POST-SOVET STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT: 
THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

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ABSTRACT

The South Caucasus states of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan have shared, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a common strategic environment. To survive as independent states in a turbulent region bordered by Russia, Turkey and Iran, each state has chosen to align themselves with external powers. This study seeks to explain why, despite the many similarities among the three countries, each has taken different alignment decisions, resulting in differing strategic trajectories. Combining elements of Stephen Walt's "balance of threat" theory with elements of decision-making theory, the study argues that both material and perceptual factors are necessary to understand regional alignment behavior. Specifically, the role of history and historical analogy in the development of threat perceptions is analyzed. Official documents, public statements and interviews with current and former high-ranking officials in each of the three countries are used to analyze the foreign policy alignment decisions of successive presidential administrations in the three South Caucasus countries. The study concludes that lessons of history learned through analogical reasoning are a central element in the development of threat perceptions and, in turn, in alignment decisions. In an effort towards bridging the gap between theory and policy, the concluding chapter addresses both the theoretical and policy implications of the study's findings.
The research and writing of this dissertation is dedicated to Catherine Ann, my wife, without whose love and patience it would not have been possible.

I also wish to thank my dissertation committee: Dr. Angela Stent; Dr. George Shambaugh; Dr. Victor Cha; and, in memoriam, Dr. Joseph Lepgold, for their guidance and support. I am grateful to many colleagues in government and in academia, in Washington, Tbilisi, Yerevan, and Baku. I will not attempt to name them all, at the risk of leaving important contributors out.

Many Thanks to all,

Jim MacDougall
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

With the unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a new era of geopolitical and economic competition began on the territory of a failed empire that had encompassed one-sixth the land area of the world. A significant result of the Soviet Union’s collapse was the emergence of fifteen newly independent states that formerly had been constituent republics of the Soviet Union. In the Caucasus and Central Asia – a region nearly surrounding the Caspian Sea – eight new states gained their independence. Among these were the three states of the South Caucasus region – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (See Map 1). Sizeable oil and gas deposits in this region exacerbate ethnic, religious and national differences and spur local conflicts and regional competition. To understand new developments, reasoning by historical analogy is an alluring and powerful analytical and descriptive technique.

After 1991, it became increasingly commonplace for analysts and observers to compare the geopolitical competition in the Caucasus and Central Asia to the 19th century duel between the British and Russian empires for control of the region, memorialized by Rudyard Kipling as the “Great Game.” This analogy has led to considerable commentary on what has been called euphemistically the “New Great Game.”¹ Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott summarized this succinctly in a 1997 address.

For the last several years, it has been fashionable to proclaim, or at least predict, a replay of the “Great Game” in the Caucasus and Central Asia. The implication, of course, is that the driving dynamic of the region, fueled and lubricated by oil, will be the competition of the great powers to the disadvantage of the people who live there.²

Later in his remarks, Deputy Secretary Talbott criticized this “Great Game” mentality as counterproductive and dangerous, emphasizing U.S. policy sought to avoid such an “atavistic” outcome in the region. Whatever be its prescriptive merits, the use of the “Great Game” analogy to describe current events in the region poses problems. Most importantly, the actors, or players, in the modern version of the purported game, are not analogous to those of the former. For one, the British Empire is long gone and has no modern analogue in the region. More significant, however, is the fact that today eight independent and sovereign states are themselves essential players in the region. No longer merely pawns on the regional chessboard, the Caucasian and Central Asian states are now primary actors in regional developments.

Having gained their independence, the newly independent states were faced, some for the first time in history, with the challenges and responsibilities of autonomous political existence. Fundamental among these challenges has been the requirement of security and survival in the international system. Fateful political decisions on which hinged the future of their states have confronted decision makers. Among the most important of these decisions has been the choice of alliance partners and alignment preferences.

In the absence of the integrated and rigid security system of the former Soviet Union, dynamic geopolitical competition has led to the emergence of new strategic

alignments in post-Soviet space. The developing pattern of new strategic alignments, while clearly discernable, is not readily interpreted, given the larger expectations suggested by current theories of alliance formation. Explaining the alignment preferences and foreign policy orientations of regional states and the resulting alignment patterns is thus a theoretical challenge. The post-Soviet area where current theory is most hard-pressed to explain developments is the Caucasus region. When the postulates of current alliance formation theories are applied to recent developments in the region, several anomalies arise, creating a puzzle that seems to require for its solution an extension or modification of current theory.

The Caucasus is a region historically beset by wars, ethnic conflicts, religious and civil strife. In his book, *The Ends of the Earth*, Robert Kaplan includes the region as one of the last “frontiers of anarchy.” Though Kaplan refers to the seemingly unrestrained lawlessness endemic to the region, in terms of international relations theory, we see anarchy in another light. In considering the structure of the international state system, anarchy connotes the absence of a governing body or principle which establishes order. As the Soviet Union collapsed and the new states moved towards independence, antagonisms which had been more or less subsumed when the South Caucasus states – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (see Map 2) – were incorporated into the multi-ethnic Soviet empire were rekindled. The collapse of the Soviet security system led to a general disorder which in many cases has yet to be redressed.

Analyzing conflicts which erupted when new states, formerly parts of larger multinational state entities, took responsibility for their own security following the break-

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up of the multinational communist empires (Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, specifically,) Barry Posen highlighted the emergence of security dilemmas and described the condition as “emerging anarchy.” While Posen focused predominantly on the Balkans, “emerging anarchy” also has been acute in the Caucasus region with its complex blend of ethnic, geopolitical and economic tensions and rivalries. In the face of these rivalries the South Caucasus states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have struggled against a multitude of threats to their sovereignty. One strategy typically pursued by states threatened by conditions of anarchy is the formation of alliances or alignments or “external balancing.” The need for alliance partners is especially acute among smaller states whose own capabilities are quite often inadequate to prevail in the face of potential adversaries and whose potential for domestic resource mobilization or “internal balancing” is limited.

In his book, *Alliances and Small Powers*, Robert Rothstein notes that, “A Small Power is a state which recognizes that it cannot obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, or developments to do so....” According to this definition, the newly independent states of the South Caucasus certainly must be considered small powers. As such, they are faced, according to Rothstein’s imperative, with relying on others.

Current theories of alliance formation fall short of explaining adequately the alignment preferences and alliance choices of the South Caucasus states. Analytically

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vexing, in this regard, is the evolution of the relationships the three states have with Russia, the historical regional hegemon. Russia has made it clear, since the breakup of the Soviet Union, that it considers the Caucasus and Central Asia region its sphere of influence. After a period of relative decline, Russia increasingly has used all the instruments of its state power to maintain primacy in the region.

Despite being similarly placed in the international system by virtue of size, geographical location, and recent history, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have chosen dissimilar paths since gaining statehood in 1991. In the face of perceived and implied threats from Russia and elsewhere, the South Caucasus states have made different strategic alignment choices. Indeed, variations in alignment preference are noted not only between states but also have been demonstrated by the same state at different times. The difference in political behavior of the three states does not lend itself to simple explanations. While useful to a degree, current theories of alliance and alignment formation do not explain adequately the complexities of regional behavior. In general terms, the broad question I will address in this study is: With which potential partners have the South Caucasus states chosen to align, and why? Explaining the alignment preferences of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia is a question with both theoretical and practical significance.

Why the Question of Alliance Formation in Post-Soviet Space is Important

The choice of alliance partners and the associated pattern of alignments in the Caucasus and Caspian region is an important question which is of interest to both international relations scholars and foreign policy practitioners. A tangible indication of the level of interest within the policy community on developments in the Caucasus and
the wider region was a conference sponsored by the National Intelligence Council in April 2000 that examined the strategic dynamics of the Caucasus and Central Asia countries. More than 100 government and outside experts, including officials and scholars from the countries concerned met to address regional issues. Regional developments since that time continue to be of significant interest to policy makers. The Russia-Georgia conflict of August 2008 is a powerful and recent example.

Importance to Policy Makers

A security vacuum has existed in the South Caucasus region, to one degree or another, since the end of the rigid bipolarity of the Cold War system. To date, despite a number of efforts to organize the states in the region into some sort of multilateral security architecture, a power vacuum remains. How this vacuum is filled -- what security arrangements will eventually regulate conflict and competition in the region -- is a central issue for policy makers. The absence of a security regime in a region of strategic consequence, central to U.S. and allied efforts to counter Islamic extremism and terrorism, bordering as it does on Russia, China, Turkey (hence, NATO), Iran (and, nearby, the Middle East) and Afghanistan, is unsettling to policy makers in every state in the region, and in many extra-regional states.

For many years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the power of Russia to control events in the region was in decline. At the same time, the interest and influence of other regional states, extra-regional states and multilateral organizations in the region rose. In the last several years, however, Russia’s determination and ability to

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influence political and economic developments in the region has increased dramatically. One result of the waxing and waning of power and interest in the region has been the emergence of patterns of conflict and cooperation inconceivable during the Soviet period.

On the most basic level, answers to the theoretical questions of the type posed in this study are important to policy makers because they offer an improved understanding of the situation and can thus improve the efficiency of policy formulation and implementation. The types of knowledge thereby gained are identified by Alexander George as “generic knowledge of the conditions that favor the success of a strategy,” and “actor-specific behavioral models.”

Beyond simply observing and trying to understand the myriad changes in this important geographical region, policy makers must endeavor to understand the dynamics which are effecting change. By correctly discerning the underlying factors which impel regional states to ally or align with other states, policy makers will be better able to influence developing events in ways consistent with their policy goals. To discern these causal factors, International Relations theories offer much promise. The argument presented here draws together theoretical understandings from several competing theories in an attempt to improve the potential contribution IR theory can make to policy formulation vis-a-vis the South Caucasus region. Viewed in geopolitical terms as a power vacuum, located in a strategically important area of the world, the Caucasus region is important to policy makers. Two additional factors, however, increase this importance.

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First, the Caspian basin, which includes Azerbaijan, is endowed with a considerable amount of oil and gas. The scale of oil and gas deposits in the region remains the subject of ongoing debate, research and exploration. Yet, by all indications, the deposits are sizeable, on the scale of those on the North Sea slope, making the region an area important to future global energy supplies. The hydrocarbon potential of the region fuels lively commercial and political competition. Complicating considerably the geopolitical and economic competition in the region is the geographical reality that the Caspian Sea is land-locked, having no access to the world’s oceans. Oil produced in the region must be transported through pipelines to seaports whence it is shipped to world markets. The dynamic development of hydrocarbon production and transportation infrastructure in the region heightens the importance of the area.

Apart from the potential oil and gas riches of the Caspian Basin, a second factor that dramatically increases the geopolitical significance of the region in the minds of policy makers is the widespread ethno-territorial unrest which plagues the region. Ethnic and territorial conflicts are particularly prevalent in the Caucasus region. In the South Caucasus countries wars and secessionist conflicts waged since independence have resulted in thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands of refugees.

A major war involving Azerbaijan and Armenia over the predominantly Armenian populated Azerbaijani enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh was waged when Russian troops were withdrawn in 1992. (See Map 2) As a result of the war, Armenians took control of Karabakh and much of the Azerbaijani territory around it. Around 800,000 Azeris were uprooted, most of whom remain to this day refugees throughout the rest of
Azerbaijan. A fragile cease-fire has more or less held since 1994 yet each side harbors serious grievances which threaten to reignite tensions at any time.

In Georgia, the dissolution of the Soviet empire saw separatist movements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia fighting for autonomy and at times militating for complete independence or even unification with Russia. After years of deadlock, the conflict in South Ossetia flared in August 2008, pitting Russia against Georgia in a five-day armed confrontation; the ramifications of which are still playing out in the region. The significance of this altercation will be more fully assessed in the concluding chapter of this study. Suffice to say at this point that this conflict has had far reaching effects on all three of the South Caucasus countries as well as their immediate neighbors.

The combination of underdeveloped domestic institutions, uneven economic development and ethnic and separatist movements renders each of the South Caucasus states unstable. Thus, in addition to being, in the regional context, a power vacuum, the South Caucasus region is characterized by internal instability in each state. Recognizing this dangerous mix, former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski has called the entire Caucasus and Central Asia region the “Eurasian Balkans.” Comparing the region with the traditional understanding of the Balkans, Brzezinski says: “…not only are its political entities unstable but they tempt and invite the intrusion of more powerful neighbors, each of whom is determined to oppose the region’s domination by another.”

