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Evolution in the Post-Soviet Period***

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# Foreign Policies of the States of the Caucasus: Evolution in the Post-Soviet Period

Brenda SHAFFER\*

## ABSTRACT

The article examines the development of the foreign policies and strategies of the three states of the Caucasus—Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia—in the post-Soviet period. The article claims that ideology and identity have had little impact on the alliances and foreign policy orientations adopted by the three states. Second, the three states of the Caucasus adopted fundamentally different policies toward Russia. Third, geographic factors have had significant influence on their foreign policy options. Fourth, managing the results of the secessionist conflicts has been a major goal of their foreign policy efforts and the conflicts are a useful lever of neighboring powers. Fifth, the foreign policy making capability of the three states has expanded significantly. Last, the foreign policy options of the three states have been limited by the policies of the major powers in the region.

**Keywords:** South Caucasus, Foreign Policy, Geography, Ethnic Conflict, Russia.

## Kafkasya Ülkelerinin Dış Politikaları: Sovyetler Sonrası Dönemdeki Evrimleri

### ÖZET

Bu makale Güney Kafkasya ülkelerinin—Ermenistan, Azerbaycan ve Gürcistan—Sovyet sonrası dönemde dış politikalarının gelişimini ve stratejilerini incelemektedir. Makale ilk olarak her üç ülkenin ittifak kurmalarında ve dış politika yönetimlerinde ideoloji ve kimliğin çok az etkili olduğunu öne sürmektedir. İkincisi, her üç ülke Rusya'ya ilişkin olarak tamamen farklı politikalar benimsemişlerdir. Üçüncüsü, coğrafi faktör bu ülkelerin dış politika tercihlerinde önemli bir etkiye sahiptir. Dördüncüsü ayrılıkçı çatışmaların sonuçlarının düzenlenmesi dış politika çabalarının en esas amacı olmuş ve çatışmalar komşu güçler için faydalı manevralar teşkil etmiştir. Beşincisi, üç ülkenin de dış politika yapma kabiliyeti büyük ölçüde artmıştır. Son olarak, üç ülkenin dış politika seçenekleri büyük güçlerin bölge politikaları tarafından sınırlandırılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Güney Kafkasya, Dış Politika, Coğrafya, Etnik Çatışma, Rusya.

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Almost two decades have elapsed since the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence of the post-Soviet states. This article examines the foreign policies of the three states of the Caucasus - Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia- in the post-independence period. The article will look at the strategic and foreign policy environment that the three states inherited at independence and the major changes in that strategic milieu over time. It will also examine the main goals of the states' foreign policies and strategies, and their development over the last two decades.

The article makes a number of main points. First, ideology and identity have had little impact on the alliances and foreign policy orientations adopted by the three states in the Caucasus in the post-Soviet period. Second, despite inheriting similar post-Soviet legacies, the three states of the Caucasus adopted fundamentally different policies toward Russia, the most dominant power in the Caucasus in the post-Soviet period. Third, geographic factors have had significant influence on the foreign policy options and constraints of the states of the Caucasus. Fourth, managing the results of the secessionist conflicts that afflicted each of the three states has been a major goal of their foreign policy efforts in the post-Soviet period and the conflicts have served as a critical constraint on their policy options as well as a useful lever of neighboring powers. Fifth, the foreign policy making capability of the three states has expanded significantly in the second decade after independence of the three states. Last, at the same time, the foreign policy options of the three states have been limited by the policies of the major powers in the region.

## **Strategic Environment**

Following the Soviet collapse, the three post-Soviet states in the Caucasus inherited a common strategic environment as well as many shared constraints. All three states are small states, bordering on three major powers: Turkey, Iran and Russia. Russia is also a global power. All three of the states possess weak military capacity that does not serve as a deterrent to any of the powers in their region or global powers. The geographic features of the three states have significantly influenced their foreign policy options and constraints: Armenia and Azerbaijan are land-locked states, while Georgia is the only sea abutter among the states of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Each of the three states of the Caucasus was born into secessionist territorial conflicts, and thus from their establishment the three states have possessed undefined borders and polities.

The policies of the regional and global powers toward the three states have changed over the last two decades. In the initial period after the Soviet collapse, the U.S., Europe and most other global powers related to the Caucasus as part of Russia's backwaters and were pleased that Moscow undertook a policing role in this region. For instance, in the immediate post-Soviet period, the U.N. Security Council legitimized the presence of Russian troops deployed in Georgia's secessionist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by granting them status as U.N. peace keeping troops. In the initial independence period, regional powers such as Iran and Turkey also adopted relatively defensive postures toward the Caucasus, fearing spillover of the instability there into their own states. However,

by the mid-1990s, the policies of the US and, to some extent Turkey and Iran, had changed and the states conducted policies to assert their interests in the region. Europe began to take an active interest in the region in the early part of the second decade after independence, albeit it plays little role in the security picture of the region.

