them dead dashed the hopes shattering the country's stability. The consequence of October 1999 events was the

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<sup>281</sup> Taras Kuzio, "Geopolitical Pluralism in the CIS: The Emergence of GUUAM", European Security, 9/2, 2000

<sup>282</sup> Unlike Central Asian states that were willing to develop security cooperation with Russia due to immediate threat from instable Afghanistan, the South Caucasian states except Armenia had no common threat with Russia on the contrary Georgia and Azerbaijan were willing to develop security cooperation with Euro-Atlantic structures.

<sup>283</sup> See Tatiana Shakleina, "Russian Policy Toward...", op cit., p.103

<sup>284</sup> Vitaly Naumkin, "Russian Policy in the South Caucasus", Connections, No.3, September 2002, p.32

reduction of Kocharian's power and legitimacy and Russia's continuing influence at least in Armenia.

#### 4.2.4 Putin and the Renewed Russian Pressure

After Vladimir Putin was elected new President of Russian Federation, Moscow's policy towards the 'southern flank' has evolved into more assertive. Even before election as the new president of Russia Putin as Prime Minister since autumn 1999 was well aware of the Chechnya as the tombstone of Russian power, hence second round in Chechnya was orchestrated to handle the problem at its roots.

In fact, it was the defeat in Chechnya that prevented Moscow from projecting its influence in the South Caucasus while other powers increasingly did so. Only by addressing the problem at its roots, obliterating the source of instability and restoring firm control over the North Caucasus could Russia reclaim its lost ground in the South. This would also send a signal to the west that Russia was not to be discounted, that the Caucasus would remain a Russian prerogative, and that western involvement there would take place on Russia's terms.<sup>285</sup>

The initial success and Russian Army's relatively well coordinated and successful operations in Chechnya raised the profile of Putin. However, the second round in Chechnya also turned out to be in a deadlock except serving as a tool for Putin's presidential campaign.<sup>286</sup> After 9/11 and subsequent 'war on terrorism' Russia's strategic interests both benefited and fundamentally challenged.<sup>287</sup> Linking the Chechens to AL-Qaeda and terrorism thereby forging commonality with US interest facilitated Russian actions whereas in Georgia, Russia's position has weakened after 9/11 given increasing US engagement into the region.

Nevertheless, Putin turned out to be more aggressive in dealing with the problems in the Caucasus and particularly to restore the Russian power in the region. Georgia as the weakest state among the South Caucasian states was the target of Moscow's renewed pressure which came affront with the imposition of visa regime in

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<sup>285</sup> Svante Cornell, "The Caucasus under Renewed Pressure...", op cit.

<sup>286</sup> Pavel Baev, "Russia's Policies in the North and South Caucasus", Dov Lynch (ed.), "The South Caucasus: a Challenge for the EU", Chaillot Papers, No.65, December 2003, p.42

<sup>287</sup> Rick Fawn, "Russia's Reluctant Retreat from the Caucasus: Abkhazia, Georgia and the US after 11 September 2001", European Security, 11/4, 2003, p.131

December 2000, allegedly in order to prevent the Chechen fighters from crossing the border between two countries. However, the exemption of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from the visa regime, besides introducing Russian citizenship in June 2002 was interpreted as the Russian move as a clear violation of Georgian territorial integrity.

Furthermore Russia pressures toward Georgia also implemented through cut-off gas supplies leaving the country heatless and in darkness.<sup>288</sup> Russia justifies its cut-off with very western arguments such as economic rationality, but by looking at the evidence and timing the cut-off energy of Georgia was carefully chosen. The cut-offs generally coincides with elections, negotiations over the status of Russian bases or the extension of the Russian peacekeeping mandate in the country.<sup>289</sup> Obviously, the Russian pressure on Georgia is desperate attempt to cling on to its military presence in Georgia.

Toward Azerbaijan Putin has adopted a differing policy which can be formulated as rather than using stick as in Georgia, carrot was preferred. Putin's visit to Azerbaijan in January 2001 was the implementation of this policy which is deemed by applying stick to Georgia and carrot to Azerbaijan, the policy was geared to disturbing and if possible the breaking up the increasingly solid Georgian-Azerbaijani axis.<sup>290</sup>

Russia has not taken significant steps in resolution of the frozen conflicts in the region, rather prefers the preservation of *status quo* which secure Russian military and peacekeeping presence in the region. In fact, Russian troops still deployed in peacekeeping roles have *de facto* become guardians of continuing existence of several breakaway quasi-states.<sup>291</sup> However, Russia refrain form political initiatives that could be interpreted as the commitment to secessionism.<sup>292</sup> In

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<sup>288</sup> The private company of Itera, which is closely connected to Russian political and public energy sectors, holds nearly a monopoly in Georgian gas supplies leaving the country vulnerable to Russia. See David Darchiashvili, "Georgian Security Problems and Policies", in Dov Lynch (ed.), "The South Caucasus...", *op cit.*, p.110

<sup>289</sup> Igor Torbakov, "Russia Turning Up Pressure on Georgia", *Eurasia Insight*, December 1, 2003

<sup>290</sup> Svante Cornell, "The Caucasus under Renewed Pressure...", *op cit.*

<sup>291</sup> Charles King, "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States", *World Politics*, July 2001, pp.524-552

<sup>292</sup> Pavel Baev, "Russia's Policies in the South Caucasus", *European Security*, 10/3, 2001, p.103

other words, Moscow faces the constraint in South Caucasus limiting its policies due to Chechnya – the dilemma between the principles of territorial integrity and self-determination.<sup>293</sup>

The developments in late 2003 and early 2004 marked with the Duma elections with the victory of nationalists bringing about Russia might adopt even more assertive policy.<sup>294</sup> The ‘Rose Revolution’ in Georgia though initially brought about comments as installation of pro-American leader, Saakashvili, in Georgia, the developments signaled warming in relations with Russia. However, the initial success of Saakashvili in asserting the central control on Adjara region compelling flee of the Adjarian leader Abashidze to Russia and proceeding signals over the next step would be the South Ossetia brought about how far Moscow will act in a constructivist manner with Georgia. The question locked on whether Saakashvili will attempt on restoration of Tbilisi’s control on Abkhazia since “any stable political arrangement for ... Abkhazia would weaken Russia’s position, reduce its influence on future developments, and all into question the rationale for its military presence.”<sup>295</sup>

In short, it can be argued that Putin raised the profile of Russian policy in the region, but unlike from his predecessor with different means and Russia despite seems to pursue a low profile in the region still holds important cards that would potentially destabilize the region.