In the South Caucasus disputes over hydrocarbon production and transportation arrangements fuel the region’s ethno-territorial and political conflicts. As a result, the

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prospect of war in the region is tangible, perhaps more so in the wake of the 2008 Russia-
Georgia conflict. Moreover, the hazard of war will remain unmitigated until questions on
how the region is defended, and how the territorial integrity of regional states is
guaranteed, are resolved. The foreign policy orientations and alignment preferences of
the regional states will contribute fundamentally to regional stability or instability. It is
thus crucial for policy makers to understand the factors which lead to these alignment
preferences and to design and implement policy accordingly.

*Importance to IR Scholars*

The alignment preferences and alliance choices of the South Caucasus states are
also important to scholars of international relations. Understanding alliance formation is
a fundamental problem in International Relations theory. In one sense, the emergence of
the new states of the former Soviet Union provides a useful context from which new data
on alignment preferences and alliance choices can be collected for use in testing theories.
In this regard, explaining the relationships between the South Caucasus states and Russia
can be viewed as one piece in the larger theoretical and practical puzzle of alignment and
alliance formation in the former Soviet region. The relationships between the South
Caucasus states and other regional powers, such as Turkey and Iran, and with extra-
regional powers such as China, the United States and even the European Union, are also
pieces needed to complete the puzzle. The theoretical literature on alliance formation is
rich and extensive, yet it tends not to address the question of choosing specific alliance
partners. The choice of specific alliance partners raises questions which have not been
adequately explored. The how and why of states’ choices of specific allies thus suggests
a blank spot in the current literature.
The dearth of work on choosing specific allies was identified by Michael Don Ward in his 1982 monograph, *Research Gaps in Alliance Dynamics*.\(^{10}\) At that time, Ward noted:

Thus, little work has probed the black boxes of decision making within either nations or alliances, despite a wealth of historical scholarship. Nor has there been very much work which has sought to examine, understand, or predict which alliance groupings were likely to form.\(^{11}\)

A brief review of the leading scholarship on alliance formation since Ward’s observation suggests that the gap he identified has not been filled satisfactorily, despite much theoretical work on alliance formation.

In recent years, the generally recognized point of departure for theoretical discussions of alliance formation is Stephen Walt’s “balance of threat” theory. The theory postulates that states react not just to raw power as Kenneth Waltz argued, but to threats, and that when faced with an external threat, states are more likely to balance against it than bandwagon with it.\(^{12}\) If we posit, as both recent and historical patterns of behavior suggest, that the dominant external threat to the sovereignty of the countries in the region is Russia, it would appear, in the general sense, that Azerbaijan and Georgia, to varying degrees, have balanced against the threat and Armenia has bandwagoned with it. Walt’s theory does not adequately explain why this outcome has occurred.

Both Deborah Welch Larson and Stephen David propose theories of alliance formation that focus on internal threats and are based on the domestic level attributes of

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\(^{11}\) Ibid. p.26.

\(^{12}\) Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). In a number of articles appearing both before and after publication of this book, Walt has elaborated on his theory. A fuller review of these materials is presented in Chapter 3.
They suggest that elites in weak states will choose to bandwagon with the states most likely to assist them in preserving their rule. It is the survival of the leader rather than the state that drives the search for allies. To illustrate his point that threats to survival may be internal as well as external, David labels his theory “omnibalancing.”

While adding a useful dimension to Walt’s balance of threat theory, these arguments still fail to fully explain the different choices made by South Caucasus leaders. The leadership elites in each of the three states have been weak. The state most able to help them preserve their rule has been and remains Russia. Russia’s ability to influence events in Georgia and Armenia was demonstrated convincingly by the fact that it maintained sizeable armed forces in both countries. Yet, while Armenia has aligned itself with Russia, as David and Larson might predict, Georgia, at direct risk to its national sovereignty, has done the opposite. President Saakashvili and, previously, President Shevardnadze, have tried to balance against Russia, succeeding eventually in gaining the withdrawal of Russian armed forces from Georgian territory, but resulting more recently in a dangerous conflict which threatened directly Georgia’s sovereignty. The different choices exhibited by the South Caucasus states in their relationships with Russia remain poorly understood in theoretical terms.

In his book, *Crucible of Beliefs: Learning, Alliances and World Wars*, Dan Reiter applies learning theory to alliance behavior, adding another dimension to the domestic

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sources explanation of alliance behavior. He posits that states learn from historical experiences and that a small power’s experience in a formative event often determines its alliance choices in the years following the event. Specifically, he hypothesizes that a small power’s experience in the last world war provides the lesson on which a decision to either align or remain neutral is based. This specific formulation of learning theory as developed in Reiter’s work is not applicable precisely to the question of alignment choices faced by the South Caucasus states in the post-Soviet security environment. World War II was not a formative event for the independent South Caucasus states. Then part of the Soviet Union, the lessons they learned were those of a larger collective and were not relevant significantly to their behavior as independent states. A similar argument could be made regarding the Cold War. Nonetheless, Reiter’s addition of elements of learning theory into the discussion of alliance choice shows promise in understanding developments in the South Caucasus. In the study which follows, I propose that a combination of both material and psychological factors is necessary to understand the foreign policy orientations and alignment preferences taken by the three countries of the South Caucasus region.

The brief review of alliance formation theories offered above suggests none satisfactorily explains the behavior of the South Caucasus states since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The alliance behavior of states in the region thus presents an on-going theoretical puzzle. Specifically, the theory-driven puzzle on which this study focuses is the question: With which specific alliance partners have the South Caucasus states

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chosen to align, and why? Case studies on the three states of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan will serve as preliminary probes of the plausibility that existing alliance formation theories might be recast or modified to address more specific questions. Answers to the research question posed herein could thus contribute, in a small but significant way, to further development of alliance formation theory.

In addition to the potential importance the research question has in the further advancement of alliance formation theory, it also is important in the more general development of IR theory. In an article reviewing the theoretical debate in the international relations field over the role of Neorealism as a theory of foreign policy, Gideon Rose identified a school of thought which he labeled “neoclassical realism.”

Rose argued that neoclassical realists recognize that, first and foremost, a country's foreign policy is driven by structural factors; its place in the international system, and its relative power. Yet, he notes, “… a theory of foreign policy limited to systemic factors alone is bound to be inaccurate much of the time, ….” Therefore, Rose continued, neoclassical realists employ unit-level variables such as domestic structure and decision-maker's perceptions to explain and theorize about foreign policy behavior. The body of knowledge which has emerged as a result of this methodology occupies, Rose says, “… a middle ground between pure structural theorists and constructivists.”

The theoretical conception suggested herein combines elements of Walt's balance of threat theory, with modifications of Reiter's learning theory. It is located, in that sense, in Rose’s middle ground between structural and constructivist theories. Rather than view

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16 Ibid. p.152.
17 Ibid. p.153.
Walt’s and Reiter’s explanations as representing an either/or choice, this study attempts to integrate the two to overcome the indeterminism of current approaches and promote a better understanding of alignment behavior. Reiter calls such an approach a “realism-plus-beliefs framework.”¹⁸ Focusing on the lessons of history (a perceptual variable) the study proposes combining perceptual and structural variables in an analysis of alignment preference. In that regard, the findings may make a positive contribution to the continued development of international relations theories, particularly research programs that seek to adapt neorealism to the task of explaining foreign policy by including perceptual and other domestic-level variables.

My Argument

Reiter sets up his argument as an alternative to Walt’s “balance of threat” theory. He says, in fact, that learning theory is “…emerging as an alternative conceptual framework to traditional realism.”¹⁹ Yet, a careful reading of Walt and Reiter reveals that their approaches to alliance formation are neither exclusive nor contradictory. I propose to combine elements from the two theories to produce a synthesis which offers greater explanatory power in addressing the problem of determining with which specific potential allies will states choose to align, and why? The result is a hybrid hypothesis that may better explain events in an area where both Reiter’s and Walt’s theories are incomplete.

While focusing his alliance choice work on whether states will choose alliance or neutrality, Reiter recognized that learning theory might provide insight into how states make specific choices from among potential allies. To wit, he stated:

¹⁸ Dan Reiter, Crucible of Beliefs, p.8.
This study tests the proposition that small powers draw general lessons about neutrality and alliance. Another possibility is that they draw lessons instead about specific nations as potential allies.\(^\text{20}\)

Nonetheless, he did not pursue this other possibility, explaining that drawing inferences about the behavior of specific countries at different time periods is difficult due to structural changes over time. For one, nations which were available as allies during a formative event may not be available as potential allies at a later time. As a result, Reiter concludes that an insufficient number of cases are available for quantitative testing.

I suggest that lessons drawn from history and applied to present conditions through analogical reasoning are an important factor in states’ calculations of which other states pose threats and with which other states it is advisable to align in order to counter these threats. A similar notion was suggested by Snyder and Diesing in *Conflict Among Nations*, where they argued that historical analogies are used to generate either some “theory” about how to deal with conflict or some “image” of an opponent.\(^\text{21}\) Reiter’s work, focused as it is on the question of whether to ally or remain neutral, may be seen as an exploration into the role of history in generating “theory” about how to deal with conflict (align or remain neutral). In this study, on the other hand, I will focus on the use of history to generate an “image” of another state, and the role this “image” plays in identifying states as either threats or potential allies.

The notion that states use history to draw lessons on the value of allying with specific partners, far from contradicting Walt's balance of threat theory, offers one means of specifying more fully how threats are determined. Walt says the level of threat is

\(^{20}\) Dan Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs*, p.104.

determined by four factors: aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions.\textsuperscript{22} The first three factors may be deemed structuralist. However, the fourth factor, Walt’s identification of aggressive intentions as a determinant of threat perception, moves the terms of his explanation beyond purely structuralist or material capabilities and introduces a variable which may be characterized as cognitive or perceptual. His theory thus would appear to include both structural and perceptual variables.

Addressing “aggressive intentions,” Walt says, “Perceptions of intent are likely to play an especially crucial role in alliance choices.”\textsuperscript{23} It is particularly important for the work herein on alignment behavior to identify the sources of these perceptions of intent or, more generally, the sources of threat perception. I suggest that lessons drawn from history are one very important source. Walt acknowledges as much when he says,

In almost all the alliances between a superpower and a regional actor considered here, the regional state perceived one superpower as favorably inclined and the other as hostile. \textit{The fact that the Soviet Union had never been an imperial power in the Middle East}, the vocal support the Soviets offered for the revolutionary ideals popular in many Arab states, and the Soviet willingness to provide extensive material assistance all encouraged the progressive Arab regimes to align with Moscow…\textsuperscript{24} [emphasis added]

Likewise, Posen, in his work cited earlier, also acknowledges the essential role of history when, in discussing "aggressive intentions" as a component of threat perception, he stated:

\textit{What methods are available to a newly independent group to assess the offensive intentions of another's sense of identity? The main mechanism that they will use is history: how did other groups behave the last time they were unconstrained?}\textsuperscript{25} [emphasis added]

\textsuperscript{22} Stephen M. Walt, \textit{The Origins of Alliances}. p.22.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. p.25.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. p.168.
\textsuperscript{25} Barry Posen, op.cit. p.30.
Based on the argument developed above, I propose that lessons from history play a central role in states' perceptions of one another and form the basis of analogies which decision makers use in determining threat perceptions and alliance choices. I will test this general proposition using case study methods.

The South Caucasus Case Study

The central question I will address is what role historical lessons have played in the formation of alignments and alliances in the South Caucasus region since the end of the Cold War. The case of the South Caucasus countries is important for two principal reasons. First, as described earlier, applying current theories of alliance formation to the South Caucasus region yields a wide divergence of predictions. In the final analysis, none of these competing theories satisfactorily explains alignment behavior in the region since the end of the Cold War. Secondly, understanding alliance behavior in the region is an important and current policy problem to which international relations theory can make a practical contribution.²⁶

There is another methodological reason for choosing the South Caucasus case. Here Reiter's wariness towards drawing inferences about specific countries due to the lack of structural similarities at different time periods should be recalled. Bearing this in mind, I propose to build on Reiter's general argument that a given state’s alliance behavior is in large part based on lessons learned during a formative historical experience. I posit that states learn lessons about the aggressive intentions of other states and draw conclusions on the relative merits of aligning with specific states or groups of

states from structurally similar, formative historical experiences.