The Caucasus states' strategies for managing or resolving the conflicts have been intertwined with their foreign policy throughout the post-Soviet period. External support, mainly from Russia, has been a key factor in the emergence of the conflicts in the Caucasus during the post-Soviet period and thus external support is key to the resolution of the conflicts.<sup>1</sup> The main conflicts that emerged in the region in the post-independence period are Nagorno-Karabagh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. The policy of fostering local conflicts achieved a number of goals for Russia. It ensured that the three states of the Caucasus were vulnerable to its demands, such as maintenance of troops in the region. In its activities in the peace-processes conducted in the region as well, Moscow promotes primarily its own state interests. For instance, Russia has promoted the stationing of its own troops between Azerbaijan and Armenia as part of the settlement of the conflict between the sides and at times this Russian demand has been an obstacle to resolution of the conflict.

Despite their prominence in the foreign policy agenda of the three states, none of the three major conflicts in the Caucasus region have been resolved in the post-independence period. The conflicts in the Caucasus continue to provide Russia and other outside powers with significant leverage in the region. All three Caucasus states still possess undefined borders and polities.

The three states of the Caucasus inherited a number of common legacies as post-Soviet states, which affected their foreign policy options. All three emerged from command economies, which were directed from Moscow and the economies were interconnected to components and markets in Russia and other Soviet states. At independence, the states did not have national currencies or many state institutions that were not subordinated vertically to Moscow. Their national security organs and militaries were funded, supplied, trained, and parts of them were still directed by Moscow at the time of independence. Moreover, Moscow commanded the transport, transportation, and communications infrastructures of the three states. These infrastructures interconnected the new states primarily to Russia, and the states possess few international infrastructures that joined to states outside the former Soviet Union.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the former Soviet Union, there were hundreds of disjunctures between the political and ethnic borders of the new states, and these disjunctures were very prominent in the Caucasus. In addition, under the Soviet federal system, many ethnic minorities possessed autonomous governing administrations that served as convenient springboards for attempts at self-rule. Elites in these autonomous regions enjoyed benefits from this structure under the Soviet system, encouraging many to attempt to preserve them in the post-Soviet period. Despite these conditions, relatively few protracted ethnic-based conflicts emerged in the post-Soviet period. The only groups that acted militarily to break away from new states in the post-Soviet space were those that received external support.

At independence, the new states had to establish from scratch foreign ministries. They had no formal training institutions in place for diplomats, and most of the original diplomatic corps of the new states had served as Soviet diplomats or translators for Soviet institutions. Armenia also recruited diaspora members to serve in top diplomatic posts.

## Strategic Environment Take Two

The global position of the Caucasus has transformed significantly during the last two decades. In contrast to the initial independence period, the positions of all the major external powers in the region have changed in the last two decades and all strive to promote their interests through expanding their power and influence in the Caucasus. Various states see the region as an important security asset. In recent years the Caucasus has become a major frontline region in the conflicts between Russia and the US, and between the US and Iran, raising the global importance of the region. However, serving as a location of these conflicts between various powers also added a major factor of instability there. The Caucasus also serves as an important air transportation corridor between Europe and Asia, including to major security arenas, such as Afghanistan. In addition, the Caucasus serves as a significant source of oil and natural gas and a potential transit route of additional Caspian energy resources, raising the strategic importance to local and global powers of possessing influence and control of the Caucasus.

Another important development in the strategic environment of the Caucasus in the post-Soviet period has been the reemergence of Russia's power in the region and beyond. Infused with profits from oil and natural gas export bolstered by an extended period of high oil prices and reconsolidation of Moscow's authority over various government agencies and representatives, Russia reasserted its power in the Caucasus region toward the end of the second Yeltsin presidency, aided by Vladimir Putin's appointment as Prime Minister in 1999. Moscow regaining of control over various military units and government agencies has allowed it to conduct a unified policy toward the region. In recent years, Moscow has been able to deter states in the region from taking stances that contradict its major policy goals and to temper Washington's ability to assert its power in the region. While the US views the region as a strategically important one, especially since a large bulk of its military flights to important areas overfly the area, Washington has proven quite limited its ability to project power into the region. This was quite evident during the August 2008 Russian invasion into Georgia. While the U.S. wanted to provide support to its ally in Tbilisi, it found itself with little relevant means to deter and push-back Russia from Georgia. As predicted earlier, while the U.S. possesses relatively more power than Russia, in the Caucasus, Moscow possesses more "relevant power."<sup>2</sup>

