

**Russia and Azerbaijan: Relations after 1989**

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**I. Introduction**

The sudden collapse of the Soviet Union has, on several levels, brought about many novel complexities to world politics. On the global level, the collapse of the Soviet Union ended the bi-polar world politics in the dangerous confrontations between Soviet ideology and power and that of the United States. The impact of the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) has been seen at the regional level as well. In particular, Central Asia and Caucasus, Eastern and Central Europe, and Baltic countries have escaped from direct Soviet domination, and so new competitions for domination have arisen. However, the most important and challenging changes have been witnessed at the individual level, insofar as fifteen new independent states have emerged post-collapse. After escaping from the domination of the USSR, these emerging states have been perplexed by the challenges of nationhood, identity politics, and state-building, re-reformulating their economic system, and entering into a global situation as independent but weak states. Thus, the collapse of Pax Sovieticus has raised a series of new foreign and security challenges, posing various obstacles and dilemmas for them.<sup>1</sup>

Among these many challenges, relations with other states, especially with the Russian Federation, have posed some of the most problematic issues. Newly independent states were faced with a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, they were still dependent on Russia as their new neighbor and the old center of the industrial and economic network, and therefore they needed healthy relations.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, they wanted to avoid a new system of re-domination by Russia, where a similar situation to the one left behind would be in place. Their fears were seemingly realized upon Russia's immediate establishment of the

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1992, with an invitation to the ex-Soviet republics to join.

In this paper, I will address some of the problematic issues introduced above specifically in the context of the relations between the Russian Federation and one of the independent ex-Soviet republics, the Republic of Azerbaijan. I will analyze the salient issues in three sections. First, I will discuss the evolution of Russian foreign policy tools while considering in general Russian conceptions of the ex-Soviet countries. Second, I will discuss the determining factors regarding the relations between Azerbaijan and Russia. Third, I will discuss the resulting issues and themes that have emerged between the two countries.

## **II. The Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy: Formation of Mechanisms and Foreign Policy Concepts About the “Near Abroad”**

After the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation found itself desperate to re-construct its institutional structure and reformulate its national interests and foreign policy goals, especially towards its newly independent, neighboring states of the “near abroad.” Russia’s immediate response under Yeltsin was to attempt to collect the old Soviet republics under the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1992. However, this was a reactionary response, rather than a well-defined plan, as we shall see. In this context, I am going to discuss two interrelated processes: the process of constructing foreign policy-making institutions, and the process of formulating foreign policy concepts about the near abroad of Russia.

The sudden collapse of the USSR left Russian policy-makers with little time to formulate their conceptions of the basic goals of Russian foreign policy toward the countries of the near abroad.<sup>3</sup> Actually, not only were these conceptions lacking, but foreign-policy professionals and mechanisms were as well. As Russell demonstrates, the Ministry of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation was quite unprepared for these developments: “it started in 1992 with only around ten people in the Commonwealth Affairs Department and had trouble finding people who spoke the languages of the former republics,” and the ministry’s leaders “were also intellectually and mentally unprepared for the task of formulating relations with the former republics.”<sup>4</sup>

The lack of standard procedures for policy formulation made the process so much more complicated that even groupings outside of the formal decision-making process—bureaucratic players, the legislature, the military, the Security Council—intervened.<sup>5</sup> Dobriansky’s explanation is helpful in understanding this situation:

Meanwhile, overall institutional arrangements for dealing with foreign policy are flawed. In the past, the Communist Party was the key player, with the military, the KGB, Foreign Ministry, and industrial managers serving as pivotal interests groups that advanced their respective agendas through their own channels, as well as through alliances and coalitions with various prominent party patrons. Here again, the current situation is much more confusing and uncertain. The Communist Party is no longer in power and no single institution has been able to assume a leading foreign-policy role. The military, the Federal Security Service, and the Foreign Ministry have different foreign policy agendas and some opportunities to influence them. The same is true of the media, the old-fashioned industrial managers, and the new, post-Communist oligarchs. The problem is one of policy coordination and development.”<sup>6</sup>

As a result, Russian policy formulation began to suffer from rivalries among organizations and individuals.<sup>7</sup>

Nicole Jackson discusses the Russian foreign and military policy formation between 1991-1996 under three phases: the Atlanticist period (August 1991-March 1992), the period of the battles of ideas (March 1992-November 1993), and the period wherein consensus was achieved (November 1993-June 1996).<sup>8</sup>

The first period after the establishment of the Russian Federation is called the Atlanticist period because of Russia’s foreign policy orientation toward the West, the United States, and Western Europe. The dominant foreign policy discourse of this period envisaged Russia as “a Western, capitalist-oriented, non-expansionist state in a peaceful world ruled by the equality of states and diplomacy.”<sup>9</sup> Proponents of the Atlanticist perspective, the architect of which was Andrei Kozryev, wanted “Russia to emerge as a prosperous – ‘normal’ – democratic country, to become (again) a pillar of Western culture and civilization.”<sup>10</sup> Atlanticists were strong advocates of integration with the community of nations, and they demanded unconditional realignment with the West, especially with the United States. As Tsygankov sees it, Russia’s need for Western economic aid influenced this alignment.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, for the Atlanticists, the new independent states of the near abroad were not an immediate priority for the Russian Federation; however, Russia would establish long-term military and economic integration through the institutions of the CIS.<sup>12</sup> This period coincided with Russia’s troubled early years, when Yeltsin was fighting to consolidate his power within the country and aiming “to create a benign, non-threatening international environment, so that potential foreign adversaries would not attempt to take the advantage of Russia’s disarray, and so that the transformation of Russia’s economy and the consolidation of his personal power could proceed unhindered.”<sup>13</sup>