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<sup>293</sup> Vitaly Naumkin, “Russia and Transcaucasia”, op cit.

<sup>294</sup> Igor Torbakov, “Parliamentary Elections Signal Growing Russian Assertiveness Towards CIS neighbors”, Eurasia Insight, December 18, 2003

<sup>295</sup> Pavel Baev, “Russia’s Policies in the South Caucasus”, 1997, op cit., p.58

## CHAPTER 5

### STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT OF THE UNITED STATES

The United States' policy towards the region evolved into being from reactive to more pro-active in time. In the aftermath of the dissolution, in the period of 1991-1994, without clear objectives and interests in the region the US pursued a defiant policy except promoting the independence of newly independent states of the region. After 1994, economic, particularly energy, interests of the US began to play significant role in aiming to promote political and security interests. This period 1994-1997, was also argued by Svante Cornell as 'formulation of policy'<sup>296</sup>. Beginning with the year of 1997, the US' strategic engagement into the region and its policy has steadily become more assertive. The election of Bush administration and the 9/11 events have contributed as new impetus to strategic engagement. In other words, before the 9/11 the US pursued the goals and interests that might be termed 'nice-to-haves' instead of 'need-to-haves.'<sup>297</sup> Despite the growing interests and engagement, Washington's foreign policy in the region on some occasions criticized to be uncoordinated and often contradictory.<sup>298</sup>

#### 5.1 Initial Ignorance and 'Russia-first' Policy

In the following period of disintegration, Washington tended to view the South Caucasus as Russia's 'backyard' and didn't take strong interests in the region. Apart from promoting the independence of new states in the region which marked by

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<sup>296</sup> Svante Cornell, "Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus", Richmond: RIIA, Curzon Press, 2001, p.367

<sup>297</sup> Olga Oliker and Thomas Szayna, "Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and the South Caucasus: Implications for the U.S. Army", Santa Monica: RAND, 2003, p.220

<sup>298</sup> Brande Shaffer, "US Policy", in Dov Lynch (ed.), "The South Caucasus: a Challenge for the EU", Chaillot Papers, No.65, December 2003, p.53 and see also Zeyno Baran, "The Caucasus: Ten Years after Independence", The Washington Quarterly, 25/1, 2002, p.222

the visits of secretary of state James Baker in 1992 didn't considered that the region contributed the US national interests and security. The lack of a clearly formulated policy has also affected the US stance regarding the conflicts in the region, particularly in Nagorna Karabakh conflict. The partisan politics in the congress led to adoption of a pro-Armenian stance which in time constituted a major imprint of constraint in US policy.<sup>299</sup>

Given the state-building process and instability of three states, Armenia achieved to establish relatively well working relations with the West. The situation thought began to change with Shevardnadze and Aliyev, in the first years, particularly Azerbaijan expressed its stakes in the Nagorna Karabakh conflict whereas Armenia managed the Karabakh conflict to be perceived from a pro-Armenian stance and to declare Azerbaijan as the aggressor in the international community.<sup>300</sup> Washington's policy goal of promoting independence of NIS and its appearance as financial and humanitarian aid, by mid 1992, *Freedom Support Act* was enacted. However owing to the perception of Azerbaijan, it contained a section known as, 'section 907a', which prohibited all US assistance to Baku by the reason of Azerbaijan's blockade<sup>301</sup> of Armenia. At the time, Azerbaijan didn't have even an embassy in Washington and was caught unprepared by the enactment of the section 907 as noted by Robert Cutler as;

United States policy on Karabakh through much of the 1990's until the present dominated by extremely well organized and politically well connected Armenian Diaspora. Legislation was passed which penalized both Azerbaijan and Turkey for their bans on trade with Armenia.<sup>302</sup>

On the other hand, there are also arguments pointing out that inadvertently section 907 also limited America's scope for security cooperation with Armenia

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<sup>299</sup> Svante Cornell, "Small Nations...", *op cit.*, p.366 and Brenda Shaffer, *op cit.* p.54

<sup>300</sup> Svante Cornell, *ibid.*, p.368

<sup>301</sup> The language of Section 907 states, "[U]ntil the President determines, and so re-ports to the Congress that the Government of Azerbaijan is taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh...." 'Blockade' and 'embargo' performs a conceptual deficiency with a clear pro-Armenian stance, while Armenia sanctioned embargo on Nakhchivan was not referred as an obstacle.