An additional development that affected the foreign policy formation of the Caucasus states is the process of state institutional consolidation that took place in the first

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on "relative versus relevant power" of the U.S. and Russia in the Caucasus and Caspian region, see Brenda Shaffer, *U.S. Policy toward the Caspian Region: Recommendations for the Bush Administration*, Policy Brief, Caspian Studies Program, Harvard University, July 13, 2001, available at <http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/3105/>.

decade of independence. The level of state strength of all three states changed dramatically over the first decades of independence. State strength is measured in mainstream academic work indicators by the degree of its monopoly over force, capability to mobilize soldiers, and the level of capability to collect taxes. At independence, Armenia started with the highest level in the region of state strength among the states in the region, especially in the sphere of monopoly over force. In contrast, Georgia and Azerbaijan experienced civil war in their early state periods and neither of their first regimes possessed a monopoly over force, with a number of militias operating in these states. In addition, as stated, at the time of independence, a number of main institutions of the three states were subordinated to Moscow and few transportation and communication infrastructures connected the states to states besides Russia and the former Soviet Union. This situation changed dramatically in the post-Soviet period. Armenia bolstered its already meaningful level of state strength. Both Azerbaijan and Georgia completely consolidated the state monopoly over means of power, turned their armies and other security organs into local state subordinated and effective organizations, and acquired capability to tax. Georgia and Azerbaijan established transport and communication infrastructures independent of Moscow. Yerevan, up until the border opening agreement with Turkey, relatively did not make great progress in establishing new international infrastructure links.

The status of the Caucasus region was greatly affected by the ebbs and tides of world oil prices. Up until the extended rise in world oil prices in the first decade of the twenty first century, most of the major route change energy export infrastructure projects remained on the drawing board. However, the rise in world oil prices rendered a number of the energy export projects from the land-locked Caspian region to commercially viable, increasingly their chances of realization. During the period of high oil prices of 2003-2008, the Caucasus and greater Caspian region was a foci of international attention and influence in the region was considered a geostrategic prize.

## **Foreign Policies of the Caucasus States**

Despite their commonly inherited post-Soviet legacies, their shared geographic location, their mutual confrontation with undefined borders and polity from day one of independence due to major secessionist conflicts, the three states of the Caucasus—adopted three distinct foreign policy orientations and strategies in the post-Soviet period. The most significant distinction in the three foreign policy strategies is each state's policy towards Russia. Despite the common historical legacy of Russian colonialization, each of the three states crafted a different policy toward Russia, creating a challenging case to the weight often assigned in international relations analysis to historical legacies in foreign policy choices. Armenia chose to form a military alliance with Russia, and Moscow possesses military bases in Armenian territory and shares a unified air defense system. In contrast, Georgia chose to ally itself with the US, while Azerbaijan has adopted a balancing policy between the global and regional powers. To follow is an analysis of the evolution of the foreign policies of each of the three states of the Caucasus in the post-Soviet period.

In the post-Soviet period, the capacity of the three states to engage in foreign policy making has significantly developed. The states have widely increased the professionalism of their foreign service, including through development of regular diplomatic training programs. The number of the embassies of the new states abroad and foreign diplomatic representations in their own capitals has increased dramatically. During the later part of the second decade of independence the three states adopted formal national security and/or foreign policy concept documents. Azerbaijan adopted a national security concept in 2007; Georgia adopted a national security concept document in 2005 and a foreign policy strategy document in 2006 Armenia adopted a National Security Strategy and Military Doctrine in 2007.

### *Azerbaijan*

In the post-Soviet period, the Republic of Azerbaijan's foreign policy can be divided into two distinct periods: the first under President Abulfəz Elçibey (1992–1993); and the second under President Heydar Aliyev (1993–2003) and President İlham Aliyev (2003–).<sup>3</sup> During the Elçibey period, ideological considerations superseded considerations of material factors, and thus long-term constraints were primarily ignored in the formation of the young state's foreign policy strategy and its designation of alliances. In contrast, the foreign policy conducted by President Heydar Aliyev and continued under President İlham Aliyev downgraded the role of ideology and thus, permanent material factors were taken into consideration and had a significant influence on the state's foreign policy decisions and alliance choices.

During the tenure of Presidents Heydar and İlham Aliyev, Azerbaijan's foreign policy includes six major features: (1) balancing relations with major regional and global powers instead of being a member of an exclusive alliance; (2) the absence of religious and ethnic identity factors in determining the state's alliances or main vectors of cooperation; (3) maintenance of full independence and not serving as a de facto vassal state of any regional power; (4) policies that serve the citizens of the state of Azerbaijan and not the greater Azerbaijani ethnic community; (5) transportation and transport infrastructure agreements are a foreign policy tool and part of the state's foreign policy agenda; and (6) active attempts to ensure the state has safe and recognized permanent borders through resolution of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict with Armenia. The major document enshrining the foreign policy approach during the tenure of Presidents Heydar and İlham Aliyev is the *National Security Concept of Azerbaijan*, which was adopted on 23 May 2007.