In the South Caucasus case, the period following the collapse of the Tsarist Russian Empire may be viewed as decidedly similar structurally and closely analogous to the period following the collapse of the Soviet Empire. The earlier period saw the independence of each of the three South Caucasus states and ended with their incorporation, by 1921, into the Soviet Union.27 Throughout their formative, short-lived and unsuccessful effort to remain independent, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia struggled to survive as sovereign states in the midst of a chaotic and rapidly changing international environment. Each state pursued different alignment strategies; all of which ultimately failed to safeguard their independence. When a structurally similar historical moment occurred in the early 1990s, lessons about the comparative value of the various strategies the states pursued in the earlier time directly contributed to the South Caucasus states’ alignment choices.

The period 1917-1921 is clearly the most similar structurally to the contemporary period (1991-present.) However, learning theory suggests that more recent formative events may have a greater impact on behavior. Jervis, for example, argues that, “... a person learns most from events that are experienced firsthand, that influence his career and that have major consequences for his nation.”28 With this in mind, a second time period from 1988-1991 when the USSR was unraveling and the three South Caucasus states were moving towards independence will also be reviewed to determine if lessons

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27 The First Republic of Armenia existed from May 28, 1918 until November 29, 1920, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic from May 28, 1918 until February 25, 1921 and the Democratic Republic of Georgia from May 26, 1918 until March 18, 1921. Detailed descriptions of the rise and fall of these independent countries is found in Firuz Kazemzadeh, The Struggle For Transcaucasia (1917-1921) (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951).

28 See, in particular, Robert Jervis, op.cit. p.235.
were learned during this time period about specific threats and potential alliance partners. In addition to meeting Jervis’s criteria of first-hand experiences, events in the 1988-1991 time frame correspond with Posen’s suggestion that the behavior of one group towards another the last time they were unconstrained is the historical lesson most important in assessing subsequent aggressive intentions. Research into the contemporary period will attempt to determine whether lessons learned in 1988-1991 contributed directly to contemporary threat perceptions and alliance choices.

This study tests the proposition that history is an important element in the formation of threat perceptions. Further, it examines whether lessons learned by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the period leading up to the collapse of the Tsarist Russian Empire and subsequently, during the formation of the Soviet Union, have influenced directly their choice of alliance partners in the contemporary, post-Soviet political environment. Additionally, the study examines the possibility that lessons learned as the Soviet Union collapsed, from 1988-1991, directly influenced their subsequent alliance choices.

Outline of the Study

In Chapter Two of this study the terms alliance, alignment and orientation are defined, and standard measures of alignment and alliance are discussed. These concepts are then used as the basis for a description of the alignment behavior of the three South Caucasus countries since they gained their independence in 1991. Specific attention is paid to multilateral organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States, and others active in the region. Also, important inflection points are identified for further concentration in the country-specific case studies that follow later.
Chapter Three reviews theoretical approaches to alliance formation. Leading explanations and interpretations of alliance formation behavior are assessed to discern the contribution they make in addressing the question of country-specific alignment behavior in the South Caucasus region. Predictions on the expected alignment preferences and alliance choices of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia will be deduced based on each theory. When compared to the actual behavior of the states, it will be seen that none of the current theories adequately explains the pattern of events in the region. The review thus suggests current theory must be expanded or modified to satisfactorily explain alliance choices in the South Caucasus.

In Chapter Four a review of learning theory and theoretical treatments of the use of history in foreign policy decision making is undertaken. Then an argument is advanced which synthesizes variables drawn from current theories, specifically from Walt’s balance of threat theory and Reiter’s learning theory, to propose a plausible explanation of alignment behavior. The argument suggests that adding perceptual variables, in this case, lessons drawn from history about the intentions of other states, to the structural variables of Walt’s theory results in a more powerful explanation of the choices small states make when forming alliances. In effect, I propose that lessons drawn from history are applied to present conditions through analogical reasoning and are primary factors contributing to states’ threat perceptions. Additionally, historical analogies play an important role in a state’s calculations with which other states it is advisable to ally in order to counter these threats.

Chapters Five-Seven comprise the case study portion of this paper. In each I will explain the strategic choices and the alignment behavior of each country and, further,
each presidential administration in each country since independence. Public statements, official documents and commentary from interviews are the primary sources of information in the case studies. The case studies detail how each of the South Caucasus states has oriented itself in the international system and seek to determine why they have done so. In the course of this examination, the hypothesis that lessons derived from historical experience are important in the South Caucasus states’ determination of threat perception are tested.

Conclusions on the findings from the case studies and on the theoretical and policy implications of this study are presented in Chapter Eight. Much of this work, particularly the case study on Georgia, was either completed or well underway at the onset of the August 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict in South Ossetia. As a result, a short Epilogue has been added to Chapter Five. Lastly, based on the study’s findings, recommendations for further research are presented as are general recommendations for U.S. policy towards the countries of the region.
MAP 1

The Caucasus and Central Asia

This work is in the public domain in the United States because it is a work of the United States Federal Government under the terms of Title 17, Chapter 1, Section 105 of the US Code.
CHAPTER TWO
ALIGNMENT PATTERNS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

Background

South of the nearly 500-mile Caucasus Mountain chain which stretches from the Black Sea in the west to the Caspian Sea in the east, bounded on the north by Russia, and in the south and west by Iran and Turkey, are located the three countries of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Together they comprise a region described from the Russian perspective as the Transcaucasus, but now more commonly known as the South Caucasus, an area roughly the size of South Dakota (or Syria, in an international context) whose combined population is approximately 16 million. In geographical terms, the region is largely land-locked, with only Georgia having access through the Black Sea to the world’s oceans.

The South Caucasus region has been described as the “lands in-between,” that is: between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea; between Europe and Asia; between Christianity and Islam; and between rival empires and great powers.\(^1\) Throughout much of its recent history the region was located between three empires: the Tsarist; Ottoman and Persian. There it served, at times, as an east-west and north-south land-bridge for trade and transportation. More often, however, it served as a field of battle in imperial wars.

In the 17\(^{th}\)-19\(^{th}\) centuries, four Russo-Persian and 10 Russo-Ottoman wars were fought, the result of most being the territorial enlargement of the Tsarist Russian Empire.\(^2\)

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At times, Russia’s influence in the Caucasus was welcomed. Having been subject throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the rivalry between the Persian and Ottoman empires, the Caucasian areas of Armenia and Georgia looked to the Russian empire – fellow Christians – for protection. In 1782, King Erekle of Georgia formally petitioned Russia for protectorate status to save his country from Turkish conquest. Later, in 1801, Georgia was, for all practical purposes, annexed to the Tsarist Empire by Alexander I.³

In the 19th century Russia increasingly gained control of Transcaucasus region, wresting control of Azerbaijan from Persia in 1813 and Armenia from the Turks in 1828. At the same time, the Caspian was transformed from a Persian to a Russian Sea. Russia enjoyed primacy in the region until World War I when the Bolshevik Revolution, the dissolution of the Tsarist Russian Empire and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire brought widespread chaos to the region.

In the midst of these events, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, after a short-lived attempt (barely two months) at confederation, each declared their independence in May 1918. When World War I ended, encouraged strongly by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson’s rhetorical support for the self-determination of nations, each petitioned the great powers at the Versailles Conference for recognition and aid. Ultimately, in the face of a resurgent Turkey and a concentrated southern offensive by the Bolsheviks, each of the South Caucasus countries was taken over and eventually became part of the Union of

Soviet Socialist Republics.⁴

Decisions taken in Moscow during the Soviet era on the territorial boundaries of the three Caucasus republics would lead to dire consequences as the Soviet Union disintegrated. To facilitate control over the region, Soviet authorities (Stalin, in particular) followed a “divide and rule” policy, drawing regional boundaries to ensure the existence of ethnic minorities within each of the major political units, and to isolate these potentially rebellious ethnic sub-groups from their larger community.⁵ This policy, labeled “cynical cartography” by one observer, fostered territorial grievances based on claims to historical justice which would erupt into open warfare as Soviet control waned.⁶

**Contemporary Context**

When the USSR collapsed in 1991, the fifteen constituent republics of the Soviet Union became successor nation-states, effectively giving Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan their independence once again. Despite their shared recent history, as the South Caucasus states began to function as independent states, the differences between them were as marked as any similarities among them. Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are divided by language, religion and culture. These differences and the legacy of the Soviet policies mentioned above have led to more conflictual, rather than cooperative behavior in the post-Soviet period. Relative peace in the region has seemed to obtain only during times of outside imperial control, with the Soviet era being only the most recent example.

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⁴ This historical period is described fully in Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917-1921)* op. cit.
Among the primary challenges of statehood for the newly independent states of the South Caucasus were the cardinal issues of security and survival. The choices the leaders of each country have made, since regaining their independence, to position themselves in both the regional and international security contexts are the focus of this study. From among the potential options, which were chosen and why? What were the principal threats they faced, how did each country determine these threats, and what alignment choices did they make in response?

By any measure, the three contemporary South Caucasus countries are small states, surrounded, as ever, by larger neighbors, today’s great powers, if not empires.⁷

| TABLE 1 |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                     | Population (millions) | GDP ($- billions) | Defense Budget ($-billions) | Active Military Personnel (thousands) |
| ARMENIA               | 2.9                | 16.3             | .19             | 43.6            |
| AZERBAIJAN            | 8.1                | 67.7             | .31             | 66.7            |
| GEORGIA               | 4.7                | 16.1             | .35             | 11.3            |
| RUSSIA                | 142.1              | 1,670.0          | 666.00          | 1,027.0         |
| TURKEY                | 70.4               | 381.0            | 8.08            | 514.8           |
| IRAN                  | 65.0               | 219.0            | 6.60            | 545.0           |

Even a cursory look at these data suggests there is little possibility of the South Caucasus states mobilizing domestic resources to balance against potential external threats. As a result, the options open to these states are limited. Walt suggests the options are two: balance against the threat or bandwagon with it.⁸ Reiter argues that balancing and bandwagoning both represent alliance strategies and argues the choice is more properly framed between alliance and neutrality.⁹ In his study of the alliance

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⁹ Dan Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs*, op. cit. p.12.
behavior of Small Powers, Robert Rothstein suggested that in the face of a preponderant threat, the options available to Small Powers are, “neutrality, isolation, nonalignment, and appeasement.”

In a study focused specifically on the post-Soviet region, Mark Webber identifies for consideration four common security policies: “isolation; self-reliance; neutrality and non-alignment; and finally, alliance strategies.”

Among the states in the post-Soviet (or Eurasian) region, only Turkmenistan has chosen to follow a policy of neutrality, vowing not to become part of any alliance or join any political or military organization.

Neither of the South Caucasus states has chosen such a course. The course they have chosen is the subject of the remainder of this chapter which will review the alignment choices of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan since 1991. Before reviewing these choices, however, a clarification of the terms alliance and alignment is necessary, as is some discussion of measuring international alignment.

Alliance, Alignment and Orientation

In the context of international relations, alliance typically is defined in general terms as a formal agreement between two or more nations to cooperate on security issues. Many IR scholars further refine the definition, characterizing an alliance as a readiness to use combined military forces, if need be, to respond to security threats from

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10 Rothstein, op. cit. p.27.
13 This definition is based on: Ole R. Holsti, P. Terrance Hoffman and John D. Sullivan, eds., Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), p.5. The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations defines alliance as: “A formal agreement between two or more actors, usually states, to collaborate together on perceived mutual security issues.”
According to this definition, in the post-Soviet Eurasia region the Commonwealth of Independent States’ Collective Security Treaty (CST) is the only agreement which constitutes an alliance. The CST has been a central element in the regional security context since its signature in 1992. Decisions by Eurasian countries on whether to join the treaty provide clear indications of these states’ alliance preferences. As such, the decision-making behavior of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan with reference to the CST will be a key variable in the analysis and will be discussed in more detail below.