<sup>302</sup> Robert M. Cutler, "US Interests and Cooperative Security in Karabakh and Abkhazia: Engagement versus Commitment", in Mehmet Tütüncü(ed.), "Caucasus: War and Peace", Haarlem: SOTA, 1998, p.136

which led minimal US security cooperation with Yerevan in order to preserve parity between the two.<sup>303</sup> Nevertheless, Armenia received over hundred million dollars per year in assistance, the fact that make Armenia the second *per capita* recipient of US aid in the world after Israel.<sup>304</sup>

Regarding the relations with Georgia though kept a relatively low profile; Washington devoted special attention and promoted cooperation with Tbilisi than with Armenia and Azerbaijan. The motivation behind was the strategic geographic location of Georgia with a coastline along Black Sea which confers a pivotal role in the regional developments. Furthermore, relations with Georgia were less controversial compared with Armenia and Azerbaijan<sup>305</sup> – which the criticism on US policy revolves around.<sup>306</sup>

At the regional level, the US didn't attempt to fill the geopolitical vacuum and to take advantage as Turkey attempted to do with Russian withdrawal. However, there are also arguments that rather than actively engaging to the region promoted a strong role for Turkey most notably to prevent debilitation of NIS towards Iran. Behind the initial ignorance and 'Russia First' policy of Washington, the perception of Russia, with considerable respect to its military and strategic capabilities, perceived Moscow as almost equal and acted accordingly with the Cold War strategic mindset and its 'sphere of influence' conception.<sup>307</sup> In other words, the US was ready to take into account of Russia's security interests in the former Soviet South and few doubted that 'instability in the Southern Tier' was a grave challenge that somehow needed to be met, the fact that, underlined by the US President Bill Clinton saying;

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<sup>303</sup> Brenda Shaffer, *op cit.*, p.54

<sup>304</sup> S. Frederick Starr, "Power Failure: American Policy in the Caspian", *National Interest*, spring 1997, p.25 and see Thomas Goltz "Catch-907 in the Caucasus", *National Interest*, spring 1997

<sup>305</sup> Brenda Shaffer, *op cit.*, p.56 and S. Frederick Starr, *op cit.*, p.25

<sup>306</sup> The uncoordinated and often contradictory nature that the critics on US policy in the South Caucasus revolve around, focus on the 'Freedom Support Act' and section 907.

<sup>307</sup> Svante Cornell, *op cit.*, pp.371-372

You [Russian] will be more likely to be involved in some of these areas near you, just like the United States has been involved in the last several years in Panama and Grenada near our area.<sup>308</sup>

## **5.2 Formulation of a Policy: 1994-1996**

The mood in US foreign policy in the region began to change in 1994. In this new direction predominantly in the initial phase the energy multinationals took a leading role while US government still was dealing with smooth functioning of relations with Moscow. The participation of energy multinationals in extraction contracts in the region brought about in turn growing economic interests. As noted by Svante Cornell “[t]hese private economic interests eventually led to an increasing governmental interest in the region.”<sup>309</sup>

### **5.2.1 The Creation of an ‘Azerbaijan Lobby’: Aliyev’s Masterpiece**

Growing significance of energy resources of Caspian region apart from attracting multinational corporations to the politics of region facilitated the hands of Aliyev as well, who as mentioned above adopted a pragmatic foreign policy line. In fact, the reconciliation of oil companies’ interests with those of Azerbaijan has further eased Aliyev’s foreign policy design. Starting with the ‘contract of the century’ and developing more than a dozen contracts that have been signed between oil companies and Azerbaijan, was aimed to attract as many foreign power as possible into the politics of oil. Thereby, Aliyev managed to bring about a vested interest of these countries in supporting the Aliyev’s regime and accordingly Azerbaijan’s stability and displaying a more positive stance towards Azerbaijan and its position in the Nagorna Karabakh conflict. In other words, Aliyev’s strategy was the ‘internationalization’ of Azerbaijan politics with energy card.<sup>310</sup>

Aliyev also had a well defined and consistent priorities attained to different states. Aliyev’s in his prioritization gave special emphasis on relations with the United States by attracting high level private American interests which in turn meant

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<sup>308</sup> Quoted in Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Premature partnership”, *Foreign affairs*, 73/2, 1994, p70

<sup>309</sup> Svante Cornell, *op.cit.*, p. 372

<sup>310</sup> Elkhan Polukhov, “Contract of the Century”, *Caucasian Regional Studies*, 2/1, 1997



the increase of Azerbaijan's importance in US foreign policy.<sup>311</sup> In this strategy, Aliyev counted on the effectiveness and influence of oil companies in domestic US politics. In other words, creation of energy lobby deemed to counterbalance the Armenian lobby.

The interests of oil multinationals were influential affecting US policy for several reasons. Firstly, as long as the Azerbaijan's stability was not guaranteed, the fate of the multi-million dollars investments would be at risk. Thus, the fate of oil companies was linked to the fate of Aliyev's regime which depended partly eliminating the threats to it from abroad – particularly from the circles in Russia. Secondly, the Nagorna Karabakh conflict was a significant factor on which Armenians had a predominant position in affecting international community and which could threaten Aliyev's regime. Hence, it was in the interest of the energy lobby to engage US government and to increase US stakes in the country, thereby increasing sustainability of Aliyev regime which meant the support of US administration. By this way, Aliyev also managed to gain support in attempts for the removal of 'Section 907' from US legislation. In fact, Aliyev's strategy in expressing the European or Middle Eastern oil companies might be in favorable position than US ones, increased the support in the removal of the section 907 which would make oil companies eligible to government-backed loans and financial assistance.

Consequently, the oil companies increased their lobbying activities in Washington to further their own interest in the region, hence Azerbaijan interests as well. The involvement of high ranking analysts and decision makers to the politics of Caspian energy was gradually increased. Most notably, Zbigniew Brzezinski in his book – the Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives – argued that Azerbaijan as the pivotal state in Caspian oil politics and hence Azerbaijan's role as the hub of Caspian energy was underlined.<sup>312</sup> The growing importance of Azerbaijan on the other hand brought about criticisms on Armenian lobby as hampering the US interests abroad.