Significant changes in the post-independence period in Azerbaijan's material basis, has had dramatic influence on its foreign policy capacity. With the commencement of the influx of massive oil revenues beginning in 2005, Azerbaijan has almost tripled its number of foreign embassies, has become a granting state of foreign aid, and most

<sup>3</sup> In addition to these two elected presidential administrations; Azerbaijan had two short-lived caretaker governments in the post-Soviet period.

significantly has embarked on the building a meaningful military force. Azerbaijan plans to maintain ninety missions abroad. In addition, Azerbaijan established in 2006 the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy (ADA) to enhance its diplomatic capability and foreign policy making. These factors contribute significantly to an increase in Baku's regional and global foreign policy capability since 2005 and its increased assertiveness in its foreign and security policies.

The distinction in the role of ideology as a source of foreign policy choices between the Elchibey and Aliyev periods created major differences in their alliances choices. President Elchibey took an idealistic view to alliances choices, and ignored many of the power realities in the region. Under Elchibey, Baku rejected institutionalized and especially security cooperation with Russia, and thus did not join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) at its inception and called for the removal of troops under Moscow's command from Azerbaijan. President Elchibey assumed that the common Turkic background would serve as a basis for an alliance with Turkey, despite the fact that Ankara showed no signs in this early period of wanting to undertake an active role in the security outcomes in the region, or to enter into a military alliance with Azerbaijan. According, Elchibey's serious miscalculation of depending on ethnic ties with Turkey contributed to Azerbaijan's strategic losses in its initial period after independence. Under Elchibey, Azerbaijan learned that the US policy in the region in the early period would be predisposed toward Armenia, due to the power of the American Armenian lobby. Elchibey also inadvertently encouraged Tehran's wrath through opening the issue of liberation of "South Azerbaijan,"<sup>4</sup> and reaching out from Baku to the ethnic Azerbaijani community in Iran, and this contributed to the emergence of the alliance between Tehran and Yerevan.

In contrast to the Elchibey period, under both Aliyev presidencies, ideological and identity considerations were removed from alliance formation and the state adopted a policy of balancing the interests of Russia and US, as well as attempting to maintain stable relations with Turkey and Iran. Azerbaijan has pursued multiple alliances and cooperation with states that often possess opposing strategic orientations. Baku maintains multidirectional security cooperation with a number of alliances, including opposing alliances such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In the Aliyev period, Azerbaijan's religious or ethnic ties not affect Baku's choice of alliances and cooperation partners. While maintaining excellent ties with Muslim-populated states, neither Aliyev regime has developed special alliances with states on the basis of shared religious identity.

In contrast to the Elchibey period, under President Heydar Aliyev and President Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijani state institutions have not attempted to promote special relations with the Azerbaijani community in Iran. Attempts at direct ties with this community, which encompasses a third of the population of Iran, could have jeopardized Baku's

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<sup>4</sup> This is the term used by President Elchibey to refer to the ethnic Azerbaijani populated provinces in northwest Iran.



cooperative relations with Tehran. In contrast to the approach many states take toward diaspora communities, the Republic of Azerbaijan has not granted special citizenship rights to ethnic Azerbaijanis from abroad, nor has it encouraged their immigration to Azerbaijan. Despite the lack of foreign policy initiatives from Baku toward the ethnic Azerbaijani community in Iran, Tehran still fears these types of activities. These fears affect relations between Azerbaijan and Iran, as well as Tehran's policies toward the Caucasus.

Throughout the post-Soviet period, resolution of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict has occupied a major portion of Baku's foreign policy activity. In its *National Security Concept of Azerbaijan*, document, restoring Azerbaijan's "territorial integrity" is listed as the first goal of its national security. The conflict is the major determinant of its decisions in the United Nations for instance. The need to cultivate resolutions in its favor on the Nagorno-Karabagh issue shapes its votes and coalitions in this international organization, as well as in other institutions.

Azerbaijan's location on a strategic land bridge between Europe and Asia has endowed Azerbaijan with both foreign policy opportunities and challenges. Today, Azerbaijan's airspace is one of the globe's major air highways linking Europe, Asia, and the greater Middle East. Baku has positioned itself as a major air hub and location for refueling of intercontinental flights. In addition, Azerbaijan is an oil and natural gas producer and exporter, and also, as noted, occupies a potential transit route for Central Asian oil and gas exports and promotes efforts to realize this transit route.