Attributing to the definition of alliance a primarily military dimension narrows the range of behavior which might be understood as indicating a country’s strategic preferences. A narrowly restrictive meaning may limit the goals of this study. Instead, a broader conceptualization is needed to better understand events in the post-Soviet South Caucasus. In this regard, Glenn Snyder said, “Alliances, however, are only the formal subset of a broader and more basic phenomenon, that of “alignment.” Alignment amounts to a set of mutual expectations between two or more states that they will have

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14 Robert Osgood defined alliance as, “a formal agreement that pledges states to co-operate in using their military resources against a specific state or states and usually obligates one or more of the signatories to use force, or to consider (unilaterally, or in consultation with allies) the use of force, in specified circumstances.” *Alliances in American Foreign Policy.* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press,1968), p.17. More recently, Glenn Snyder similarly defined alliances as: “formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, intended for the security or the aggrandizement of their members, against specific other states, whether or not these others are explicitly identified. (See: “Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut,” in Robert L. Rothstein. *The Evolution of Theory in International Relations.* (Columbia, S.C., University of South Carolina Press, 1991), p.84.

15 Article 4 of the Collective Security Treaty states, in part, “In the event of an act of aggression being committed against any of the participating states all the other states will give it the necessary assistance, including military assistance …” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta,* 23 May 1992, translated in Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Paige Sullivan, eds., *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis.* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), p.541. It could be argued that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is an alliance. However, its area of operations currently is Central Asia which lies outside the geographical scope of this study.
each other’s support in disputes or wars with particular other states.”^{16} In a later work, Snyder moves away from the focus on war, broadening his definition of alignment to include, “expectations of states about whether they will be supported or opposed in future interactions.”^{17} The term alignment connotes less formal cooperation between states on a variety of issues. In his review of research on alliance dynamics, Michael Don Ward stated that alignment is:

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\text{[N]ot signified by formal treaties, but is delineated by a variety of behavioral actions. It is a more extensive concept than alliance since it does not focus solely on the military dimension of international politics. Degrees of alignment in political, economic, military and cultural spheres present a multifaceted sculpture of national and supranational postures.}^{18}
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While this definition certainly moves in the direction of a broader conception, it perhaps moves too far. Ward clearly recognized the conceptual Pandora’s Box opened by this definition, stating later, “…the possibilities for crosscutting pressures upon states by virtue of their differing degrees of alignment on different issues with different groups of nations are quite large and potent.”^{19} For the purposes of this study, a slightly narrower definition of alignment will be used. As the major focus here is how and why states align to increase their security, the focus will be on political-military alignment, rather than cultural or economic. This focus should capture the informal nature of a relationship between two or more states who share mutual security interests.

Perhaps ironically, Walt provides a good definition of the term alignment, though he doesn’t distinguish it from the term alliance: “I use the terms \textit{alliance} and \textit{alignment} interchangeably throughout the book. For my purposes, an alliance is a formal or

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^{17} Glenn Snyder, \textit{Alliance Politics}, p.6.
^{19} Ibid. p.8.
informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states.”

Much of the data gathered in the case studies is from Russian language sources as Russian remains largely the language of strategic dialogue in and among the states of the former Soviet Union. In Russian, alliance may be variously understood through terms such as soyuz (alliance/union), blok (bloc), and dogovor (treaty). However, alignment, denoting a less formal cooperation than use of the term alliance would suggest, is understood more often in Russian through the term orientatsiya (orientation) and oftentimes by describing the two nations involved as strategic partners or being involved in a strategic partnership. By way of example, one noted Russian analyst of the Caucasus, describing what he perceived as pro-Western policies in Azerbaijan and Georgia and pro-Russian policies in Armenia, explained these policies could be understood under the rubric of “orientation politics.”

The Russian term orientation corresponds closely with an understanding of alignment as military or political cooperation on a less formal level than that undertaken under an alliance. Snyder and Diesing state, “Alignment, at bottom, consists of states’ intentions and expectations of others’ intentions concerning supportive or opposing behavior in future interactions.”

Identifying Alignment

In this section I will review briefly an approach to measuring alignment preferences. The variables and indicators most useful in determining alignment patterns

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will be identified and of these the most salient will be used to examine developments in Eurasia since 1991 in an effort to determine the general alignment patterns in the South Caucasus region. In the following chapter, the leading theories of alliance formation will be applied to the results in an attempt to explain what has been observed in the region. Later, in the case studies section (chapters 5-7), several additional indicators of alignment preference will be used to deepen our understanding of the choices the South Caucasus states have made and to test propositions that are advanced in Chapter Four on how these alignments might be explained.

At times since 1991, commentators in Eurasia, Russia and the West have claimed with accompanying alarm to have discerned the development of any number of geopolitical blocs, axes, counter-axes and alignments in post-Soviet Eurasia.\(^23\) One western analyst described developments in post-Soviet Eurasia as a “bewildering array of constantly shifting state strategies.”\(^24\) Analysts in Azerbaijan were prone to see a security bloc developing between Armenia, Iran and Greece, while their counterparts in Armenia were just as apt to see an axis developing between Azerbaijan, Turkey and Israel.\(^25\) Newspaper articles such as those cited typically took for their starting point statements by foreign officials, visits between military leaders, and other such commonplace

\(^{23}\) One good analysis is: Svante Cornell, “Geopolitics and Strategic Alignments in the Caucasus and Central Asia,” *Perceptions - Journal of International Affairs* (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs) (Volume IV, Number 2, 1999).


occurrences. Based loosely on these events, the articles deigned to identify the strategic alignment intentions of the countries under discussion.

While the types of events mentioned above, a statement by a foreign minister, for example, provide interesting data, a more rigorous level of substantiation is required to determine alignments. What factors would demonstrate the existence of strategic axes or alignments? How, in fact, can international alignment be measured? An accurate answer to these questions is essential to a better understanding of policy developments in the Caucasus region.

Writing at the height of the Cold War, thus viewing international alignment in binary terms, two scholars associated with the Foreign Policy Research Institute proposed an extensive list of indicators that might be used when measuring international alignment. The list includes some variables that were applicable solely in the context of the Cold War (diplomatic recognition of East Germany, for example). As with many issues in the field of security studies, analysis was simpler during the bipolar era. Yet, from among the list of variables several are either generic or easily lend themselves to modifications making them potentially promising points of departure for contemporary analysis. Examples of these are: military alliances; visits by heads of state; U.S. or USSR military presence; nonmilitary treaties and agreements; voting records in the United Nations; and, protests and expulsions of diplomatic personnel. The foregoing analysis will be informed by Tuene and Synnestvedt’s conclusion that the most useful indicators fell into two categories: military and diplomatic. In addition, given developments since

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27 Ibid. p.176.
the end of the Cold War towards a more globalized world economy, it would seem prudent to examine indicators that economic relations provide a measure of international alignment.

_Military Indicators_

The most basic military indicator of alignment is a security treaty or defense pact. In fact, by most definitions, a security treaty indicates an alliance, a more formal association than an alignment. In post-Soviet Eurasia, as was noted earlier, the Collective Security Treaty (CST) has served as the region’s principal collective security mechanism. Any discussion of alignments in Eurasia should begin by examining regional states participation or non-participation in this treaty. Other key military indicators of alignment to consider include: the presence of Russian military bases on a country’s soil; the presence of U.S. military forces in a country; joint training; and a country’s principal source of arms sales. In an examination of the applicability of balance of power theory to developments in post-Soviet Eurasia, William Wohlforth uses many of these same variables in his assessment of Central Eurasia’s response to Russian power.\(^\text{28}\)

_Diplomatic Indicators_

Membership and cooperation in nonmilitary treaties and agreements provide solid indications of a state’s alignment. In this regard, the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as the Soviet Union disintegrated is worthy of note. Most of the Eurasian states joined the CIS and remain members. However, as political and

\(^{28}\)William Wohlforth, op.cit., p.230 Table 8.3. Wohlforth does not include arms sales as a variable in his assessment, though Stephen David does in: _Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World._ (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) p.29. Wohlforth’s work, published in 2004, provides a useful snapshot of alignment patterns at that time. In the analysis that follows a longitudinal approach will be taken with efforts made to identify alignment patterns at various times during the period of the study.
military developments unfolded, the formation of a regional subgroup in 1997 called GUAM consisting of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova revealed serious differences within the CIS. In fact, GUAM has been described by some Russian commentators as the “anti-CIS.”29 A largely uniform body of opinion argues that neither the CIS nor GUAM has been particularly effective to date. But our interest here is what the groups can tell us about alignment preferences, not how they rate as competent international organizations.

Decisions to support great powers in high profile actions, either rhetorically or with material contributions, may well offer clues to alignment. The positions taken of regional countries towards the NATO bombing of Serbia provide one example. Other potential examples are support (or nonsupport) to anti-terrorism coalition operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Deployment of armed forces in support of coalition operations demonstrates some measure of alignment both diplomatically and militarily.

Another diplomatic indicator that might facilitate an understanding of regional alignment preferences is voting patterns in multilateral organizations. In this case, recent voting patterns in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are instructive. This factor will come into sharper focus later in this review.

_Economic Indicators_

It was suggested earlier that in an era of increased globalization economic relationships maybe important factors in determining a nation’s alignment preferences. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the economies of the Eurasian regional states remained connected primarily to Moscow. For most of the post-Soviet period, Russia has been the

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leading trading partner for all of the region states. In some cases, the economic relationships approached total dependence on Russia. Dependence in most states has been particularly acute in the energy and energy transport sectors. Wohlforth, in his review of the region, included several economic variables in addition to a core of military variables to determine the Eurasian states proclivity towards balancing or bandwagoning with Russia. Specifically he looked at trade dependence, energy dependence and energy transport infrastructure dependence as alignment variables.  

Much of the western attention to the South Caucasus and the wider Caspian Basin has been driven by oil and gas interests. The background and development of a specific few highly publicized multinational, economic projects such as “the contract of the century” signed in Baku, Azerbaijan in 1994 or the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Cheyhan oil pipeline might also provide important information on alignment preferences.

Based on the review conducted thus far on measuring alignment behavior, a few conclusions may be drawn. First, a security treaty or defense pact is the most basic and unambiguous indicator of alignment. Thus, the participation or non-participation of the three South Caucasus states in the CIS Collective Security Treaty (CST) provides a basic measure of alignment. Secondly, other military, diplomatic and economic variables also provide important information on alignment. Of these, the diplomatic history and development of the CIS and GUAM, particularly decisions on membership in these.

30 William Wohlforth, op. cit., p.230. Another scholar, Eric Miller, also identifies energy dependence as a key factor in determining alignment behavior. Eric A. Miller, To Balance or not to Balance? Alignment Theory in the Commonwealth of Independent States, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006). Looking specifically at Ukraine and Uzbekistan, he posits that alignment behavior can be explained by two factors: internal political threats, and economic dependence on Russia. While these factors may be important in measuring alignment, it is my contention herein that external threats understood in large part through historical experience are more important in determining alignment, at least in the case of the South Caucasus.
organizations, offer concrete data on alignment.

It is my contention that a careful examination of the CIS, CSTO and GUAM will provide the basic data necessary to determine general alignment patterns. This will be undertaken in the next section. In subsequent chapters, the additional variables noted above will be considered and may either reinforce the general conclusions, revealing different aspects of the same alignment choice, or raise questions on the general conclusions. In any event, it should be recalled that the objective of this portion of the analysis is description; efforts at explanation will follow.

Commonwealth of Independent States

As the drama of the collapse of the former Soviet Union unfolded, a critical subplot was the development of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Meeting at a hunting lodge in Belarus in December 1991, the Presidents of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus agreed, rather than pursue ratification of a new treaty reconstituting the Soviet Union, to form the Commonwealth of Independent States. Almost immediately, other constituent republics of the Soviet Union expressed their desire to become members of the Commonwealth. On December 21, 1991 the Declaration of Adherence to the Commonwealth of Independent States was signed in Alma Ata.\(^{31}\) The leaders of all the former Soviet Republics except the three Baltic states and Georgia signed the CIS agreement in Alma Ata.\(^{32}\) (see Table 2, column 1) The CIS proved to be the straw that broke the Soviet Union’s back. Four days after it was formed, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev resigned and the USSR ceased to exist.

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From its inception the CIS was viewed differently by member countries. Some saw it as a vehicle for future integration, others as a forum to manage the Soviet Union’s disintegration. Within the CIS, member states could decline to take part in decisions to which they objected. A result of this has been a plethora of agreements and arrangements agreed to by various subsets of the overall membership. A large percentage of these agreements have been unproductive. Of the many agreements signed within the CIS, one – the Collective Security Treaty – is particularly pertinent and representative of the general alignment dynamic that has taken shape within the CIS.