According to Jackson, the second stage in the evolution of Russian foreign policy started with the outbreak of the conflict over Moldova in March 1992 and lasted until the adoption of the Military Doctrine in November 1993.<sup>14</sup> By the spring of 1992, Yeltsin and Kozryev faced criticism from conservative circles, such as those from Vice President Rutskoi and parliamentary chairman Khasbulatov, on account of neglecting relations with the near abroad in favor of relations with the West and ignoring the rights and needs of Russian speakers and Russian troops abroad.<sup>15</sup> Kozryev's response was pertinent: "belligerent actions by the Russian government would lead to Russo-phobia."<sup>16</sup>

During this period, Russian foreign policy debate quickly became polarized along liberal and nationalist lines, which reflected the old divide between Russian Slavophil and Westernizers.<sup>17</sup> During this debate, moderate opposition demanded "a reorientation of Russian foreign policy toward the CIS and the re-establishment of old Soviet economic and security, if not political ties," while the extremist wing, headed by former presidential candidate Zhirinovski, demanded the "outright establishment of a unitary Russian empire."<sup>18</sup> During this period, many of the Russian political elite abandoned their liberal westernist ideas, but adopted "more nuanced and moderate nationalist views"<sup>19</sup> than the extremists. It was in this period that popular and more balanced pragmatic nationalist views proliferated.<sup>20</sup>

According to Dobriansky, behind Moscow's move toward a much more anti-Western stance was Russia's economic and political crisis.<sup>21</sup> Lynch explains this nationalist reaction against Kozryev's liberal democratic policy with a set of foreign policy problems:

- (i) the inevitable frustration of Russia's hopes for rapid political, economic, and security integration with the West and the apparently meager, if not counter-productive, effects of Western economic assistance,
- (ii) the very real and urgent challenges of dealing with the novel problems of international relations among fifteen former union republics of the USSR, and
- (iii) the rapid realization that the United States and Western Europe would neither help nor seriously impede Russia in devising responses to the problems of instability and regional conflicts along Russia's new international frontier.<sup>22</sup>

Also during this period, the leading Russian elite worked to establish a Foreign Policy Concept and Military Doctrine that "focused primarily on cooperation and integration with the CIS states," portrayed "Russia as an emerging great power facing multiple threats," emphasized "the importance of maintaining a sphere of influence in the former Soviet Socialist states (as opposed to former emphasis in the West)," asserted "Russia's right to

intervene in the CIS-while stressing that this should only be done in accordance with appropriate international documents and on the basis of mutual agreements,” allowing the “legal use of armed forces in peacekeeping operations within the former Soviet republics,” and finally recognized the legitimate use of force in the case of the “suppression of the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of Russian-speaking citizens in the foreign states.”<sup>23</sup>

To summarize, in the second stage of the evolution of Russian foreign policy, many discussions took place over the issues in foreign and security policies, and consequently, the leading elite shifted from its early liberal democratic tendency to a more nationalist, but pragmatic, stance.

The third stage in Russian foreign policy, for Jackson, is from the November 1993 Military Doctrine to the June 1996 Presidential elections. This stage was marked with “the decline of many liberal westernist ideas in the foreign policy debates and the continuation of fundamentalist nationalist ideas.”<sup>24</sup> After the adoption of the Foreign Policy Concept and Military Doctrine, Kozryev introduced a new term in Russian foreign policy, the “Yeltsin Doctrine,” which mainly argued that “Russia was the most effective guarantor of stability over the entire territory of the former SU and it should have assume the role of peacemaking in the post-Soviet political space.”<sup>25</sup> Kozyev, in a speech in 1994 stated that

States of the CIS and Baltics constitute the area of concentration of Russia’s vital interests. This is also the area from which the main threats to these interests emanate ... I think that raising the question about complete withdrawal and removal of any Russian military presence in the countries of near abroad is just an extreme, if not extremist, suggestion comparable to the idea of sending [Russian] tanks to all the former republics to establish there some imperial order.<sup>26</sup>

The Yeltsin Doctrine was a major sign of the shift from Kozryev’s early liberal democratic stance.