Azerbaijan's geographic location has significant influence on its foreign policy options and outcomes. As an energy exporter and land-locked state, Azerbaijan is in a unique and especially challenging position. Unlike most oil exporters, landlocked Azerbaijan's export infrastructure passes through neighboring states before reaching world markets. In this state, decisions on energy export pipelines have larger political weight than those of sea-abutters, since they involve designating permanent transit states.

Azerbaijan's choice of main energy export pipeline route reflects its primary alliance orientation. Thus, by choosing the route through Georgia and Turkey, Baku indicated the view that a security alliance with these states brought it the most benefit among its various regional options and was the least risky to have dependence on these states versus others. By choosing to build its main oil and natural gas transport infrastructures in Georgia during the post-Soviet period, Baku has designated Georgia as its primary transit state. This designation reflects Baku's prioritization of highly positive relations with Tbilisi and obligates long-term policy activity to maintain these relations and Georgia's stability. In this context, Baku has offered favorable natural gas prices to Tbilisi (to the chagrin of the World Bank, which had tried to prod Baku into charging higher prices) in order to help Georgia achieve a healthy economy and greater stability. With Georgia serving as its main transit state, Azerbaijan viewed Georgia's stability as a goal of its own national interest. In addition, thus, Azerbaijan has continually encouraged the ethnic Azerbaijani minority in Georgia to support state institutions in Tbilisi and integrate into the Georgian polity, as a further measure to fortify Georgia's security. Moreover, Tbilisi and Baku have both been

extremely accommodating in border delimitation deliberations, which have contributed to the two countries' overall cooperation and stability in their relations.

During the independence period, Baku's view of the role of energy export as a foreign policy tool as evolved. During the first decade after independence, Baku attempted to leverage its energy export as a foreign policy tool. It believed that its role as an energy exporter will entice the US and Europe to contribute to resolution of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict in order to improve stability in the region and open up options to a closer relationship with European-Atlantic institutions. However, in recent years Baku seems to have become aware of the limitations of the energy tool factor and that it can't be leveraged to achieve many of its main security goals. Moreover, Baku realizes that while the role as an energy exporter renders it an object of external courtship, it also makes it a destination for destabilization by different powers.

Azerbaijan's geographic position also influences the way transportation issues are intertwined in Baku's foreign policy. As stated by Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov, "An Azerbaijani foreign minister deals a lot with transportation."<sup>5</sup> A primary example of this is Azerbaijan's prominent role in the GUAM regional organization, which includes Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova. Transportation and trade linkages, including protection of energy export infrastructure, are GUAM's flagship issue. Baku is also striving to become a major transit state itself, focusing on trade and transport to and from the greater Caspian region. Thus, Baku promotes export projects that would transport Central Asia's natural gas through Azerbaijan, such as the proposed Nabucco project. In addition, Baku's intensive foreign policy efforts to realize the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway link reflect the importance of transport as part of Azerbaijan's foreign policy.

Azerbaijan's growing natural gas exports will require expanding political arrangements and policies. The nature of gas trade renders it much more susceptible to political considerations than that of oil or coal. Petroleum and coal are primarily traded on international markets with little direct connection between supplier and consumer. Natural gas, on the other hand, is supplied chiefly in pipelines, creating direct, long-term linkages between suppliers and consumers. The high cost of the majority of today's international natural gas export projects means that consumers and suppliers must agree to mutual long-term commitments. Thus, as Azerbaijan brings online new natural gas exports in the coming decade, building the framework for the right export venue, will occupy part of its foreign policy agenda.

## ***Georgia***

Georgia's foreign policy strategy focuses on a number of main goals. One, increasing domestic stability and renewing its territorial integrity. Two, decreasing Russian military presence and levers of security influence in the state. Three, increasing US military presence in Georgia. Four, increasing Georgia's integration into NATO and ultimately

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<sup>5</sup> Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov, 5 July 2009, speech Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, Baku

receipt of membership. Four, preservation of Georgia as a main and stable transit state for Azerbaijan and other Caspian and Central Asian states. Five, translating its transit role into geopolitical gain. Six, encouraging foreign direct investment in Georgia. Last, protecting the rights of Georgian citizens abroad.