Collective Security Treaty

The original intention of CIS leaders was to maintain some type of unified military and security structure in the post-Soviet space.\(^{33}\) After initial success resolving issues involving the legacy of the USSR’s nuclear arsenal, there seemed to be increasing momentum among the CIS states towards formation of national military forces. Differences between integrationists and separatists over the military issue seemed to split the CIS into two camps from the very outset. One camp, favoring closer integration, included Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. A separatist camp included Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.\(^{34}\) (At this time Georgia had not yet joined the CIS.)

The CIS Treaty on Collective Security (CST), signed in Tashkent in May 1992, demonstrated clearly that the defense and security interests of the CIS member states were diverging sharply. The CST was signed by just more than half of the CIS member


states (Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan).\(^{35}\) (see page 51, Table 2, column 2). Designed to facilitate political-military cooperation among CIS states, the CST served instead to polarize the members.

As the CIS and CST began to take form, grave domestic crises demanded the attention of many of the new states’ fledgling governments. This was particularly true in the South Caucasus where civil war and separatist conflicts waged in Georgia, and a war in separatist Nagorno-Karabakh involved both Azerbaijan and Armenia. As it became clear that Russia would dominate the CIS, Azerbaijan, preoccupied with Nagorno-Karabakh, withdrew from the new organization in October 1992, adopting observer status.\(^{36}\) Georgia and Azerbaijan demonstrated continued ambivalence towards the CIS when neither signed the formal CIS Charter at a January 1993 CIS meeting in Minsk, Belarus.\(^{37}\) (Table 2, column 3).

Yet in a surprising turn of events both Georgia and Azerbaijan in late 1993/early 1994 reversed their policies and decided to join the Commonwealth of Independent States and the CIS Collective Security Treaty. Azerbaijan joined the CIS in September 1993 and Georgia joined in October of that same year. (Table 2, column 4). The Collective Security Treaty, not signed in May 1992 by either Azerbaijan or Georgia, included both when it entered into force in May 1994. (Table 2, column 5). In each country the decisions to join these organizations were surrounded by controversy and were described by disgruntled observers as betrayals or political coups. In terms of alignment choice, the

\(^{35}\) Rossiyskaya Gazeta, May 23, 1992. An English language translation of the Treaty done by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) can be found in Brezezinski and Sullivan, pp. 541-542.


period September-October 1993 is clearly an inflection point in both Georgia and Azerbaijan. As such, one of the principal focal points of the country-specific analysis on Georgia (Chapter 5) and on Azerbaijan (Chapter 7) will be to describe and attempt to explain the events leading up to these pivotal decisions. It should suffice for the time being to note that in each country new presidents come to power between the initial decisions not to join the CIS and CST and the subsequent reversal. Bearing this in mind, a careful examination of the various leaders in each country and their approaches to alignment behavior would seem to be a necessary part of any country-specific review.

What may have appeared in May 1994 as general support for the concept of collective security in post-Soviet space soon enough revealed fundamental flaws. Conceptually, the CIS Collective Security Treaty was based on the principle of collective defense which in turn is based on a common perception of threats. Article 4 of the Treaty stated, “If one of the participating states is subjected to aggression by any state or group of states, this will be perceived as aggression against all participating states to this treaty.” Members of the treaty perceived aggression differently. Perhaps the most glaring example was Armenia and Azerbaijan each of which perceived the other as the aggressor in the war over Nagorno-Karabakh. Not long after joining the CST, both Georgia and Azerbaijan became disillusioned with the apparent failure of the treaty to address their central security concerns -- the threat to their territorial integrity from separatist conflicts. The rift apparent when the CIS was formed seemed to be widening, accompanying a decline in the integrative role of the CIS and the CST.

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38 Brzezinski and Sullivan, op.cit. p.541.
GUAM – The Anti-Commonwealth?

While political analysts argued whether the CIS was half-alive or half-dead, states in the region began exploring and indeed, developing new bilateral and multilateral patterns of cooperation.\(^{39}\) One of the most notable of these emerged in the context of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Conference in Vienna, Austria when, in 1996 Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova began to issue joint statements and propose common security initiatives. In October 1997, while attending a Council of Europe heads of state meeting in Strasbourg, France, the Presidents of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, released a joint communiqué stressing the importance they attached to cooperation among their four nations and effectively inaugurating the GUAM group.\(^{40}\) (Table 2, column 8). They further stated their intention to work together on issues of European and regional security, as well as to promote political and economic contacts.

Similar to the CIS, the GUAM group proved to be more a forum for coordination and discussion than a mechanism for implementing policies. Yet at the same time it served as a tangible expression of the four member countries’ interest in cooperating with European institutions outside the CIS framework. GUAM included the four CIS countries most resistant to closer CIS integration and most suspicious of Russian domination. Nearly every joint statement issued by GUAM included some mention of cooperation with, and later, integration into European structures of security and cooperation. Additionally, every GUAM communication emphasized cooperation among

\(^{39}\) One well known Russian analysis, “The CIS: The Beginning or the End of Its History?” Nezavisimaya Gazeta, March 26, 1997, stated it was common knowledge that the CIS was becoming a fictitious entity after a brief surge of centripetal tendencies in 1993-1994.

\(^{40}\) The October 10, 1997 joint communiqué and other pertinent documents can be found at: http://guuam.org (accessed March 1, 2009). Uzbekistan joined GUAM in 1999 adding a second “U” and rendering the name GUUAM. They later dropped out of the group. Given the focus here on the South Caucasus, Uzbekistan’s role will not be examined in any detail.
the members in establishing a Eurasian, Trans-Caucasus transportation corridor.\textsuperscript{41} Both of these positions suggest coordinated efforts to seek a measure of what some analysts have called “geopolitical pluralism” in the Eurasia region.

The GUAM group’s focus on developing a Eurasian transport corridor pertained first and foremost to transporting oil and gas from Azerbaijan to world markets. The near total reliance on a Soviet-era oil and gas transport infrastructure oriented through Russia made regional countries highly susceptible to Russian pressures. Seeking to mitigate these pressures, the GUAM states, with the strong encouragement of the United States, supported plans to develop oil and gas pipeline routes that avoided Russian territory. An intergovernmental agreement in support of a pipeline route from Azerbaijan through Georgia and Turkey to the Mediterranean Sea by way of Baku-Tbilisi-Cheyhan (BTC) was signed in Ankara in October 1998.\textsuperscript{42} Additional governmental agreements from 1999 to 2001 secured firm financial and political support for the project.

The divergence of political, economic and security interests among members of the CIS increasingly was evident. In public statements, the GUAM member states carefully explained their desire for closer cooperation with each other was by no means directed against other states and was not incompatible with their membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States. Nonetheless, it would prove incompatible with membership in the Collective Security Treaty.

In early 1999, Azerbaijan and Georgia joined Uzbekistan in announcing their intentions not to renew participation in the CIS Collective Security Treaty which required


renewal upon the expiration of its initial five-year period in May 1999.\textsuperscript{43} (Table 2,
column 6) In April 1999 Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan participated in a joint military
training exercise held in Georgia to ensure protection of pipelines and other lines of
communication. The exercise coincided with the inauguration of a new pipeline route
from Baku in Azerbaijan to Supsa on the Georgian Black Sea coast. Following the
exercise, one Russian newspaper called it a “highly unfriendly move aimed at creating a
new military alliance.”\textsuperscript{44} A U.S. analyst noted, “Such a joint exercise highlights the
continuing decay of the Russian-backed Commonwealth of Independent States as the
chief security organization of the post-Soviet region.”\textsuperscript{45}

Two Blocs Solidify

On April 24, 1999, meeting in Washington, D.C. on the margins of the NATO
50\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary Summit, the Presidents of the GUAM countries joined with President
Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan to announce Uzbekistan’s accession to the GUAM group,
known thereafter until Uzbekistan’s departure as GUUAM. (Table 2, column 9) This
expansion of GUAM came on the heels of a highly publicized but ultimately
unsuccessful lightning tour by Russian Presidential envoy Viktor Chernomyrdin to
Ukraine, Georgian and Azerbaijan where he attempted to head-off emerging security
cooperation among the GUAM countries and between the GUAM countries and NATO.\textsuperscript{46}
The choice of the NATO Washington summit as the venue for expansion from GUAM to

\textsuperscript{43} “CIS Defections Redefine Regional Balance, “Asia Times Global Intelligence Update, February 23,
\textsuperscript{44} Segodnya, 20 April 1999.
\textsuperscript{45} Paul Goble, “New Moves on the Caucasus Chessboard,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 16 April
1999.
\textsuperscript{46} Nezavisimaya Gazeta, April 22, 1999. p.5.
GUUAM unmistakably symbolized GUUAM’s strategic orientation toward the West.47

Analysts in Russia, Eurasia and the West increasingly saw within the CIS two divergent camps: one centered on GUUAM, the other on the Collective Security Treaty. By way of example, one Russian commentator noted:

The GUUAM regional association, which was initially created as an economic association, is increasingly acquiring the characteristics of a military-political alliance that is gradually being transformed into an alternative to the CIS with the blessing and with the support of the United States.48

A Ukrainian analyst described the two camps as “Russophiles” and “westernizers.”49

Indeed, leading up to the 1999 decision on renewed membership in the Collective Security Treaty, GUUAM countries increasingly expressed a strategic orientation towards the West. Azerbaijani and Georgian political figures publicly announced their desire eventually to join NATO. In March, 1999 foreign policy adviser to the Azerbaijani President, Vafa Guluzade, caused a minor sensation when he declared Azerbaijan was prepared to establish a NATO air base on Baku’s Apscheron Peninsula. In Georgia, President Eduard Shevardnadze repeatedly stated his intention to pursue NATO membership for Georgia. In one interview Shevardnadze stated that Georgia planned to apply for membership in NATO by the year 2005.50

The 1999 decisions by Azerbaijan and Georgia (and Uzbekistan) not to renew their participation in the Collective Security Treaty again signaled a major reversal in

policy. The period leading up to these decisions is another important inflection point for a study of strategic alignment in the Eurasia region. As such, it also will be a specific focus in subsequent analysis.

Since the solidification of two rival camps within the CIS in the late 1990s, the alignment patterns clearly identifiable at that time have not changed appreciably. One camp of “enthusiasts” favors CIS integration, while a second camp of “skeptics” looks increasingly towards the West for cooperation and integration. It appears that centrifugal tendencies in the CIS region have become stronger.

In June 2001, GUUAM formalized its activities when member states signed a formal charter at a summit meeting in Yalta. (Table 2, column 10). The formalization of the organization did not make it more effective, but it continued to represent a pro-Western orientation among member states. In May 2002, at a Kremlin ceremony marking the 10th anniversary of the Collective Security Treaty, member states unanimously decided to establish a new body – an international regional organization called the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Observers were quick to conclude that the CSTO’s formation was in large part a response to expanding NATO involvement in the Eurasia region. In October 2002, at a CIS summit in Chisinau, Moldova, the CSTO formally was established. (Table 2, column 11). That the summit’s host nation – Moldova - was not a party to the agreement was an irony that spoke volumes about the evolution of the CIS.

Many developments at both the international and regional levels reinforced the tendency within the CIS towards evolution of two competing models. Significantly, after

the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the active U.S. presence in the Eurasia region in support of military operations in Afghanistan gave hope to those states that desired closer security cooperation with the West. Close cooperation to counter terrorist threats was initiated between the U.S. and several regional states. Notably, in May 2002, the United States initiated a comprehensive military training program to enhance the Georgian military’s ability to deal with the largely ungoverned Pankisi Gorge region where militants from nearby Chechnya had taken refuge. Under the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP), the U.S. military trained and equipped the majority of Georgia’s military forces, greatly increasing their ability to protect the country’s sovereignty. To those states in the Eurasia region that sought further western integration, the U.S. military presence in Georgia was a psychological boost.

In 2003-2004, leadership changes in the South Caucasus contributed to the continued evolution of strategic alignments in the region. New Presidents came to power in both Azerbaijan and Georgia. In Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was elected to succeed his father Heydar Aliyev in October 2003 and continued to support western integration, particularly in the economic sphere. In Georgia, overwhelming popular dissatisfaction with widespread election irregularities prompted large-scale demonstrations that eventually led to the resignation of President Eduard Shevardnadze. The “Rose Revolution,” as it became known, resulted in new elections in which Mikhail Saakashvili, a pro-western reformer, became President.