The 1993 developments in Russia, especially the parliamentary elections in December, which had a decisively nationalist bent, forced Yeltsin to move to the right of the political spectrum, and accept partnership with conservative forces in the State Duma on foreign policy matters.<sup>27</sup> Gradually then, Kozryev’s liberal democratic proposals were overruled by the changing attitudes of Yeltsin himself.<sup>28</sup>

In 1996, Yeltsin replaced Kozryev with Primakov, who was “less Western-oriented than Kozryev, but remained a pragmatic politician throughout his reign.”<sup>29</sup> With Primakov, Russia started to assert further its interests, creating a Eurasian counter-balance to the United

States and its allies, through an alliance of Russia, China, and Iran. Lynch's interpretation of the appointment of Primakov is helpful:

The appointment of Primakov, with deep roots in the Soviet foreign and intelligence bureaucracies and having just served as a head of a KGB-successor unit, the Federal Intelligence service, presaged a renewed focus on securing for Russia the status of global power with Eurasia and further afield that Kozryev had seemed to neglect, in his vociferous advocacy of the proposition that Russia's national interest flowed from its liberal-democratic aspirations. Indeed, contrary to this liberal school, Primakov had on several occasions declared that Russia should pay the economic price for reintegrating the old empire, directly or indirectly: great power status did not come cheaply.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, looking at these developments, it can be seen that the Russian foreign policy outlook entered a period of agreement between different groups. Leaders of different sides—the conservatives, and Yeltsin and Kozryev—sacrificed their initial position and met at a central point. The leading Russian elite adopted and defended this perspective in the following years. As Dobriansky argues, in spite of the dizzying succession of Russian governments engineered by an increasingly erratic Yeltsin, Moscow's global outlook has remained essentially unchanged since the mid-1990s.<sup>31</sup>

Because of his health problems in his second term in the presidency, Yeltsin was replaced by his Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in 2001. Putin was known for his decisive and harsh action against Chechens during his tenure as Prime Minister. Thus, his accession to the presidency raised questions about potential changes in Russian foreign policy toward the new abroad. Additionally, many feared that with Putin, Russia would adopt a neo-imperial policy toward former Soviet republics, while many spoke of a coming Eurasianism.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to these interpretations, though, some saw Putin's policies as a continuation rather than as a big change. Akerman and Graeme locate Putin within the pragmatist school,<sup>33</sup> and Giorgadze argues that Putin "continues Primakov's pragmatic foreign policy, trying to regain not only Russia's Eurasian, but also world status."<sup>34</sup> Giorgadze, in her study, discusses Putin's policy and provides the main arguments of the four documents that constitute 'Putin's Doctrine':

[The] four documents form *Putin's Doctrine*. The Defense Doctrine says that Russia has the right to a first nuclear strike in case of attack with weapons of mass destruction or conventional forces 'under conditions critical for Russian national security'. The National Security Doctrine says that attempts by other states to establish a unipolar world that pose a threat to the national security of Russia. It stipulates that Russia should create a multipolar world and regional spheres of influence that will diminish American power in the world. The Foreign Policy Doctrine declares that Russia is the strongest Eurasian power: it will dominate its neighbors and

create a belt of friendly states around its borders. Relations with CIS countries will be based on ‘...readiness of the states to take into consideration interests of Russian federation’. The Concept of International Security...states that free television, mass media and the internet can pose a threat to Russian security, and should , therefore, be managed...<sup>35</sup>

As we have seen, Russian foreign policy and the importance attached to relations with ex-Soviet republics have been evolving. I have tried above to analyze the parallel processes: the process of forming Russian foreign policy mechanisms and the process of developing concepts about “the near abroad.”

To briefly summarize, the early years of the Russian Federation constitute the consolidation period for Russian domestic and foreign policy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs lacked professionals and clear perspective about the CIS states. Yeltsin and his Prime Minister Kozryev adopted a liberal democratic perspective, which left the republics with their own choice of policy formation. However, shortly after, conservatist and nationalist opposition started to criticize the adopted policy and demanded a higher priority for the near abroad of Russia. After months of debate, Yeltsin moved toward a consensus, and a new path emerged in Russian foreign policy. Later, with replacement of Kozryev with Primakov in 1996 and Putin’s accession to power, the perspective that sees the CIS as the ‘absolute priority’<sup>36</sup> merged with the older Russian foreign policy perspectives on the region.

Through this process of the development of Russian foreign policy on the region, Russia has started to become more interested in policies of the states of the region and has started to perceive herself as vulnerable to developments in the region. Under the guidance of such a perspective, Russia started to assert herself as a ‘big power’ to be taken seriously and became more interventionist in foreign, and even domestic, policies of the regional countries. In the forthcoming section, I will discuss Russia’s relations with Republic of Azerbaijan to illustrate how to escape these propositions.

### **III. Azerbaijan and Russia: Determinants of Relations**

After the collapse of the USSR, many Russian policy-makers, as well as ordinary Russians, held the naive and sentimental perception that other nationalities would still be for continued association.<sup>37</sup> They thought that “old good days” of Soviet times would be a common memory that might motivate them toward cooperation, and even integration, with Russia. However, the situation after independence was quite different than what Russians dreamed. Except for some states, the new republics aimed to protect their independence. Armenia was willing to cooperate with Russia, especially in military issues; however, “of all major regional players,

Russia was the least successful in drawing Azerbaijan closer by evoking past history and common ties.”<sup>38</sup>

Relations between Russia and Azerbaijan have been influenced by several factors, three of which are discussed below. First of all, Russia’s self-perception produced self-claimed roles for Russia, in “the near abroad” in general, and more specifically in Azerbaijan. The second factor pertains to Russia’s strategic and material interests. Finally, I will discuss Azerbaijan’s foreign policy preferences, which have been a product of domestic developments in Azerbaijan.