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<sup>311</sup> Svante Cornell, *op cit.*, p.372-373

<sup>312</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geopolitical Imperatives", NY: Basic Books, 1997, p.129,144

### 5.2.2 The War in Chechnya: The Watershed

Apart from the energy factor, the first war in Chechnya brought about drastic changes in perception of Russia in Washington. Most notably, the US belief on military parity in terms of capabilities of Russia was seriously questioned. The ‘big red machine’ that once believed to have a first-rank military power was reduced to a position where it has difficulty in keeping internal order. The watershed was the August 1996, when the Chechen fighters recaptured the Grozny despite their significant numerical inferiority. Hence, it seems in retrospect as if the US administration gradually has lost the respect it had for Russia as great power with which keeping good relations viewed as a desperate need. Furthermore, with the reelection of president Yeltsin as the Russian president, the US perceived that he need to support his policies with the fear of anti-Western reaction as groundless. Nevertheless, the policy shift had not occurred in US administration given the elections were being held in the US as well.

The importance of Chechen war was the pronouncement that Russia can no longer militarily assert its influence and accordingly its way of handling crisis – conflict management capabilities – was not effective.<sup>313</sup> The ineffectiveness underlined by Russian peacekeeping activities ended up with frozen conflicts, or open-ended interventions.<sup>314</sup> Thus, Russia’s policies and actions towards the conflicts and crisis on its periphery become gradually unpredictable which entailed there still exists a Russian threat. Russia basically, despite its shrinking abilities, was regarded capable of creating serious problems in its near abroad. The second consequence was the retreat of Russian power as noted by Stephan Blank saying;

Russian military and economic power is visibly retreating as Moscow’s capability to control its outlying provinces and neighboring republics declines...This retreat of Russian power is another structural factor that plays an important role in shaping regional outcomes because it affects both local security calculus and the actions of the major foreign players...Due to the

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<sup>313</sup> For more information of Russia’s policies until the period of 1991-late 1996 see Pavel Baev, “Russia’s Policies in the Caucasus”, London: RIIA, 1997 and on the conflict management Pavel Baev, “Russia’s Experiments and Experience in Conflict Management and Peacemaking”, International Peacekeeping, 1/3, 1994

<sup>314</sup> See Pavel Baev, “Conflict Management in the Former Soviet South: The Dead-End of Russian Interventions”, European Security, 6/4, 1997

failure of coercive diplomacy and the shocking defeat in Chechnya, Russia is already effectively leaving the area as troop reductions, withdrawals and the accords with Grozny and Baku all show.<sup>315</sup>

### **5.3 Strategic Engagement: 1997-2001**

The re-election of Clinton Administration brought about changes in the cabinet. Most notably retirement of Secretary of State Warren Christopher and his replacement with more assertive Madeleine Albright marked the growing US assertiveness in the Caspian region. Translation into a policy change was underlined by Strobe Talbott saying that Transcaucasia and Central Asia make up “a strategically vital region” for the US, and what happens there “matters profoundly” to the US.<sup>316</sup>

Though the reasons of policy change can not be reduced merely on energy issues, in fact energy is important for the US. The supply of the US oil is increasingly provided through import from abroad which meant the dependence of the US to Persian Gulf, a situation make the US engulfed in a dual containment of Iran and Iraq. Moreover, the suggestion that the Caspian Sea might hold up 200 billion barrels of oil and the analysis ranking the Caspian basin reserves in third place after the Gulf and Russia, automatically contributed the region’s significance for the West and particularly for the US. Azerbaijan by being a major producer of these reserves and the location of the country that transportation of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan energy productions through a Trans-Caspian pipeline can be cited as the reasons behind the rapprochement with the regime in Baku. In other words, the Caspian Basin would then be a major source of diversification of oil imports; hence be of significant importance to US national security.

#### **5.3.1 An Increasingly Assertive Policy**

The consequence of the policy shift led the US administration to pressure the Congress in a more assertive way to repeal the section 907 of the Freedom Support

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<sup>315</sup> Stephan Blank, “Instability in the South Caucasus: Old Trends, New Traits”, Jane’s Intelligence Review, April 1998, p.16

<sup>316</sup> Strobe Talbott, “A Farewell to Flashman: American Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia”, Address at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, July 21, 1997, U.S. Department of State Dispatch, 10517693, Jul97, Vol. 8, Issue 6

Act. Strobe Talbott underlined section 907 as an impediment for US policy in the region stating;

But there are still plenty of obstacles to further progress. One of those is domestic--we have inflicted it on ourselves. I am referring to Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act, which limits our ability to provide assistance to the Government of Azerbaijan. This legislation, written in 1992, was intended to help Armenia overcome an Azerbaijani embargo. But it has had the negative effect of limiting our leverage with Baku and complicating our ability to be as effective as we could otherwise be as an honest broker.<sup>317</sup>

Similar statements was also delivered by Madeleine Albright in September 1998 that “Section 907 damages US national interests by undermining the administration’s neutrality in promoting a settlement in Nagorna-Karabakh, its ability to encourage economic and broad legal reforms in Azerbaijan, and efforts to advance and East-West energy transport corridor.”<sup>318</sup>

In fact, 1997 meant that two tendencies became increasingly obvious. Firstly, the energy lobby in the US became a counterbalance to the Armenian lobby in congress regarding the issues related to the US’s Caucasus policy. Even the Jewish lobby – supporting Turkey against Greek and Armenian lobbies owing to the Turkish-Israeli cooperation – acted in favor of the energy lobby and Azerbaijan, hence further counterbalanced the Armenian lobby. On the other hand, these developments prompted the concerns of Armenian community to a degree claiming that oil companies are working to further the Azeri political objectives.<sup>319</sup> As long as the US policy in the region was formulated in coordination with private companies, Azerbaijan’s position had indeed gained strength in Washington.