In 2004-2005, incumbent Presidents in both Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan dramatically were ousted by popular uprisings over election irregularities. In the wake of the Rose Revolution in Georgia, the so-called “Orange” and “Tulip” revolutions in Ukraine and
Kyrgyzstan caused considerable consternation in Russia and other CIS states that saw behind these “colored” revolutions hidden U.S. and western hands intent on spreading their political influence throughout the Eurasia region. In large part in response to these events, a bitter fight has been waged within the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) over its future activities. The tendency of Russia and its partners in the Collective Security Treaty to vote together on this and other issues in the OSCE is a definite indication of the CST-GUAM split within the CIS and suggests the split has ramifications beyond the CIS.  

The Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (ODED) -- GUAM

At a summit meeting in Kiev in May 2006, GUAM was reconstituted with a new charter as the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development. Viewed from one perspective as an effort to revive a moribund regional organization, the reformation of GUAM can also be seen as an affirmation by a new generation of leaders of the alignment choice made by their predecessors. (Table 2, column 11). Presidents Aliyev of Azerbaijan, Saakashvili of Georgia and Yushchenko of Ukraine have all assumed office since GUAM was initially chartered in 2001. Moreover, the new ODED-GUAM leaders demonstrate more self-assurance in their efforts to pursue a western orientation. In both the preamble and Article I of the ODED-Charter they cite European integration as among


54 The charter and final summit communiqué are at: http://guam-organization.org/en/node (accessed March 1, 2009)
the main purposes of the organization. The point was taken by one Russian observer who concluded that the GUAM countries had, “definitively determined their foreign policy orientation, forming, in effect the anti-CIS.”

A considerable amount of additional information supports the conclusion that membership patterns in the CIS, the CST and GUAM are representative of the general alignment patterns in the Eurasia region that emerged in the late 1990s. Political, economic and security-related developments in the intervening years show that this pattern has deepened. In fact, nearly every indicator of alignment mentioned earlier in this chapter points to the same pattern. Charting the development of the CIS and the related sub-groups -- the CST and GUAM -- thus provides a useful framework for analyzing alignment patterns in Eurasia and will form the basis for the analysis of strategic alignment in the South Caucasus region that is the focus of this study.

Table 2 depicts milestones in the development of the CIS, the CST and GUAM and the associated participation of Eurasian regional states. The data specific to the South Caucasus countries is shown in Table 3. Readily apparent in this table is the close correlation in behavior between Georgia and Azerbaijan, and the distinct difference between that pattern and the behavior of Armenia. When Russian behavior is added (Table 4), a close correlation between Armenian and Russian choices is noted. Explaining the differing behaviors of the three South Caucasus countries is the focus of this study. After reviewing in the next chapter current theories of alliance or alignment formation and examining their utility in understanding developments in the South Caucasus region, I propose to combine a number of theoretical elements to construct hypotheses that may

assist our understanding. In the country-specific case studies that follow, a more detailed look at the alignment behaviors of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan will be undertaken with specific attention being paid to those inflection points when the countries seemed to reverse their alignment preferences. In addition, leadership changes in each country will be scrutinized closely to ascertain continuities and changes in alignment behavior.
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CHAPTER THREE
THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO ALIGNMENT FORMATION

Introduction

Amidst the anarchy which emerged in the Caucasus region after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, each of the three South Caucasus states, embroiled, as they were, in separatist conflicts, were challenged to mobilize domestic resources at any level approaching that required to defend against potential threats. As a result, each sought to form alliances or alignments to gain military and political support. This is unsurprising, as small and weak states, in particular, are prone to seek security assistance through alignment or alliance with other states. What is surprising, or, at least, puzzling, about the alignment behavior of the South Caucasus states is the apparent lack of a convincing explanation for the specific alignment and alliance choices made by the three countries in the post-Soviet period.

In this chapter, the leading theoretical approaches to alliance formation are described and subsequently assessed for their potential relevance to understanding the contemporary alignment behavior of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The basic tenets of the competing explanations are summarized. Throughout the summary, attention will be paid to identifying the level of analysis stated (or perhaps implied) by each approach. Most importantly, what each explanation has to say about choosing specific alliance partners is reviewed. Further, the alignment behavior predicted by each theoretical approach is determined and then compared to actual behavior. This comparison shows ultimately a divergence between expected and actual behavior and demonstrates that current alliance formation theories do not explain events in the South Caucasus region.
satisfactorily.

**Competing Theories of Alliance Formation**

*Balance-of-Power Theory*

Traditional balance-of-power theory maintains that states form alliances in response to perceived imbalances in the distribution of power; that is, in order to keep stronger states or coalitions of states from dominating them. States seek to balance the power of a stronger state by aggregating their strength and forces with those of other, similarly-threatened states. It follows that states would join the weaker side in any constellation of power in order to balance against the preponderant power. In *Theory of International Politics*, Kenneth Waltz makes this point: “Secondary states, if they are free to choose, flock to the weaker side, for it is the stronger side that threatens them.”

Alliance, then, in balance of power/realist terms, is a rational response to an external preponderance of power. The determinants of alignment are the structure of the international system and the material power of the states comprising the system. In the post-Cold War context, one could imagine that, according to the postulates of balance-of-power theory, the states of Eastern Europe and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, fearful of the preponderant power of NATO and the West, would have chosen to balance against that power; perhaps by allying with Russia. Given that three of the former Warsaw Pact member-states and three former Soviet republics have since joined NATO, this clearly has not been the case. In fact, among the former Soviet states, only Belarus seems to be motivated by such considerations.

The notion of alliance formation as solely an expedient response to greater power

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capabilities has been tempered by the realization that assessments of power include an appraisal of the intentions, as well as the capabilities of the state, coalition or alliance holding the power. The addition of this perceptual factor to the power equation leads to a more nuanced explanation of the simple example mentioned above. The reason the states of Eastern Europe and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union have not balanced against NATO is because they have not assessed negatively NATO’s intentions or motives. At the theoretical level, the addition of a perceptual element to assessments of power led from a balance of power explanation of alliance formation to the balance of threat explanation.

**Balance-of-Threat Theory**

Waltz's explanation for secondary states' proclivity to flock to the weaker side is based on his stated assumption that it is the stronger side that threatens them. In his book, *The Origins of Alliances*, Stephen Walt challenged this assumption, revising traditional balance-of-power theory by presenting a “balance-of-threat” theory to explain alliance formation. Walt’s basic premise is that, “Although power is an important part of the equation, it is not the only one. It is more accurate to say that states tend to ally with or against the foreign power that poses the greatest threat.”

According to this view, alliance formation behavior is more properly seen as a response to threats, rather than a calculation of aggregate power. After studying, in detail, alliance formation in the Middle East, Walt drew the following conclusions:

First, and most obviously, external threats are the most frequent cause of international alliances. Second, balancing is far more common than bandwagoning. Third, states do not balance solely against power; as predicted,

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they balance against threats.  

To bolster his theory against arguments that the Middle East, as the regional focus of his study, might have been a unique case, Walt widened his research focus to include Southwest Asia with specific case studies on Iran, Turkey, India and Pakistan.  

In large part, Walt reaffirmed his previous conclusion that states balance against threats.

If Walt’s conclusions were accepted at face value and applied to the contemporary South Caucasus states, what expectations would they generate for the alignment behavior of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia? Based on the measures Walt uses to determine threat: aggregate power, geographical proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions, it would seem that Russia, as the most powerful state in the region as well as the former hegemon, would be the primary external threat to the sovereignty of the new countries in the region.  

If this is true, we would expect the three South Caucasus countries to have balanced against Russia, or at least attempted to do so.

This expectation is confirmed by William Wohlforth, in a survey of the applicability of balance of power theory to post-Soviet Central Eurasia. Wohlforth addresses the theoretical relevance of both balance-of-power theory and balance-of-threat theory in the region. Based on Russia’s enormous regional superiority of power and the realistic possibility of a new Russian hegemony, Wohlforth states, “a simple reading of

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3 Ibid. p.148.
balance of power theories … should predict that these states would be balancing as hard as they can.”\(^7\) Given Russia’s record of behavior in the post-Soviet period, Wohlfforth further suggests that, “balance-of-threat theory only reinforces the predictions of balance of power theory.”\(^8\)

Contrary to the predictions of both balance-of-power and balance-of-threat theories, all three South Caucasus states have not chosen to balance Russia “as hard as they can.” Azerbaijan and Georgia, to varying degrees, have balanced against the threat from Russia, although at times they have attempted to bandwagon. Armenia has not balanced against Russia, but rather has bandwagoned with Russia. This general outcome conforms to neither balance of power nor balance of threat expectations. While the expectations derived from classical balance of power theory are unambiguous, Walt’s balance of threat theory contains areas of nuance which, upon closer examination, might explain the seeming contradiction between the expected and actual alliance behavior of the South Caucasus states.

In his analysis, Walt recognizes that, “Small states bordering a great power may be so vulnerable that they choose to bandwagon rather than balance, especially if a powerful neighbor has demonstrated its ability to compel obedience.”\(^9\) The imperial history of Russia; both Tsarist and Soviet, unequivocally demonstrates an ability to compel obedience in its borderlands, including the Caucasus region. But all three South Caucasian states are small and vulnerable. Why has only one chosen to align consistently with Russia, particularly the one of three which does not share a physical border with

\(^7\) Ibid. p.225.
\(^8\) Ibid.
This question raises a basic conundrum confronting structuralist explanations of alliance formation: Why do states similarly placed in the international (and regional) system, and confronting similar threats, make different, at times opposite, alignment choices? A solution to this puzzle might better be approached at a different level of analysis. Walt’s balance-of-threat theory operates primarily at the systemic level of analysis, as does the balance-of-power theory with which it is closely associated. To understand the alignment behavior of the South Caucasus states in this case, it may be productive to consider the problem using the state, and state-level variables, as the units of analysis.

Of the four elements Walt identifies as integral to threat assessment (aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions), the first three may be thought of as structural/material and could thus be measured in one way or another. In theory, measurements of Russia’s aggregate power and offensive power would be the same whether they were done in Armenia, Azerbaijan or Georgia. Geographic proximity could likewise be measured though the results would vary based on regional geographical exigencies. The one factor which could be expected to vary significantly among the three states is that of aggressive intentions.

It is feasible that the different alignment behaviors of the three South Caucasus states are attributable to their different perceptions of Russia’s aggressive intentions: i.e. the threat emanating from Russia. This explanation is lent some credence by analysts who suggest Armenia does not fear Russian aggression, but is more concerned with the perceived threat from Turkey. One assessment of alignment behavior among former
Soviet states suggests, for example, that Armenia’s alignment with Russia is better explained, not as bandwagoning with the Russian threat, but, rather, as balancing with Russia against the threat from Turkey. This observation demonstrates the importance of analyzing, at the state level, perceptions of aggressive intentions (threat perceptions) in order to explain the variation in the behavior of the states. Viewed only at the level of international system structure, Walt’s theory is indeterminate. He predicts that states will more often balance than bandwagon, yet such predictions specify a general pattern of behavior, not specific outcomes. The state-level, perceptual variable “aggressive intentions” differentiates Walt’s balance-of-threat theory from traditional balance-of-power conceptions and offers the possibility of explaining specific state behaviors. Predictions on the specific countries with which other states will align may be possible with the addition of the state-level variable of threat perception. This point will be of central importance in the approach to alignment choice proposed in Chapter Four. Before that, however, a broader survey of alliance formation theories will be completed in an effort to identify additional factors which may be essential to understanding alignment behavior in the South Caucasus states.