### **A. Russia’s Self-Perception**

Russian self-perception has been influential in defining Russia’s foreign policy toward “the near abroad.” For centuries, Russia has considered that her “mission was to unify a vast Eurasian landmass under the dominance of a unique Russian civilization.”<sup>39</sup> As a natural extension of this consideration, “almost all Russians seem to have visceral feeling that the Transcaucasia is, and ought to remain, politically inseparable from Russia.”<sup>40</sup> This belief can be traced through nearly two centuries of Russian domination in the North Caucasus and of different parts of “the near abroad.” The impact of this perception was observed in the early discussions of Russia’s role in the region. As Russell argues, “many Russians continue to confidently predict the eventual reintegration of the republics.”<sup>41</sup>

### **B. Russian Interests in Azerbaijan**

Russia’s interests in and its policies regarding the near abroad have been evolving. Developments in domestic politics and changes in the foreign policy goals of Russia have influenced Russia’s interests and policies with respect to Azerbaijan. Similarly, developments in the domestic politics and changes in the foreign policy preferences of Azerbaijan, which I discuss in next section, have greatly influenced relations between the two countries. Russia, as the successor of the Soviet empire, has various interests in Azerbaijan. First of all, Russia has strategic interests in the North Caucasus in general: keeping the region in its sphere of influence, and avoiding the penetration into the region from other big powers, especially the United States. The sensitivity about this issue is related to Russia’s perceived global status and prestige.<sup>42</sup>

Secondly, Russia has economic interests in Azerbaijan. It has looked to restore control over Azerbaijani natural resources, mainly oil, and gain access to its industrial and defense facilities in order to guarantee a market for its products.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, Russia intended to



create opportunities both for companies such as Lukoil and Gazprom as well as for new sources of government revenue via transit fees for oil and gas pipelines from the Caspian to Europe. With control over Azerbaijani oil, Russia would have strengthened its power and influence in the international energy market, as one of the main oil and gas producers in the world.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, as Sadri argues, “Moscow is interested in protecting its territorial integrity by responding comprehensively and effectively to any regional rebellion, such as Chechnya. [Therefore], Moscow aimed to ensure that other states in the Caucasus, particularly Azerbaijan, would not pose a direct or indirect threat to Russian territorial integrity by assisting rebels.”<sup>45</sup>

In conclusion, the Russian Federation has a set of interests, three of which are mentioned above, that have had an important impact on Russia’s relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan.

### **C. Azerbaijan’s Foreign Policy Preferences**

The third factor that influenced the relations between Russia and Azerbaijan has been the domestic political developments in Azerbaijan, along with the foreign policy preferences of the Azerbaijani governments. Inquiring about the political history of Republic of Azerbaijan and looking at the policy priorities of national governments and their debates over foreign policy issues, helps in showing Azerbaijan’s changing attributes toward its relation to the Russian Federation. While the nationalist government of Elchibey rejected association with Russia, the more pragmatist Aliyev pursued a balanced policy of interaction with Russia.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan was the first country in the Transcaucasia to declare its independence, issue its own money (in 1992), and expel Soviet troops from its territories. Azerbaijan is located at the west shore of the oil rich Caspian Sea and bordered with Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Armenia. Azerbaijan’s quick motivation and continuous attempts for independence is related to its memory of the experience of independence, traced back to the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (1918-20). Olcott discusses the roots of pro-independence ideas of Azerbaijan and argues,

Azerbaijan desires to recapture the statehood they lost during the Russian Civil War (1918-1920). As early as 1989 or 1990 the memory of that “lost” statehood was sufficiently strong that the Azerbaijani Popular Front [a nationalist movement] became one of the largest and politically most powerful groups in USSR, posing a sufficient threat to local Communist rule.<sup>46</sup>

And so even before the official collapse of the USSR, “the Soviet-nurtured Azerbaijani intelligentsia, who were growing increasingly vocal in their criticism of Soviet regime, turned to the pre-Soviet past to ‘rediscover’ the ‘true Azerbaijani identity’.”<sup>47</sup>

The national interests and foreign policy goals of Azerbaijan have been shaped by several factors. First, after the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan, independence, especially from any sort of re-domination by Russia, has been a priority of Republic of Azerbaijan. Second, as a result of the undeclared war between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno Karabakh, Armenians invaded 20% of Azerbaijani territories. Since then, the regaining of those lost territories and the protection of the territorial unity of the country have been urgent priorities of the Azerbaijani government. Third, Azerbaijan has a significant amount of oil and gas resources, over which big oil companies has competed after its independence. Therefore, developing the economic system and becoming one of the richer economies of the region have remained other important priorities of Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan’s relations with Russia have not followed a stable course, but have demonstrated a changing character. Because of its interest in including Azerbaijan in its sphere of influence and benefiting from its natural resources,<sup>48</sup> Russia has been faced with opposition from Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan’s relations with Russia can be analyzed in two periods: during the rule of nationalist Popular Front of Azerbaijan headed by Elchibey, and then, during the rule of New Azerbaijan Party government led by Haydar Aliyev, an old Politburo member.