The growing US interests in the region found ground in conflict resolution as well. The Clinton administration had acted more resolutely to take part in negotiation process of conflicts in the region. Though particular attention was attempted to be paid to Abkhazia given the geographic position of Georgia, the efforts then focused on Karabakh conflict. Eventually, in January 1997, the US became the co-chairmen of Minsk Group. At the time, OSCE was implementing a rotating co-chairmanship in

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<sup>317</sup> Strobe Talbott, op cit.

<sup>318</sup> Quoted in Svante Cornell, op cit, p.377

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., pp.377-378

which apart from Russia as a permanent co-chairmen, Finland was holding the co-chairmanship. France's attempts to replace Finland that not perceived as a positive progress for Azerbaijan, given the influence of Armenian lobby in France and Azerbaijan's concerns on France as impartial mediator, led Baku to prefer the US. Ultimately, OSCE decided to implement troika of Russia, France and the US as co-chairmen.

Certainly, the importance of implementation of troika and US participation on suggestion of Azerbaijan perceived in Baku as its ability to convey its stakes in negotiation process. In fact, the pressures put on Armenia become clear. Even the statements of an US ambassador in Yerevan, underlined this tendency and Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.

No country recognizes Karabakh's independence. This is US policy and it is the policy of the OSCE. In other words all of these countries [53 out of 54] recognize territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and that Karabakh is within the borders of Azerbaijan...We believe that Armenia cannot realize sustained, robust economic growth unless there is a solution to the Karabakh dispute.<sup>320</sup>

The OSCE's announcement of step by step solution instead of a package solution brought about internal debates in Armenia leading to resignation of Ter-Petrosian – the 'palace coup.'

In this period, political objectives of the US also transformed that by early 1998, these were officially summarized as consisting of four elements:<sup>321</sup>

- strengthening modern political and economic institutions and advancing market economy
- conflict resolution
- energy development and the creation of an east-west energy transport corridor
- security cooperation

The first objective in broad terms is aimed to consolidate and promote the independence of newly independent states of the region, the transformation to well functioning market economies as well. However, the failure in state-building which

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<sup>320</sup> Quoted in Svante Cornell, p.378-379

<sup>321</sup> Strobe Talbott, op cit.

make them vulnerable to instability and foreign intervention hampers the process of their transformation and consolidation of their independence. The ongoing conflicts in the region further exacerbate the process of state-building for that reason as noted by Strobe Talbott,

An essential step in that direction is the resolution of conflicts within and between countries and people in the region. In the last century, internal instability and division provided a pretext for foreign intervention and adventurism.<sup>322</sup>

The US perceives instability in the region as a factor that the potential to hamper its strategic goals particularly on energy which provides "...yet another reason why conflict resolution must be job one for U.S. policy in the region: It is both the prerequisite for and an accompaniment to energy development."<sup>323</sup> As long the US supported the east-west energy corridor passing through Georgia and eventual incorporation of Azerbaijan in transportation of Central Asian oil and gas through the project of TRACECA, the instability in the South Caucasus, is perceived as having the potential to create a handicap in realization of this project and disturb energy diversification.<sup>324</sup>

Most notably the Karabakh conflict is seen as a major obstacle to regional stability<sup>325</sup> and impediment to further penetration due to the section 907. But on the other hand, the US rather than involving conflict resolution on the ground promoted multilateral conflicts resolution which as already mentioned firstly by taking part in OSCE Minsk Group.

Being aware of the Russia's capabilities to create and exploit instability in the region the US also promoted regional security cooperation by multilateral organizations such as NATO PfP program.<sup>326</sup> However, this does not mean the US

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Olga Olikier and Thomas Szayna (eds.), "Faultlines...", op cit., p.223

<sup>325</sup> Camilla Khokhar and Paul Wiberg-Jorgensen, "United States' Strategic Possibilities in the South Caucasus", European Security, 10/3, 2001, p.77

<sup>326</sup> NATO's objectives for PfP include fostering regional security and stability through peacetime engagement; ensuring access to Caspian Basin energy resources; combating nontraditional threats such as international terrorisms, drug trafficking, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and containing Russian resurgence at the expense of the sovereignty and/or territorial integrity of

has no difficulty regarding Russia. The US dilemma come affront with the contradiction of on the one hand intruding into its 'near abroad' by no more recognizing the southern underbelly as Russian exclusive sphere of influence; on the other hand the need to maintain good relations with Russia to integrate global economic and political systems.<sup>327</sup> In fact, many in Russia continue to express concern on US engagement but Putin, as more pragmatic leader, reiterates that Russia does not oppose the US actions, but the extent to which this cooperation is sustainable depends on the extent to which they continue to perceive their interests as shared.<sup>328</sup>

### 5.3.2 Reasons of the Policy Shift: Geo-economics vs. Geo-strategy

In terms of reasons of the policy shift, as mentioned above, the loss of respect for Russia's capabilities in the South Caucasus and increasing significance of Caspian oil can be cited. Since August 1996, the US seemed to have increasingly adhered to perception of Russia as retreating power particularly due to its shrinking military capabilities, the fact that, underlined by the economic crisis of Russia in 1998. In a sense, the US has drawn into the feeling of superiority. On the other hand, oil factor, though tended to be cited as the primary factor in US policy shift, such mono-causal reasoning argued as lacking in explanation.<sup>329</sup> So the question is whether this policy shift depends on geopolitical or geoeconomic calculations.

Regarding the actual reserves of the Caspian basin several speculations have been made, nonetheless, the projections refer to 200 billion barrels of oil. The figures laid down though is not comparable with the reserves of Middle East, nevertheless, Caspian basin is considered to be comparable of the reserves of North Sea, the fact that is deemed to contribute to the policy of diversification. Hence, as long as the figures regarding the reserves is seen as exaggeration and the US itself is unlikely to

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either Georgia or Azerbaijan. For more information see James DeTemple, "Military Engagement in the South Caucasus", *JFQ Forum*, autumn/winter 2001-02, p. 68.