**Omnibalancing/Regime Survival**

A useful extension of Walt's balance-of-threat theory is found in the work of Steven David who studied alignment and realignment in the Third World, an area perhaps applicable to the new states in the South Caucasus region. In his work, David advances a

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concept he calls “omnibalancing.” The omnibalancing concept shares most of the core assumptions of realist/balance of power thinking. It accepts, for the most part, that states (and regimes) are motivated, in the first instance, by survival and therefore form alignments to balance against perceived threats. However, David contends that the threats are not necessarily external, but may also be internal. In the case of the Third World, the primary threats are internal threats to an individual leader or regime’s survival. David says that, "...the most powerful determinant of Third World alignment behavior is the rational calculation of Third World leaders as to which outside power is most likely to do what is necessary to keep them in power." As a result, he suggests that states must balance both external and internal threats. When considering international alignments, Third World leaders ask themselves, “Which outside power is most likely to protect me from the internal and external threats that I face?” In some of his later work on alliance formation, Walt, arguing the superior merits of balance-of-threat theory over balance-of-power theory, acknowledged David’s contribution:

Finally, by focusing on power alone, balance-of-power theory overlooks the fact that domestic threats may provide an important motive for alignment. Although external threats were probably more important, domestic concerns also encouraged Pakistan and Iran to seek U.S. support. As Steven David has suggested, regime stability and personal survival rank high on the agendas of many third world leaders. Balance-of-Threat theory can accommodate this possibility—that is, states seek allies to counter both internal and external threats, whichever is imminent—but balance-of-power theory cannot.

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13 Ibid. p.238.
Walt’s and David’s theories are compatible, both seeing threats as the primary determinants of alliance behavior, but they differ in unit and level of analysis. Walt’s unit of analysis is the state and his systemic approach focuses on the existence and strength of threats to the state from across the international system. The primary explanatory variable is found in the configuration of the international system. David focuses on individual leaders, motivated by the dictates of personal and regime survival, as his unit of analysis. The threats David sees as driving alliance behavior may derive from either the state or systemic level, but more often, at least in the Third World, seem to be found at the domestic level. In theoretical terms, Steven David’s focus on internal as well as external threats to regime survival is an important addition.

A fundamental assumption of the realist school of international relations is the existence of anarchy at the system level and order at the state level. David’s focus on internal threats was particularly appropriate to events in the Third World where the realist assumption of domestic order was generally not valid. As David said, only a handful of leaders fell to outside invasions, while hundreds were overthrown by their internal enemies. While David generalized about states in the Third World, he made no claims on the applicability of his theory in areas other than the Third World. It is feasible that David’s theory may be applicable to the states of the South Caucasus. If so, we would expect the most likely cases to have been soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when each of the states, with barely functioning political institutions, was beset by grave domestic instabilities.

As noted previously, Walt’s balance-of-threat theory suggests the most likely

15 Ibid. p. 242.
behavior by the South Caucasus states would have been to balance against the predominant threat (Russia, at the systemic level), though, alternatively, they could choose to bandwagon with Russia. According to David’s theory, each of the South Caucasus leaders would base his alignment choice on a dispassionate calculation of which outside power would be best able and most likely to help keep them in power. In the case of the Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian leadership elites, the outside power most capable of keeping them in power was, in the early 1990s, and remains today, Russia. Yet, here again, we note contradictions between those expectations generated by theory and actual events in the South Caucasus.

Perhaps the most poignant example of this was in early post-Soviet Georgia. Amid the general chaos that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, a military revolt ousted embattled Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia who fled Tbilisi in January 1992. During the revolt, the sizeable Soviet armed forces contingent in Georgia offered no support to the Gamsakhurdia government. Nor did the Gamsakhurdia government request support from Russia.

In March 1992, Georgia’s ruling Military Council invited Former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze to return to Georgia. Shevardnadze agreed and was soon leading the fledgling country. The domestic situation in Georgia deteriorated further throughout 1992 and in 1993. Forces loyal to Gamsakhurdia fought national forces, and separatist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia spun out of Tbilisi’s control. In a late 1993 about-face, Shevardnadze, under considerable duress, invited Russian armed forces to remain in Georgia and agreed to join the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent

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States and its associated Collective Security Treaty. It seemed as if Shevardnadze had learned a hard lesson from the fate of Gamsakhurdia, realizing his survival, and that of the Georgian nation, depended first and foremost on Russia. Shevardnadze’s late 1993 policy reversal seems a clear example of a leader aligning himself with the power most able to ensure survival of their regime and their own tenure. In that regard, events at that time in Georgia lend a measure of support to Steven David’s contention that leaders will align with the outside state most able and likely to keep them in power.

Subsequent events, however, demonstrated that Shevardnadze’s move towards Russia was a tactical concession, not a strategic choice. Throughout the mid-1990s, Shevardnadze increasingly maneuvered towards the U.S. and the West and away from Russia. As he moved his country out of Russia’s political orbit, Shevardnadze endured several assassination attempts. The power behind the attempts was not determined with any certainty, though Shevardnadze publicly stated he believed Russia was involved. Shevardnadze’s move away from Russia confounds alliance formation theories based on the proposition that leaders align with the state most likely to keep them in power. At almost the same time, similar events unfolded in Azerbaijan as President Heydar Aliyev charted a political course for Azerbaijan to become substantially less dependent on Russia. It thus seems, from this brief review, that the theory of “omnibalancing” does not adequately explain alignment behavior in the Caucasus.

Steven David’s theory of omnibalancing, while taking into account both external and internal threats, prioritizes internal threats. Similar in this regard is the work of Deborah Welch Larson, who focuses solely on internal determinants in her work on alliance behavior and generally comes to conclusions empirically consistent with
David’s. Larson argues, in part, that, “Elites bandwagon not to protect their state’s territorial integrity or to enhance its power, but to preserve their rule.”18 This proposition is similar to that of Steven David which was assessed above.

Larson further states that, “…states with weak domestic institutions are likely to align with a threatening power.”19 Predictions based on her propositions again would suggest all three South Caucasus states would align with Russia, as they all have weak domestic institutions and are threatened by Russia. Alternatively, in the case of Armenia, if the threatening state were presumed to be Turkey, Larson’s prediction could suggest Armenia would align with Turkey. None of these expectations has been borne out in fact.

Compared to events in the region, Welch’s theory also faces some difficulty explaining why Azerbaijan has aligned itself with Turkey. Can this be explained as a state with weak domestic institutions aligning itself with a threatening power? Perhaps more saliently, can Georgia’s strong orientation to the West be explained in these terms? The answer in both cases is no. Larson’s focus on one type of behavior, bandwagoning with a threatening country for elite preservation, and the predictions her theory generates, do not correspond to what has happened in the South Caucasus.

While neither David’s nor Larson’s theories satisfactorily explain alignment behavior in the South Caucasus, by expanding the range of potential threats to include internal as well as external, they make a useful contribution with specific

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19 Ibid. p.86.
relevance to the South Caucasus. Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia share many
characteristics with the Third World states David surveyed, as well as with the
states with weak domestic institutions analyzed by Larson. Their contributions may
well contribute to a synthesized understanding of alliance formation behavior.

Before proceeding, the continuing relevance of perceptions in the theoretical
work on alliance formation is underscored. Under the tenets of David’s theory,
perceptions of which other country is likely to be willing and able to help a leader
preserve power are decisive. Likewise, employment of Larson’s theory depends on
perceptions of which state is threatening. The importance of perceptual factors, in
addition to structural and material factors, is a recurring note in the literature
reviewed thus far on alliance formation. It is an important point which will be
explored in greater depth later in this chapter. Prior to that, however, a theory of
alliance behavior based on interests defined more broadly than in terms of power or
threat will be assessed.

**Balance-of-Interest Theory (Bandwagoning for Profit)**

The argument that states bandwagon, not because they are fearful in the face of
preponderant power or threats, but because they see opportunities for profit in
bandwagoning behavior has been advanced by Randall Schweller.\(^{20}\) Schweller’s basic
argument is that balancing and bandwagoning as described by Walt are not necessarily
opposite behaviors motivated by the same goal of achieving greater security. Instead, he
argues bandwagoning should be seen not as giving in to a menacing threat but as an
opportunity for gain. In this conception, states bandwagon for profit, not for security.

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Schweller says, “Alliance choices, however, are often motivated by opportunities for gain as well as danger, by appetite as well as fear.”\textsuperscript{21}

Focusing on the distinction between status quo and revisionist states, Schweller argues that contemporary realist or neorealist scholars suffer a status quo bias, assuming that the first priority of all states is security. He suggests, to the contrary, that revisionist states seek power and expansion more than security and thus are likely to bandwagon not out of fear but out of greed.\textsuperscript{22} Based on a refinement of states’ goals, Schweller advances what he calls a balance-of-interest theory, which postulates: “Satisfied powers will join the status-quo coalition, even when it is the stronger side; dissatisfied powers, motivated by profit more than security, will bandwagon with an ascending revisionist state.”\textsuperscript{23}

Introducing variation to the state’s alignment motivations emphasizes the state as the level of analysis in calculations of alliance choice. At the systemic level, structural and material factors pose threats and opportunities to states. But how states respond, according to Schweller’s conception, is a state-level calculation that depends on whether the state is satisfied with its relative position in the system.

To apply the balance of interests proposition to the states of the South Caucasus region, or to any states, for that matter, an assessment of whether the state or states in question are status quo or revisionist is the first order of business. While the terms (by Schweller’s own admission) are somewhat ill-defined and difficult to operationalize, the status of several territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus provides a useful point of departure.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. p.79.
\textsuperscript{22} In Ibid. p.85, note 59, Schweller identifies the historical roots in postwar realism of the distinction between status quo and revisionist states.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. p.88.
The stalemate in Nagorno-Karabakh, a separatist enclave in Azerbaijan (see Map 2), whose historic ownership is claimed by both Azerbaijan and Armenia, and where a brutal war waged from late 1988 until a cease-fire was brokered by Russia in 1994, has left a status quo more acceptable to Armenia than to Azerbaijan. More or less autonomous Karabakh Armenian control over Nagorno-Karabakh has been frozen in place by the cease-fire. This is unacceptable, from the Azerbaijani perspective, as is the fact that approximately 20% of Azerbaijani territory (outside of Nagorno-Karabakh) remains occupied by Armenian forces as a result of the war, and hundreds of thousands of Azeris are war refugees, living in squalid conditions throughout the country.

Measured against the yardstick of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Azerbaijan must undoubtedly be viewed as a revisionist state. By the same measure, Armenia would be viewed as a status quo state, content with the general outcome of the war and the resulting territorial disposition.

According to Schweller’s logic, status quo states join status quo coalitions. The two principal Eurasian coalitions currently are NATO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Of the two, NATO, notwithstanding its enlargement to the East, could be viewed as the status quo coalition. NATO harbors no aggressive, expansionist designs, nor does it seek redress for past territorial losses. Its expansion has been accomplished on a voluntary basis. The CSTO, on the other hand, is arguably a revisionist coalition. For all practical purposes, it is a vehicle driven by Russia towards reintegration, in one form or another, of the former Soviet space. Put simply, it is my assessment that Russia is a revisionist state, and the Russian-led CSTO is a revisionist coalition.
Leaving aside, for the sake of brevity, the question of whether Georgia should be categorized as a status quo or revisionist state, if the logic of Schweller’s balance-of-interest theory were to hold in the South Caucasus, the status quo state – Armenia – would be expected to align with the status quo coalition – NATO. Similarly, the revisionist, or dissatisfied, state – Azerbaijan – would be expected to align with the revisionist coalition – the CSTO. In neither case is this true. In fact, the opposite behaviors have been exhibited. Armenia has aligned itself with Russia while Azerbaijan has demonstrated a strong alignment preference for Turkey and the West. It seems as though Schweller’s theory is not particularly helpful in this case.

Notably, in a response to criticism of his theory, Schweller makes several explanatory remarks which are relevant to the discussion herein. First, he notes, “my bandwagoning argument and my cases focused on great powers, not weak ones; …”\(^{24}\) Given this stipulation, it could be argued that his theory, based on its scope conditions, is not applicable to the weak states of the South Caucasus. The applicability of the balance-of-interests theory to the South Caucasus is further undermined by another clarification. Schweller notes that, “My argument is straightforward: Unthreatened states… often bandwagon with the stronger revisionist state or coalition for opportunistic reasons.”\(^{25}\) The suggestion that the behavior described by the balance-of-interests theory is relevant only to “unthreatened” states may again rule out the states of the South Caucasus. Each is threatened, or perceives itself to be so. If a theory based on interests operates only in the absence of threats, the implied default condition is that, in the presence of threats, a


\(^{25}\) Ibid.
theory based on threats is likely to be more applicable. Turning, for the time being, away from our discussion of threats and interests, an alluringly simple and widely popular explanation for alliance preferences will be considered.