### **1. Azerbaijan’s Relations with Russia During the Rule of Ebulfez Elchibey**

The Nationalist Popular Front of Azerbaijan was established as a response to the Armenian claims to have transferred the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region to Armenia. The founders of the movement were a small group of academics, writers, artists, and other intellectuals who came together to demonstrate their opposition to the Armenian demands over Karabakh.<sup>49</sup> Shortly after, the Armenian side started an armed attack on Azerbaijan, and by 1993, they occupied one-fifth of Azerbaijani territories.

After independence, under the provisional governmental institutions, free and fair presidential elections brought the Nationalist Popular Front’s leader, Ebulfez Elchibey, to power. “Undoubtedly influenced by the battles in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azeris have exhibited greater nationalism and a more conscious demand for real independence.”<sup>50</sup> The Elchibey government gave prior importance to developing relations with Turkey. The government and the population in general tried hard to dissociate themselves from Russia and the Russian

legacy.<sup>51</sup> Understandably, the policy of “Turkification” angered Russia and Iran, inducing them to seek rapprochement with each other and to improve bilateral relations with Armenia.<sup>52</sup>

In their meeting, the Azerbaijani government rejected ratification of Azerbaijan’s joining of the CIS. During this period, Azerbaijan’s relations with Russia were at their worst, which brought a high political cost to Elchibey and his weak government. As Aliyeva argues, “the day after Elchibey’s refusal to join to CIS Treaty on Collective Security, as a result of double attacks from Karabakh and Armenia, the so called Lachin corridor was opened and the whole region outside the disputed oblast was occupied, which mean the unification of Karabakh with Armenia.”<sup>53</sup> Russia’s second response was its support of the coup headed by Huseinov against the Elchibey government. According to Aliyeva, Elchibey’s collapse was helped by the coup led by the renegade military commander Surat Guseinov, which, according to many sources, received direct military support from Russia.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, for Aliyeva, there were other factors too, such as economic problems, the flow of refugees, and the lack of experience exhibited by the Popular Front government in managing the domestic sphere. Also there were the complications brought on by the persistent efforts to steer independence course from Russia without support from the West or Turkey in protecting the Azerbaijani state and democracy<sup>55</sup> Actually, Russia’s support for the coup aimed to bring back pro-Russian presidential candidate Mutalibov. However, Aliyev acted quickly, and with the support of Turkey, took office in 1993.<sup>56</sup>

## **2. The Aliyev Government and Relations with Russia**

Returning to Azerbaijan after his forced resignation from the Politburo in 1997, Aliyev became the acting President of Azerbaijan in 1993. Despite his career background in the Communist Party, KGB, and Politburo, he emerged as an anticommunist, nationalist leader.<sup>57</sup> He was an experienced and talented politician. Unlike his predecessor, Aliyev considered the path of having good relations with Russia, joining the CIS and the satisfying the interests of Russia as the only realistic means of coping with the present situation.<sup>58</sup> Short after coming to power, Aliyev stopped all talks with foreign companies regarding the exploitation of Caspian oil (while assuring representatives of the companies that a contract would be signed soon<sup>59</sup>), and invited Russian oil companies to take part in the consortium. As a result of the negotiations, Azerbaijan gave ten percent of its share in the consortium to the Russian oil company, LUKoil. The Parliament of Azerbaijan, in a vote of 30 to 13, ratified the membership to the CIS on 20 September 1993.<sup>60</sup> Aliyev’s visit to Moscow, his meeting with

Yeltsin, and his statements about bettering relations with Russia were signs of certain changes in the foreign policy attitude of Azerbaijan toward Russia.<sup>61</sup>

As Nasibli argues, Aliyev wanted to demonstrate that, “in comparison to Elchibey, his administration’s intentions were fundamentally different towards Russia.”<sup>62</sup> According to him, Azerbaijan’s changed behaviors toward Russia “also worked as catalyst in forming a pro-Azerbaijan lobby within the Russian government.”<sup>63</sup> Haydar Aliyev, as Altstadt argues, “is the most significant political figure in Azerbaijan since the death Stalin. He may also be the most cunning political leader in the post-Soviet space.”<sup>64</sup> In the years of his presidency, he maintained the independence of his state despite pressure and incursions by two powerful neighbors, Russia and Iran, and at the same time, he finessed the demands of more than a dozen foreign oil companies.<sup>65</sup> After the death of Aliyev, his son Ilham Aliyev was elected, and has become President of Azerbaijan. During his presidency, Azerbaijani foreign policy has been carried out in line with his father Aliyev.