Georgia's distinctive geographic location has provided it with both foreign policy opportunities and constraints throughout the period of independence in the post-Soviet period. Georgia is the only sea-abutting state of all the republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus. As such, Georgia is a central geopolitical prize for countries that want to influence the region. Both the US and Russia has invested significant policy efforts to maintain a military presence and/or levers of influence in Georgia's territory and to determine the outcome and direction of Georgia's transit role for the greater region and the state's strategic orientation. As part of these efforts, Russia has throughout the post-Soviet period actively attempted to destabilize Georgia, in order to prevent it from serving as a transit state for the other states in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and thus to lower these states' dependency on Russia. This geopolitical interest of Russia has served as a constant constraint on Georgia's foreign policy options throughout the post-Soviet period. Due to Russia's policies, Georgia's domestic stability and its foreign policy decisions have been interconnected and thus Georgia views achieving domestic stability as part of its foreign policy agenda.<sup>6</sup> The fact that domestic stability is part of its foreign policy strategy is very unique. In addition, like Azerbaijan, Georgia views restoring its territorial integrity as among the top goal of its foreign policy. This desire is increased by the interest to remove this domestic power lever from Russia and other foreign states.

Since independence, Georgia has attempted to build a military alliance with the U.S. and Europe and to integrate the state into Euro-Atlantic security structures, especially in order to create a deterrence to Russia. Under President Shevardnadze, the desire to align with the U.S. and NATO structures was present in Georgia's foreign policy, but the president refrained from attempting to formally materialize this goal as part of an effort to appease Moscow and subsequently prevent domestic instability in Georgia. However, under President Saakashvili, Georgia's foreign policy evolved into full out alignment with the US and a clear, articulate desire to join NATO as a full member.

In addition to the desire to align with NATO and the US, in its *Foreign Policy Strategy* Tbilisi has singled out a number of states as "strategic partners": Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. These strategic relations result chiefly from the relations between the states as part of a united transit and transport system. Georgia serves as the primary transit state for Azerbaijani trade, including its major economic vector-- oil and natural gas export. Georgia's ports are primary export ports for Kazakhstan's non-energy trade, and in recent years Kazakhstan has become the largest foreign direct investor in Georgia, focusing on acquiring ownership of Georgia's transport infrastructure. Turkey serves as the designation of the of the major energy transit projects that transit Georgia—

<sup>6</sup> "Foreign Policy Strategy 2006-09" [http://www.mfa.gov.ge/files/35\\_9440\\_673620\\_11.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.ge/files/35_9440_673620_11.pdf), (Accessed on 4 October 2009).

the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline. Ukraine is also a major energy transit state and thus like Georgia possesses an interest in preserving the safeguarding the transit infrastructures flow through the states.

Georgia has attempted to leverage its transit role for geopolitical significance. As stated, Georgia's transit function has indeed endowed it with special policy investments from the US and has rendered it a special target of Russia's policies in the region. At the same time, in contrast to many transit states, such as Ukraine vis-à-vis Russia and Turkey vis-à-vis Azerbaijan, Georgia has not toyed with the stability of the transit from Azerbaijan and the Caspian region via its territory as a way to achieve more gains. Tbilisi has viewed the safe passage as a major source of its regional power and safeguarded this asset.

Georgia hopes to develop its diaspora as a foreign policy tool. As stated in its *Foreign Policy Strategy*, "It is a task of Georgian diplomacy to mobilize and organize Georgian diasporas to support the goals of Georgia's agenda, including Georgia's active outreach in their respective states and attracting foreign investment to Georgia."<sup>7</sup>

Georgia also sees protecting Georgian citizens abroad as an element of its chief foreign policy mission, which is defined as to "Promote national interests of Georgia, protect the rights of Georgian citizens abroad, and contribute to a better world community."<sup>8</sup>

Since its independence, Georgia's foreign policy capability has been affected by its varying levels of state strength and its changes in regime type. In the post-Soviet period, Georgia has been through three major regime type transitions: democratic and weak state (1991-1992) under President Zviad Gamsakhurdia; autocratic and weak (1992-2003) under President Eduard Shevardnadze; democratic and strong (from 2003) under President Mikhail Saakashvili. During the democratic periods, wars have emerged, while under Shevardnadze's regime, concord returned to Georgia. While Moscow possessed many interests in controlling Georgia and preventing its joining of US led security alliances, the incentives and available means rose during periods of democratization in Georgia. Moscow actively intervened on behalf of secessionist groups there as a lever of influence over Tbilisi during periods of democratization in Georgia. In these periods, under Presidents Gamsakhurdia and Saakashvili, the democratization process facilitated the emergence of local power sources against the central government that could be used by Moscow to pursue its interests. Also, in democratic periods, the costs to the regime of ignoring Russia's control of its "lost territories" was higher and thus caused the regimes to undertake risky behavior vis-à-vis Russia that ended in unsuccessful wars for Tbilisi. In addition, democratization of the ruling regimes in Tbilisi rendered Georgia a potential candidate for NATO membership, raising the motivation to Moscow to obstruct this development through intervention and support of proxies. Moreover, President Saakashvili was emboldened by a sense of security that the U.S. and Europe will support Georgia in facing of Russian security challenges, in light of its adoption of democratic government following the 2003 Rose Revolution. As stated in Georgia's *Foreign Policy*