<sup>327</sup> Olga Oliker and Thomas Szayna (eds.), "Faultlines...", *op cit.*, pp.222-225

<sup>328</sup> Cited in *ibid.* p.224

<sup>329</sup> Cited in Svante Cornell, *op cit.*, p.382

become a customer of Caspian energy,<sup>330</sup> the motivation behind the US policy can be explained through that the energy issue as an ostensible instrument for its engagement. The point also been made by Olga Oliker noting;

...even if there is not as much oil and gas in the region as high-end estimates indicate, the resources have significance beyond mere quantity. Central Asian oil and natural gas provide the potential for diversification for many U.S. allies in Asia and Europe, now highly dependent on Russian and Middle Eastern sources of energy.<sup>331</sup>

This line of argument for diversification is made frequently enough to create a political reason, whether or not economic one exists. Referring the reserves as containing of '200 billion barrels' has become standard in US official statements the fact brought about the question why the US is insisting on the high-end projections. Simply the answer base on the fact that production is likely to affect the world oil prices, the fact in which the US certainly has an interest. This fact stems from the consensus on the view that "secure supply of oil at stable prices" is one of America's "vital national interests."<sup>332</sup>

In fulfillment of the diversification objective, the US has promoted the multiple export pipelines (MEP) project – particularly the one going through Turkey, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline – serves as a mean which meet the US demands of "...lessen dependency of the Persian Gulf oil, pursue continued containment of Iran and strengthen the stability and independence of South Caucasus."<sup>333</sup> On the other hand, the promotion of these objectives through multiple outlets is perceived by Moscow as penetration into the Russian 'near abroad' and anti-Russian in nature which was noted by US official as saying,

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<sup>330</sup> Sergei Mahnovski, "Natural Resources and Potential Conflict in the Caspian Sea Region", in Olga Oliker and Thomas Szayna (eds.), "Faultlines...", op cit., pp.109-145

<sup>331</sup> Olga Oliker and Thomas Szayna (eds.), "Faultlines...", op cit., p.221

<sup>332</sup> Robert J. Art, "Geopolitics Updated: The Strategy of Selective Engagement", International Security, 23/3, winter 1998/99, p.92

<sup>333</sup> Camilla Khokhar and Paul Wiberg-Jorgensen, op cit., p.79



The policy of pipeline diversification is inevitable. ... I must stress that this is not an anti-Russian policy. It's a policy of antimonopoly.<sup>334</sup>

In fact, much of the competition for influence over the Caspian region has been conducted through the pipeline projects.<sup>335</sup> Brzezinski explains the centrality of the pipeline issue in the future of the Caspian basin by looking into the issue in broader context of access to this landlocked region. He argues that “whoever either controls or dominates access to the region is the one most likely to win the geopolitical and economic prize.”<sup>336</sup> In short, as also argued by Stephen Blank, the geopolitical considerations and calculations still play significant role in formulation of US policies in the region despite the rhetoric of geoeconomic interests.<sup>337</sup>

#### **5.4 9/11 and ‘the War on Terrorism’: a New Impetus for Engagement**

The events of 9/11 and subsequent ‘war on terrorism’ acted as a new impetus for strategic engagement of the US into the region. In broader terms, Washington perceives the US engagement into the region as component of its ‘Greater Middle East’ and anti-terrorism policies.<sup>338</sup> Though the engagement refers to broader context of Eurasia and more particularly to Central Asia, the Caucasus also affected from the new impetus. The immediate attention on Central Asia led to uncertainty in the Caucasus about whether region’s significance would decrease or increase as a result of the war in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, “[i]f Central Asia has been the center stage in the war on terrorism, the Caucasus has been the backstage.”<sup>339</sup>

In fact, in the immediate aftermath of terrorist attacks on 9/11, both Georgia and Azerbaijan announced their full cooperation with the US sharing intelligence, offering over-flight rights, refueling facilities, and bases. Armenia, like Russia, cooperated as well, though not as extensively as Georgia and Azerbaijan. The

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<sup>334</sup> Quoted in Zeyno Baran, “The Caucasus...”, *op cit.*, p.233

<sup>335</sup> Nur Bilge Criss and Serdar Güner, “Geopolitical Configurations: The Russia-Turkey-Iran Triangle”, *Security Dialogue*, 30/3, 1999, p.365

<sup>336</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, “The Grand Chessboard...”, *op cit.*, p.140

<sup>337</sup> Stephen Blank, “Every Shark East of Suez: Great Power Interests, Policies and Tactics in the Trans-Caspian Energy”, *Central Asian Survey*, 18/2, 1999

<sup>338</sup> Brenda Shaffer, “US Policy”, *op cit.*, p.53

<sup>339</sup> Svante Cornell, “America in Eurasia: One Year After”, *Current History*, October 2002, p.332

cooperation and over-flight permission provided to the US has facilitated its access to Afghanistan. Nearly all the US and allied aircraft transited the airspace of Georgia and Azerbaijan on their way to Afghanistan. Instrumentally, this illustrated the significance of the location of South Caucasus and the need to gain access to the Caucasus for any direct role in Central Asia or in broader terms in Eurasia.