To summarize, the relations between Russia and Azerbaijan have been affected by the domestic political developments in Azerbaijan. During the reign of the nationalist Elchibey, Azerbaijan distanced itself from Russia, and at the same time tried to keep Russia out of the Azerbaijan’s oil business. However, with the coup supported by Russia, Elchibey left the presidency. Despite Russia’s desire to bring a pro-Russian Mutalibov to government, Aliyev moved in quickly and became the acting president of Azerbaijan. With Aliyev, Russian-Azerbaijani relations entered a new period of rapprochement. Azerbaijan ratified their joining of the CIS and gave her 10 percent share to the Russian oil company, LUKoil. After Haydar Aliyev, his son, Ilham Aliyev, was elected and is still president of Republic of Azerbaijan.

#### **IV. Problematic Issues Between Azerbaijan and Russia**

As seen from the discussions above, relations between Russia and Azerbaijan have recently altered and have been vulnerable to domestic and international political changes. In this section, I will expand the discussion of the relations between the two countries. Here, I will treat issues that have had a negative impact on and have caused problems with the relations of the two countries. I first discuss Russian covert interventions in Azerbaijani politics, and then Russia’s support for Armenia’s fight against Azerbaijan. Finally, I touch on Russia’s stance in the dispute over the legal status of Caspian Sea.

##### **A. Russian Hand in the Domestic Politics of Azerbaijan**

Shortly after independence, Azerbaijan entered into a period of political turmoil. The Popular Front of Azerbaijan struggled with bureaucrats and politicians who were advocates of close

cooperation, even re-integration, with Russia. However, the nationalist Popular Front government attempted to distance Azerbaijan from Russia and so intensified relations with Turkey. However, as briefly mentioned above, the Elchibey government paid a very high cost for their anti-Russian policies: Russia covertly supported anti-government coups and ousted Elchibey from power. Blank, in his study, lists Russian involvement in Azerbaijani politics and argues that “The 1993 overthrow of President Elchibey, the breakout of political prisoners, the murder of high officials, and the attempted coup in September 1994 are widely seen as proof of Russian complicity. The 1994 coup attempt came occurred not long after Elchibey agreed to build a pipeline with his ally, Turkey.”<sup>66</sup> Fiona and Jewett support the argument that the coup against Elchibey came soon after Elchibey’s refusal of Russian demands to deploy Russian peacemaking troops in the Nagorno Karabakh.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, those leaders who attempted to stage the coup against Aliyev are still in Moscow, and are waiting for a time to return to Baku.<sup>68</sup>

Azerbaijanis and their leaders have been sensitive about protecting the country’s sovereignty and its independence, especially from Russia. Therefore, Russia’s covert interventions in Azerbaijani politics have alienated Azerbaijan and have increased Azerbaijan’s suspicious about relations with Russia.

## **B. Russia’s Support for Armenia Against Azerbaijan in the Nagorno Karabakh Conflict**

As a result of the war with the Armenians, Azerbaijan lost one-fifth of its territories and one-seventh of its population have become refugees.<sup>69</sup> The war lasted until the 1993 cease-fire agreement supervised by Russia and United States. However, as Sadri argues, “despite their declared neutrality, Russia strategically supported Armenians,”<sup>70</sup> which, predictably alienated the Azerbaijanis. Actually, according to Aliyeva, in the very beginning, Russia had tried to remain neutral, and even sided with Azerbaijan, but later on, the Soviet authorities obviously favored Armenia.<sup>71</sup> Again, Aliyeva argues,

At the end of 1989, republics were gathering arms... [A]ttack on Soviet military garrisons became more frequent... Gorbachev issued a decree concerning the disarmament of all illegal groups in the republics. However, while the Armenian authorities were allowed to fulfill this operation by themselves, Azerbaijan was deprived of this opportunity, and troops were brought into Baku in 1990 in order to suppress quickly the burgeoning democratic movement (the PF).<sup>72</sup>

Mehdiyeva explains Russia's support for Armenia as Russia's discomfort with the nationalist government's (Popular Front) close relations with Turkey and its anti-Russian discourse and policies.<sup>73</sup> For Mehdiyeva, "the best known case of Russian covert military aid to Armenia concerns the transfer of missile and anti-aircraft systems, multiple rocket launchers and ammunition worth a total of about \$1 billion in the period of 1992-1997."<sup>74</sup> Itzkoff's study is also supportive of arguments about the Russian military support given to Armenia.<sup>75</sup> Sobhani also supports this view as he argues, "Recently, it was revealed by the Russian military establishment that 84 T-72 tanks had been transferred to Nagorno-Karabakh, in addition to 50 infantry combat vehicles. There is clearly a Russian hand in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and there clearly is Russian assistance to the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh."<sup>76</sup> Otherwise, the victory of 2.9 million Armenians over 7 million Azeri would be difficult.

To summarize, during the war with Armenia, as a response to Azerbaijan's anti-Russian stance, Russia supported Armenia, strategically and militarily. This, in turn, further alienated Azerbaijan and raised suspicions about Russia. Therefore, this situation has had a negative impact on the relations between the two countries.