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

*Strategy 2006-09*, Georgia's foreign policy priorities are based on the values established in the modern democratic world. This interrelation allows us to ensure international support in accomplishing our objectives.<sup>9</sup>

In the foreign policy strategy document, Tbilisi also defines supporting the emergence of democracies in the region of Eurasia and conducting cooperation with democratic states as components of its national strategy. In actuality, in the early part of the decade, Georgia worked actively to support regime transitions in some of the states of the region, such as Kyrgyzstan. However, Georgia has been cautious and refrained from supporting regime transitions in states with which it maintains strategic partnerships, such as Azerbaijan.

### *Armenia*

In the two decades since independence, Armenia has conducted a relatively consistent foreign policy strategy, despite three changes of leadership in the country (President Levon Ter-Petrossian 1991-1998; President Robert Kocharian 1998-2008; and President Serzh Sargsyan 2008- ). Armenia's foreign policy since independence includes a number of elements: one, preserving a strong alliance with Russia, which includes allowing Russian to maintain military bases and deploy troops in the territory of Armenia and integrating its air defense with Russia; sustaining strong cooperation with Iran and transit and transport options through its territory; attempt to open trade and transit links with Turkey; consolidating its control over Nagorno-Karabagh; attempt to achieve international legitimacy for its control over Nagorno-Karabagh (though not necessarily over the surrounding occupied districts); continuation of status as recipient of significant US foreign aid; and preserving strong ties and cooperation with the major Armenian diaspora communities, especially in the US and France, which promote Yerevan's foreign policy interests in these states.

Early in the independence process, Yerevan assessed that Russia is the main power affecting the Caucasus region and concluded that it should ally with Russia as a means to achieve its security and strategic goals. At the same time, in order to increase its political maneuverability within this relationship and in general, Armenia pursued development of trade and ties with other neighboring states, including Turkey. Under all three Armenian presidencies, Yerevan has attempted to develop relations and trade with Ankara. This policy goal was most pronounced under Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrossian. Developing the relationship with Turkey could help it off balance its dependency on Russia and help Armenia receive legitimacy for its control over Nagorno-Karabagh. The closed border with Turkey was one of the only major strategic costs that Armenia paid for its control of Nagorno-Karabagh. Consequently, the status of the border with Turkey is one of the only meaningful non-military means that can elicit concessions from Armenia in the resolution of the conflict.

<sup>9</sup> "Foreign Policy Strategy 2006-09" [http://www.mfa.gov.ge/files/35\\_9440\\_673620\\_11.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.ge/files/35_9440_673620_11.pdf), (Accessed on 4 October 2009).

Armenia's geography has also had major impact on its foreign policy. Like Azerbaijan, Armenia is land-locked and thus possesses dependency on its transit states. Armenia has not carved any stable transit options through its neighbors, with the exception of Iran and this option could be hampered, if instability or conflict will emerge in Iran. Moreover, Armenia also does not have territorial contingency to its main strategic partner—Russia, and this creates a major challenge to their cooperation. In Armenia's *National Security Strategy*, it states as one of its primary strategic goals “ensuring the reliability, security and safety of energy, transport and communication infrastructure.”<sup>10</sup> In this strategy, Armenia lists explicitly disruption of transport as a major national security threat:

The disruption of both the Tbilisi Sukhumi railway and the road from Georgia into Russia has posed a significantly negative impact on Armenia. The imposition of broad international economic sanctions on Iran would also directly threaten the National Security of the Republic of Armenia.<sup>11</sup>

Yerevan received an acute reminder of its challenging location as a land-locked state during the 2008 Russia-Georgia War. While it was not an intended policy of Moscow, the war essentially blocked Armenia's transit through Georgia (and as such its accessibility to Russia). The reminder of its vulnerability was one of the main motivating factors for Armenia to bolster its efforts to open its border with Turkey.

Consolidating its control over the region of Nagorno-Karabagh and attaining international legitimacy for its occupation of the region are prominent goals of Armenia's foreign policy. All three Armenian presidencies have engaged in formal peace negotiations with Azerbaijan in the framework of the Minsk Group of the Organization of Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE). In their negotiations, it seems that Yerevan has striven to achieve an agreement that would leave Nagorno-Karabagh under its control (at least de facto) as well as control over territory that would allow Armenia territorial continuity with the disputed region (such as Lachin), but would relinquish control over most of the other occupied districts of Azerbaijan as part of a comprehensive settlement.