The creation of American bases in Central Asia further increased the strategic importance of the South Caucasus in the eyes of policy-makers in Washington. Hence, in order to sustain the access to Central Asia, securing the stability and cooperation of the South Caucasian states became a priority for the US.<sup>340</sup> For the US, though for its own stakes, the problem of sustainability of stability is directly related with Georgia and Azerbaijan given they still weak states with deadlocked frozen conflicts that leave them in a state of ‘no war, no peace.’<sup>341</sup>

Azerbaijan thanks to its energy revenues remain stable and prosperous performing less vulnerability towards external manipulation whereas Georgia has not achieved yet to exercise governmental control over the *de facto* independent republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Moreover, Tbilisi’s control over the regions of Ajaria and Armenian populated Javakheti – both regions contain Russian military bases – is limited. The situation particularly in Georgia further exacerbated with Russia’s accusations on Georgia as sheltering terrorists in Pankisi Gorge.<sup>342</sup> The terrorist activities underlined that Russia still has the capacity to undermine Georgian statehood.<sup>343</sup> Terrorism was used as a pretext by Russia to intervene militarily which was asserted as Russia’s moral right to launch an anti-terrorist operation in Pankisi leading to call developments as ‘war of words.’<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Brenda Shaffer, *op cit.*, p.58

<sup>341</sup> The term ‘no war, no peace’ was used by Edward Walker in order to illustrate the nature of frozen conflicts leaving the region vulnerable to external manipulation and further destabilization. See Edward Walker, “No War, No Peace in the Caucasus: Contested Sovereignty in Chechnya, Abkhazia, and Karabakh”, in Gary K. Bertch, Cassady Craft, Scott A. Jones, Micheal Beck(eds.), “Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia”, New York-London: Routledge, 2000, pp.152-188

<sup>342</sup> The location of Pankisi Gorge between Georgian and Chechen border made the gorge a haven for transnational criminal activities particularly for terrorists which even claimed that Al-Quade has links.

<sup>343</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, “US Policy in the South Caucasus”, Connections, No.3, September 2002, p.62

<sup>344</sup> For a detailed account of ‘war of words’ see Tracey German, “Faultline or Foothold? Georgia’s relations with Russia & the USA”, Conflict Studies Research Center, January 2004, pp.3-6

Consequently, the US intensified its military assistance<sup>345</sup> and initiated the Georgian Train and Equip Program (GTEP)<sup>346</sup> on February 26, 2002, to be deployed in Georgia. By this way, a possible Russian military action that was seen as a threat at the time or at least the elimination of terrorist activities in this region was deemed. Yet the continuation of Chechen conflict indicates the risk that Russia might use the pretext of anti-terrorism to pressure on Georgia.<sup>347</sup> GTEP is aimed to train Georgian military against low-intensity conflict and transnational threats hoping of reassertion governmental control over Pankisi, thus in a sense eliminate the possible Russian actions in the region. In fact, the US military involvement in Georgia is perceived as changing the dynamics as well as the balance of power in the region in terms of both relations with Abkhazia and Russia.<sup>348</sup> Though the US military engagement is on small scale, the perception of engagement may be more important than its objective contributions.<sup>349</sup>

These developments brought about the pressure from Moscow particularly through cut-off supply of gas and electricity and imposition of visa regime that exempts Abkhazia and the South Ossetia. In summer 2002 it extended Russian citizenship to residents of the two breakaway regions, carrying out a de facto annexation of two Georgian provinces. Russian reactions rather than antagonizing its relations with the US preferred direct pressure on Georgia. Despite Georgia at least on GTEP sought to reassure Russia that its deployment is aimed to eliminate the

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<sup>345</sup> The U.S. has been a major provider of direct military assistance to Georgia, with its security assistance in 2001 totaling \$39.6 million<sup>77</sup>, \$31.7 million in 2002 and \$41.4 million in 2003, with the total expected to grow even further in 2004. See Svante Cornell and S. Frederick Starr *et al.*, “Regional Security in the South Caucasus: The Role of NATO”, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute (CACI), 2004, pp.60-61

<sup>346</sup> The ‘train’ side of the program entailed the deployment of close to 200 US military trainers to instruct four Georgian battalions in light of infantry tactics, with the goal of producing serious fighting force which could successfully confront small-scale security threats. On the ‘equip’ side of the program, the US has supplied uniforms, small arms, ammunition, communications equipment and other equipments to the Georgian armed forces. For detailed information on GTEP see Svante Cornell and S. Frederick Starr *et al.*, “Regional ...”, op cit., pp.62-64 and Tracey German, op cit., pp. 6-8

<sup>347</sup> Russia by linking Chechens to terrorism achieved to use war on terrorism as leverage to intervene militarily most notably arguing as The US intervened in Afghanistan Moscow also has the right to intervene in Georgia.

<sup>348</sup> Rick Fawn, “Russia’s Reluctant Retreat from the Caucasus: Abkhazia, Georgia and the US after 11 September 2001”, European Security, 11/4, 2003.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., p.136

terrorist activities in sensitive regions such as Pankisi Gorge, and the practice behind the GTEP was transparency<sup>350</sup> not managed to avoid pressures from Moscow.

The origins of pressure actually stems from the geographic location on Georgia linking the Eurasian east and west. By controlling Georgia or sustaining instability and unrest in the country, Moscow can also assert control over the export of Caspian oil and gas thereby keeping an economic stranglehold on Azerbaijan.

In the post-9/11 period, the US intensified its military assistance to Azerbaijan by waiving the section 907 in October 2001 to reward Azerbaijan's support for the US war on terrorism. This post-9/11 action opened the door for the provision of direct military aid for the first time and U.S. military/security assistance programs have increased significantly since then, with only \$2.3 million in 2001, \$13.6 million in 2002 and an estimated more than \$20 million in 2003.<sup>351</sup> The US also signed a major security agreement with Azerbaijan focusing on apart from training and air control activities, enhancing naval capabilities so as to secure its maritime borders and protect its economic zone and territorial waters.<sup>352</sup> The timing of the agreement and its extent is no coincidence given the 'gunboat diplomacy' of Iran in July 2001.<sup>353</sup> The dispute over Caspian Sea legal status coupled with the identification of significant oil and gas resources in the Sharq/Alov oilfield lying in area disputed by Tehran brought about eviction of BP-owned exploration vessel forcibly by Iranian gunboats.