### **C. Dispute over the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea**

Another important problem between Azerbaijan and Russia has been the dispute over the legal status of the Caspian Sea.<sup>77</sup> The dispute stemmed from Russia and Iran's claim that the Caspian is not a sea, but a lake. They demanded equal and cooperative exploitation of the Caspian reserves. However, Azerbaijan and other littoral countries claimed their right of exploitation of their own territorial waters. For the sake of scope of this study, I will briefly discuss only the issue's major impact on the relations of Azerbaijan and Russia.

Russia, since the beginning of Azerbaijan's early attempts to cooperate with Western oil companies on the exploitation of Caspian resources, had demanded that littoral states must share revenues equally. In addition to economic expectations, Russia has been cautious on the strategic side of the issue: potential penetration by and domination of European and American interests in its near abroad. Russia's first opposition came a day after Elchibey's signed the agreement with the British Petroleum led consortium in 1992. Russia sent a letter to the UK rejecting their right to exploit the Caspian. Blank interprets this letter of rejection as Russia's awareness of the successful cooperation and its resistance of Russian interests.<sup>78</sup> In addition, another reason behind Russia's continuing rejection has been Azerbaijan's refusal of Russian military peacekeeping in Nagorno Karabakh.<sup>79</sup>

However, after Russian interest was partially satisfied in the Azerbaijan's oil business and there was a *de facto* acceptance of the Caspian as a sea by Western powers, Russia's position toward the issue changed. In 1998, Russia signed a mutual agreement with Azerbaijan, which recognized latter's right to exploit water that coincided with its borders. To conclude, the dispute over the legal status of the Caspian Sea, along with Russian opposition to Azerbaijan's demand, had strained the relations between the two countries until 1998. With the change in Russia's position, one of the obstacles to normal relations has been removed.

## **V. Conclusion**

The collapse of Soviet Union has brought many new opportunities and challenges for both the Russian Federation and for the surrounding, newly independent states. In this paper, I focused on what has been one of the more politically visible challenges: the relations between the successor of the old empire, the Russian Federation, and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

I have focused on the evolution of Russian foreign policy tools and its conceptions of the "new abroad." Next, I discussed the factors that have been most influential on the relations between Azerbaijan and Russia: Russia's self perception as a superpower and supervisor, Russia's interests in Azerbaijan, and domestic political developments in Azerbaijan. I then discussed three of the major conflicts that have caused interruptions between in the relations of the two countries: Russia's covert interventions in the domestic politics of Azerbaijan through supporting coups against anti-Russian leaders and governments, Russia's siding with Armenia against Azerbaijan over the dispute on the Nagorno Karabakh, and Russia's position on the dispute over the legal status of the Caspian Sea.

## **NOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> Ella Akerman and Graeme P. Herd, "Russian Foreign Policy: The CIS and the Baltic States," in Cameron Ros (ed.), *Russian Politics under Putin* (Manchester and NY: Manchester University Press, 2004), p.270-1.

<sup>2</sup> Khatuna Giorgadze, "Russia: Regional Partner of Aggressor?" *The Review of International Affairs*, 2(1), Autumn 2002, p.64.

<sup>3</sup> Wynne Russell, "Russian Relations with the 'Near Abroad'," in Peter Sheorman (ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy since 1990* (Westview, 1995), p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60.

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- <sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 61.
- <sup>6</sup> Paula J. Dobriansky, "Russian Foreign Policy: Promise or Peril?" *The Washington Quarterly*, 23(1), 1999, p. 137.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Nicole J. Jackson, *Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions* (London and NY: Routledge, 2003).
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 54.
- <sup>10</sup> Akerman and Herd, op.cit., p.271.
- <sup>11</sup> A.P. Tsygankov, "From Internationalism to Revolutionary Expansionism," *Mershon International Studies Review*, 41, 1997, pp. 247-268.
- <sup>12</sup> Jackson, op.cit, p. 56.
- <sup>13</sup> Paul Marantz, "Russian Foreign Policy During Yeltsin's Second Term," *Communist and Post Communist Studies*, 30(4), p. 346.
- <sup>14</sup> Jackson, op.cit., p. 59.
- <sup>15</sup> Russell, op.cit., p. 61.
- <sup>16</sup> Russell, op.cit., p. 61.
- <sup>17</sup> Allen C. Lynch, "The Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy in the 1990s," *The Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 18(1), 2002, p. 165.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 165.
- <sup>19</sup> Jackson, op.cit., p.62.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.62.
- <sup>21</sup> Dobriansky, op.cit., p.136
- <sup>22</sup> Lynch, op.cit., p.165.
- <sup>23</sup> Jackson, op.cit., pp.61-65.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 69.
- <sup>25</sup> Giorgadze, op.cit., p.65.
- <sup>26</sup> Cited in Jackson, op.cit., 74.
- <sup>27</sup> Giorgadze, op.cit., p.65.
- <sup>28</sup> Russell, op.cit., p. 61.
- <sup>29</sup> Giorgadze, op.cit., p.65.
- <sup>30</sup> Lynch, op.cit., p.167.
- <sup>31</sup> Dobriansky, P. 140.
- <sup>32</sup> Ilan Berman, "Slouching toward Eurasia?" *Perspectives* , 12(1), 2001.
- <sup>33</sup> Akerman and Graeme, op.cit. 271.
- <sup>34</sup> Giorgadze, op.cit., p.66.
- <sup>35</sup> Giorgadze, p.66.