Armenia views ties and support of its diaspora as an important foreign policy and national security goal. At the same time, it sees the diaspora as an important instrument of its foreign policy. In its *National Security Strategy*, “Preservation of National Identity” in Armenia and its Diaspora is listed as a security obligation: “The Republic of Armenia strives to preserve and develop the identity of the Armenian nation, within both Armenia and throughout its Diaspora.”<sup>12</sup> The tasks included in this obligation are quite unique among the security doctrines of states:

developing and implementing a comprehensive concept of Armenia Diaspora relations, with a broader mobilization of the potential of the Armenian Diaspora; promoting and fostering Armenian studies language, literature, history

<sup>10</sup> “Republic of Armenia National Security Strategy”, 2007, <http://www.mil.am/eng/index.php?page=49>, (Accessed on 5 October 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

and culture as factors ensuring continuity of national spiritual heritage and symbolizing national identity; and, enhancing the Armenian national culture along with preserving the elements of its distinguishing national features, aware of universal cultural values and developments, including the promotion of Armenian cultural heritage abroad.<sup>13</sup>

In a quite unique statement as part of national security documents, in Armenia's *National Security Strategy*, assimilation of Armenians in the Diaspora communities is considered an "external threat to Armenia."

However, despite these commitments on the rhetorical level, Armenia's policies toward its diaspora communities has been quite pragmatic and led by material and non-ideological considerations. Armenia's policies toward various diaspora communities are differential. Armenia has promoted the rights of Armenian communities in non-bordering states that legitimize foreign activity toward ethnic minorities (such as the US, France) and in places where Yerevan's assessments of the power relations have led it to believe that it can successfully join with co-ethnics. Thus, Armenia supported the drive of Karabagh Armenians for Nagorno-Karabagh to be annexed to Armenia, however Yerevan has treaded carefully in its policies toward the Armenians in the Javakhetian region of Georgia (many who share similar desires of annexation. Furthermore, Armenia has refrained from any criticism of the governments treatment of Armenians in two major Armenian communities —Russia and Iran, out of deference to its strategic cooperation with these two states.

## Conclusion

This article examined the evolution of the foreign policies of the three states of the Caucasus —Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia—in the post-Soviet period. Due to the diversity of groups in the region, outsiders looking into the Caucasus often view it as a region where history and religious and cultural differences have a major impact on the political and security developments of the region. However, this analysis of the two decades of foreign policies of the three states of the Caucasus illustrates that historical legacies and identity ties have had little impact on the policies of the states of the region in relating to vital state interests, when these conflicted with the material interests of the state. For instance, in ties with their diasporas, all three states promoted primarily material based policies. The states conducted differential policies toward different diaspora communities based on their bilateral interests with the states of residence of these communities. For instance, Yerevan militarily supported the drive for annexation of the Karabagh Armenians with Armenia, while it has refrained from supporting the Armenian community in Georgia to join Armenia. Conflict with Georgia would have closed Armenia's transit to Russia, and thus hurt a vital state interest. Baku fosters ties with Azerbaijanis in the US and Europe, but abstains from conducting formal ties with the Azerbaijani community in Iran. The recent elevation of protecting the interests of its diaspora communities to a top

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

foreign policy goal, also serves Tbilisi's larger security agenda, since Georgia can point out Moscow's discrimination and poor treatment of ethnic Georgians and Georgian citizens in its territory. An additional example of the limits of identity ties is the fact that when President Elchibey based Azerbaijan's alliance choices on identity ties and strong strategic losses were incurred, the system corrected itself and elevated a government that disregarded the role of identity in its alliance choices. Georgia as well is selective in its policy of supporting democratic movements. Tbilisi refrains from this policy in states where it could endanger bilateral relations with states that are important to Georgia. Thus, its material interests trump its ideological support for spreading democracy.

This article attempted to explain the goals of these three states in their foreign policy making. While the states have operated independent foreign policies, in actuality many of the strategic outcomes of the region were determined by external powers. The three states operate and form their foreign policy within the context of their strategic environment. The strategic environment that affects the Caucasus places significant constraints on the policy options of the three states. The most significant factor affecting their foreign policy options is the fact that the region is of important geopolitical significance to Russia and the United States. Accordingly, both states apply policy means to promote their interests in the region, creating both constraints and opportunities for the three states. Thus, while the three states have formed and conducted foreign policies, many of the outcomes in the region are affected by the activities of other states —especially the powers that border the region: Russia, Iran and Turkey. And, many of the activities of these three states in the region are impacted by their relations with each other and each with the United States. Successful policies toward the region should identify and understand the constraints in which the three states of the Caucasus operate and their policy limitations.

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