In short, the US engagement both in Azerbaijan and Georgia is aimed to enhance their security. But, this does not mean Armenia was excluded from military assistance. On March 29, 2002, the U.S. State Department removed Armenia from the list of countries barred from receiving U.S. military and security assistance under the U.S. International Traffic in Arms (ITAR) restrictions.<sup>354</sup> This post-9/11 U.S. Congressional action, lifting its restrictions on military assistance to Armenia,

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid., p.138

<sup>351</sup> Svante Cornell and S. Frederick Starr et al., "Regional ...", op cit., pp.57-58

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., p.58

<sup>353</sup> Stephen Blank, "US Military in Azerbaijan to Counter Iranian Threat", Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, April 10, 2002, pp.5-6

<sup>354</sup> The move was taken in response to Armenia's support for the U.S. -sponsored the 'War on Terrorism.' Additionally, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Armenia granted U.S. and coalition aircraft over-flight privileges, as well as refueling and landing rights.

opened the door for direct military aid and U.S. military assistance programs that have since increased significantly. Annual security-related U.S. assistance almost doubled to \$10 million in 2002 nearly doubled again to more than \$18 million in 2003 and is expected to increase yet again in 2004.<sup>355</sup> The rationale behind the US action can be seen in the context of breaking the North-South axis by approaching and eventually integrating Armenia into the West which would decrease Armenian reliance on Russia.<sup>356</sup>

At the regional level, it is clear that Russia and the US, though they reiterates cooperation there is inherently conflicting interests. Russia foreign policy mostly focus on controlling Eurasian energy whereas as the US pursue the policy of preventing any single country's dominance over energy resources, and therefore aims as bolstering the independence of regional states. So far, developments have not brought about confrontation mostly due to publicity and transparency of US actions. In fact, as long as the US engagement into the region is continue to be clear and predictable, the US has the potential to play the role of stability provider in the South Caucasus. But as long as uncertainty surrounds its commitment, the US role may instead to be destabilizing, if other powers try to test its determination to remain there.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Svante Cornell and S. Frederick Starr et al., "Regional ...", *op cit.*, p.56

<sup>356</sup> Annie Jafalian, "Influences in the South Caucasus: Opposition and Convergence in Axes of Cooperation", Conflict Studies Research Center, February 2004, pp.4-5

<sup>357</sup> Svante Cornell, "America in Eurasia...", *op cit.*, p.336

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The security environment in the South Caucasus after the disintegration of Soviet Union was characterized and mentioned with the term of ‘instability.’ The instability in the region mostly viewed as the result of policies of regional actors to gain leverage and influence over the newly independent states. However, as mentioned in the introduction chapter the literature also approaches from the point that the weakness of these states inevitably brought about the involvement of extra regional actors to the region. In fact, the retreat of Soviet power caught these states unprepared to independence and its painful state-building and nation-building processes. Coupled with the long suppressed grievances that turned out to be outright conflicts the ongoing instability embraced the South Caucasus. The internal causes of instability apart from as a negative impact in front of regional cooperation and integration furthermore brought about the meddling of regional actors. In other words as argued in chapter one the weakness of these states led them to seek security through external support and legitimized their policies with their external links with regional actors, hence the ‘internationalization’ of regional politics become an inevitable feature of region.

In the aftermath of disintegration the security environment in the region shaped by the policies of Russia to reassert its decisive influence in the region and used the threat of dismemberment of these newly independent states. After a period of incoherence Moscow from mid-1992 pursued aggressive reintegration policy. The formulation of ‘near abroad’ doctrine underlined this policy shift. Eventually the grievances and ethno-political conflicts in the region was perceived by Moscow as invaluable tools to reassert its influence. By the end of 1994 Moscow managed to freeze the conflicts in the region and consolidated its influence and leverage on Azerbaijan and Georgia. At first sight Russia’s involvement into the region might be seen as stability providers, nevertheless, the continuation of status quo without political solution gave Moscow a free hand to maintain its decisive influence in the

region. Furthermore, the militarization of Armenia to the extent threatening regional military balance can be perceived as destabilizing factor.

After the US entanglement to the regional politics with the Caspian oil Azerbaijan and Georgia began to develop alternative security ties through Western mechanisms and eventually diversification of these two states' security ties become a feature of South Caucasus. But on the other hand, at the same time regional strategic alignments or balance of power politics become a regional feature as well. Both Azerbaijan and Georgia began to develop more independent policies from Moscow which in 1994 enforced these two states to join Russian security arrangement. Though strategic alignments seem to provide a relative stability and status quo to the region, nevertheless, it embedded with the fragility and bounded up with regional actors' ambitions.

Particularly the latest developments in Georgia brought about the anxieties what would happen if a pro-Russian government installed in Tbilisi. Nevertheless, the developments and policies of Saakashvili falsified this line of argument. This of course does not mean the future developments will maintain same trend, hence the fragility of stability in the region is still there. Putin's policies that aspire to achieve traditional objectives with modern means still have the potential to disturb regional stability.

So far, developments in Georgia and Moscow's warming relations with Baku raises the hopes to provide long lasting stability and therefore regional cooperation and integration. But, as argued in chapter three and four how far Moscow will appease the policies of Washington remains unclear. This stems from the fact that though Russia and the US reiterate cooperation, at roots have inherently conflicting interests. Converging interest to eradicate terrorism from the region acts as a motivation for both actor to remain calm and pursue their policies with transparency.

In conclusion, as long as the actors pursue their policies by taking into account regional security dynamics and stakes of regional actors they may act as stability providers; otherwise their policies to further their own interests might lead to a renewed cycle of tensions, conflicts and in the end instability.

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