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- <sup>36</sup> Yeltsin's usage.
- <sup>37</sup> Cited in Russell, op.cit., p. 55.
- <sup>38</sup> Nazrin Mehdiyeva, "Azerbaijan and Its Foreign Policy Dilemma," *Asian Affairs*, 34(3), November 2003, p. 273.
- <sup>39</sup> Giorgadze, op.cit., p.67.
- <sup>40</sup> David E. Mark, "Eurasia Letter: Russia and the New Transcaucasus," *Foreign Policy*, 105, Winter 1996-1997, pp. 144-5.
- <sup>41</sup> Russell, op.cit., p. 53.
- <sup>42</sup> Houman Sadri, "Elements of Azerbaijan Foreign Policy," *Journal of Third World Studies*, 20(1), 2003, p.185-6.
- <sup>43</sup> Cited in Leila Aliyeva, "The Institutions, Orientations, and Conduct of Foreign Policy in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan," in Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha (ed.), *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and New States of Eurasia* (London and NY: M.E. Shape, 1995), p.287.
- <sup>44</sup> Sadri, op.cit., p. 185-6.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 185-6.
- <sup>46</sup> Martha B. Olcott, "Sovereignty in 'Near Abroad'," *Orbis*, 39(3), Summer 1995, p. 355.
- <sup>47</sup> Cited in Mehdiyeva, op.cit. p. 279.
- <sup>48</sup> See discussions over Russia's interests in Azerbaijan above.
- <sup>49</sup> See Audrey L. Altstadt, "Azerbaijan and Aliyev: A Long History and An Uncertain Future," *Problems of Post-Communist*, 50(5), 2003, pp. 3-13.
- <sup>50</sup> Mark, p.148.
- <sup>51</sup> Mehdiyeva, op.cit, p. 273.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 274.
- <sup>53</sup> Aliyeva, op.cit., p. 295.
- <sup>54</sup> See Aliyeva op.cit, and Fiona Hill and Pamela Jewett, *Back in the USSR: Russia's Intervention in the Internal Affairs of the Former Soviet Republics and the Implications for United States Policy toward Russia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994).
- <sup>55</sup> Aliyeva, 290.
- <sup>56</sup> See Altstadt, op.cit.
- <sup>57</sup> Sadri, op.cit., p.183.
- <sup>58</sup> Aliyeva, op.cit., p. 291.
- <sup>59</sup> Nasib Nassibli, "Azerbaijan: Oil and Politics in the Country's Future," in Michael P. Croissant and Bulent Aras (ed.), *Oil and Geopolitics in the Caspian Sea Region* (Westport and London: Praeger, 1999), p. 106.
- <sup>60</sup> Russell, op.cit., p. 56.
- <sup>61</sup> Aliyeva, p. 302.

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- <sup>62</sup> Nassibli, op.cit., p. 106.
- <sup>63</sup> Nassibli, op.cit., p. 107.
- <sup>64</sup> Altstadtop.cit., p. 3.
- <sup>65</sup> Id.
- <sup>66</sup> Stephen Blank, "Russia's Real Drive to the South," *Orbis*, 39(3), Summer 1995, p. 371.
- <sup>67</sup> Fiona Hill and Pamela Jewett, *Back in the USSR: Russia's Intervention in the Internal Affairs of the Former Soviet Republics and the Implications for United States Policy toward Russia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp.12-13.
- <sup>68</sup> S. Rob Sobhani, "The United States, Iran, Russia, and Turkey: The Struggle for Azerbaijan," *Democratizasya*, Winter 1998, p.37.
- <sup>69</sup> For detailed discussion of the conflict over Nagorno Karabakh, see "Appendix I: Nagorno Karabakh Conflict" attached to this paper.
- <sup>70</sup> Sadri, op.cit., p.181.
- <sup>71</sup> Aliyeva, p. 292.
- <sup>72</sup> Aliyeva, p. 292.
- <sup>73</sup> Mehdiyeva, op.cit. p. 283.
- <sup>74</sup> Mehdiyeva, op.cit. p. 283.
- <sup>75</sup> Seymour W. Itzkoff, "Russia as a Superpower," *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, 29(2), Summer 2004, p.218.
- <sup>76</sup> Sobhani, op.cit., p.37.
- <sup>77</sup> For detailed discussion over the dispute on legal status of the Caspian see Cynthia M. Croissant and Michael P. Croissant, "The Legal Status of the Caspian Sea: Conflict and Compromise," in Michael P. Croissant and Bulent Aras (ed.), *Oil and Geopolitics in the Caspian Sea Region* (Westport and London: Praeger, 1999), pp. 21-42.
- <sup>78</sup> Blank, op.cit., p. 370.
- <sup>79</sup> Olcott, op.cit., p. 358.

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