**The Clash of Civilizations**

In a thesis first presented in a 1993 article in *Foreign Affairs* and later expanded in a book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Samuel Huntington argued that the post-Cold War world would be organized along civilizational lines.²⁶ Among the many factors which define a civilization, Huntington singled out religion as the most pervasive and the one on which a state’s self-identification would be based. He suggested that, over time, the states of the world would form seven or eight civilizations based on the principal world religions.

A detailed analysis of Huntington’s interpretations is not intended in this paper. Nevertheless, the overwhelming reaction worldwide to his propositions illustrates their fundamental importance and suggests they should be addressed to some degree.²⁷ While his arguments have found limited resonance with western scholars and analysts, they appear frequently in foreign literature and may, in fact, play a role in the decision-making processes in other countries. Furthermore, Huntington directly addresses alignment patterns in post-Soviet space, including in the South Caucasus, making his views relevant to this study.

Describing the Armenia-Azerbaijan war over Nagorno-Karabakh as an Orthodox-

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²⁷ For an example related to the Caucasus, see, for example: “Russian National Security in the South,” *Svobodnaya Gruziya*, May 24, 1997, pp.2-3. The authors suggest the dividing line between the historic Russian and Ottoman Empires as a fault line along which contemporary alignments will form.
Muslim fault line war, the roots of which may be found in the historical rivalry between the Russian and Ottoman empires for control of the Black Sea and Caucasus regions, Huntington identifies the Turks and other Muslims as the primary supporters of Azerbaijan, and Russia as the principal supporter of Armenia, a fellow Orthodox country.\textsuperscript{28} Insofar as Armenia has aligned itself with Russia and Azerbaijan with Turkey, Huntington’s argument may be accepted as an accurate description of the general outcome of alignment behavior in the two South Caucasus countries. Nonetheless, some caution should be exercised before attributing the cause of these alignments to a common civilizational heritage.

Huntington’s statement that Turkey backed Azerbaijan and Russia backed Armenia is not wholly accurate. Russia (in 1988, still the Soviet Union) initially supported Azerbaijan in the war over Nagorno-Karabakh, later backed Armenia, and ultimately has maintained a stated policy of “equidistance,” attempting to mediate the crisis. Also, his contention that Azerbaijan has aligned with Turkey (or vice-versa) on religious lines, is not wholly correct. If religion were deterministic, we would expect Azerbaijan to align itself not with Turkey, an Islamic but predominantly Sunni state, but with Iran, a fellow Shi’a state.

The logical inconsistencies in Huntington’s predictions on the alignment choices of the South Caucasus states are compounded when Georgia, the third South Caucasus state, is added to the analysis. Based on Huntington’s conception of civilization, Georgia, as an Orthodox country, should be aligned with Russia, in the first instance, and with Armenia, another Orthodox country. To date, this has not been true. Georgia

\textsuperscript{28} Samuel P. Huntington, \textit{The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order}, p.278.
wholeheartedly has resisted alignment with Russia, and has proper, but somewhat
strained, relations with Armenia. On the other hand, Georgia has considerably closer
relations with Azerbaijan, Turkey and the West. This pattern of behavior certainly does
not fit Huntington’s model. Huntington alludes to a possible reason for such an
anomaly:

Historical relationships and balance of power considerations also lead
some countries to resist the influence of their core state. Both Georgia and
Russia are Orthodox countries, but the Georgians historically have resisted
Russian domination and close association with Russia.²⁹

Huntington’s suggestion that historical relationships and balance of power considerations
may explain behavior inconsistent with his model is an interesting one, yet it undercuts,
in part, the validity of his argument. Because he identifies no specific conditions under
which to expect states to behave according to historical or material, rather than
civilizational, variables, it is not possible to explain accurately alignment behavior
observed in the South Caucasus let alone predict what behavior might be expected in the
future. The problem faced, in essence, is not knowing when or whether historical,
material or civilizational factors will be deterministic in alignment behavior.

This brief survey of the *Clash of Civilizations* theory shows that the alignment
choices made by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are explained no more satisfactorily
by this model than any other of the theories reviewed thus far. It does however, represent
a certain departure from theories discussed previously.

Of the theories reviewed up to this point, all but Huntington’s focus primarily on
structural and material factors. While it has been shown that each, to a degree, relies on
perceptual factors as well, the heavy theoretical lifting is done either by traditional

notions of power and threat, or by slight modifications of these notions. In the case of the *Clash of Civilizations* thesis, however, the explanatory variable is one based on identity, not on the distribution of power. In a reversal of explanatory roles, perceptions, in this case, are the rule, not the exception. Power considerations (as noted above) are the exception. As such, the explanation offered for alliance behavior is radically different from previous explanations.

Approaching the problem from a somewhat less acute angle, Michael Barnett concludes that perceptual and structural variables are both important and necessary in explaining alliance formation. Barnett describes the strategic calculus of alliance choice as a two-step process. In the first step states identify threats. Secondly, states decide whether to ally in response, and with which other state. Barnett argues that in both of these steps states factor perceptions of other states into their calculations. On the issue of identifying threats, Barnett states, “It is the politics of identity rather than the logic of anarchy that often provides a better understanding of which states are viewed as a potential or immediate threat to the state’s security.” With this conclusion in mind, this review now turns to the work of Dan Reiter, whose use of learning theory provides a beliefs-based explanation of alliance formation behavior.

*Learning Theory*

A useful development in thinking about alliance choices is seen in Dan Reiter’s work on learning theory. In terms of foreign policy behavior, Reiter defines learning

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31 Ibid. p.401.
as, “…the application of information derived from past experiences to facilitate understanding of a particular policy question.”

Reiter argues that beliefs, not material or structural factors, play the decisive role in a state’s alignment decisions. Moreover, he proposes a learning theory of alliance formation that, in contrast to realist theories which propose that states ally in response to either preponderant power or threats, proposes states make alliance policy according to lessons learned from formative historical experiences. According to this theory, states learn by historical analogy which alliance choices will prove successful. Framing the primary alliance choice facing states as whether to ally or remain neutral, Reiter posits that, “They learn from past events whether neutrality or alliance best protects the national security, and then they act on these lessons.”

Further, Reiter suggests, “…small powers learn lessons about alliance and neutrality from their past experiences in world wars, and these lessons determine their alliance choices in the peacetime years that follow these wars.”

Studying, for the most part, the alliance decisions of small powers, Reiter hypothesizes that in a system-wide war, a small power may choose either to ally with a great power or to remain neutral. If the choice proves successful, positive reinforcement of the small power’s decision occurs and similar alliance behavior is continued in the years following the war. Contrariwise, if the alliance policy pursued by the small power proves unsuccessful, it will change policies after the war. Success is determined by whether or not the small power is invaded during the war (if neutrality was chosen) or

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33 Dan Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs*, pp.19-20.
34 The theory is outlined in, Dan Reiter, “The Weight of the Shadow of the Past,” pp. 490-499 and, in greater detail, in Dan Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs*, pp.15-41.
35 Dan Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs*, p.3.
36 Ibid.
whether it was on the winning side (if its choice was to ally).

Application of Reiter’s specific formulation of learning theory to the South Caucasus states proves problematic. The formative historical event postulated by the theory from which lessons are drawn is the last systemic or world war. The last systemic war –arguably, World War II – was not a formative event for the South Caucasus states in terms of drawing lessons on alignment preferences. During that war, neither Armenia, nor Azerbaijan, nor Georgia was an independent state. Neither faced the choice of allying with a great power or remaining neutral. Neither, in the post-war years, measured the success or failure of alliance decisions, nor did they draw lessons based thereupon. In short, as constituent elements of the Soviet Union, any lessons they learned were those of a larger collective and were not relevant significantly to their individual state behavior. The post-Cold War emergence of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia as independent states has no historical referent in the World War II era.

Alternatively, the Cold War might be considered the last major systemic war. There again, however, the South Caucasus states were component parts of the Soviet Union and made no individual decisions to ally or remain neutral. In historical terms, World War I was the last (and only) system-wide war during which Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, as independent states, made unique decisions on whether to ally with a great power or remain neutral. Yet, even in that case, each country began the war as part of the Tsarist Russian Empire and acquired a measure of political autonomy only by default when the empire collapsed after the Bolshevik Revolution. Discounting, for the time being, the fact that World War I was not the last systemic war, we might nonetheless apply Reiter’s formula to the South Caucasus against the backdrop of that time period.
Without delving too far at this point into the details of Caucasus history in the years between the fall of the Tsarist Empire and the Bolshevik takeover of each of the three countries, some general observations can be made on that time period (approximately 1918-1921) which bear on the applicability of Reiter’s learning theory to the region. First, amid the chaos of the disintegrating Russian empire on one hand and an advancing Ottoman empire on the other, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia banded together and declared their independence as the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic on April 22, 1918.\(^{37}\) In terms of Reiter’s theory, the declaration of independence had the practical effect of a neutrality declaration as it represented a desire to align neither with Bolshevik Russia nor with Ottoman Turkey, the two great powers in the region.

In late May 1918 Turkey began an attack in the Transcaucasus. The Transcaucasian Federation collapsed and Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia each separately declared their independence. On June 4 each signed a separate treaty with Turkey. For Armenia and Georgia the treaties were viewed as capitulation. For Azerbaijan, on the other hand, the treaty was viewed as an alliance. Subsequently, with the ebb and flow of the battle lines in the Transcaucasian sector of the Eastern front, the fortunes of each country similarly waxed and waned. Ultimately, by March 18, 1921, when Georgia fell to the Bolsheviks, each of the three South Caucasus states again became components of a larger Russian empire, in this case an empire soon to be constituted as the Soviet Union.

What, in the context of Reiter’s learning theory, does the proceeding discussion of Caucasus history suggest by way of potential lessons learned with reference to alignment behavior? According to Reiter’s first criterion for success, if a small power attempts neutrality in a systemic war and is invaded, the policy is deemed a failure. In that regard, the attempted neutrality policy of each of the three South Caucasus countries, based on their initial decision to form a federation and remain aloof from the great powers, was a failure. Consequently, the learning theory model suggests they would each choose to ally with a great power in the aftermath of the war (or in the modern era, if the lessons from that systemic war were to bear on contemporary behavior).

After the failure of the Transcaucasian Federation, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia each attempted policies of alignment with various of the great powers: Azerbaijan with Turkey, Georgia with Germany, and Armenia with the Allies. Each ultimately lost its sovereignty when it was taken over by Bolshevik Russia. The alliance policies pursued by the three South Caucasus states thus also proved to be failures. According to Reiter’s model, the logical lesson drawn from failed alliances is to remain neutral in the next instance.

This brief historical sketch indicates that Reiter’s specific formulation of learning theory, if it may be applied to events which occurred so long ago, reveals mixed and conflicting lessons for the South Caucasus states. Nevertheless, the more general proposition that lessons of history play a significant role in the alliance formation decisions made by states is worth further consideration. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union’s dissolution, one keen observer, reflecting on the role of history stated, “Modern history presents few, if any, instances of so much historical experience being recovered
from oblivion as in the post-Soviet states today.” If this is true, and if the lessons of history play a role in foreign policy decision-making, specifically in alliance formation, as Reiter proposes, post-Soviet space could be considered a most likely case where such behavior could be expected.

To conclude the discussion of Reiter’s work, we might say, as has been said with reference to other of the theories reviewed thus far, that it does not fully explain alignment behavior in the South Caucasus. Yet, as with many of the others, it does appear to have some merit. It may be that Reiter’s formulation of learning theory which, in effect, addressed the empirical question: “What are the causes of states’ preferences for alliance or neutrality?” is too narrow. This point will be examined in more detail in Chapter Four. Here, to conclude the general review of alignment formation theories, a brief summary is offered.

Summary

The preceding examination suggests that none of the leading theories of alliance formation satisfactorily explains alignment behavior in the South Caucasus since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The realization that none of the leading alliance formation theories adequately describes outcomes in the South Caucasus suggests new theoretical approaches are needed. Moreover, the theories reviewed generally address preferred behaviors, such as bandwagoning with threats or balancing, rather than specific countries with which to bandwagon or balance. Those theories reviewed which posit that states’ alignment choices are determined in relation to threats stop short of identifying with any

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39 The question is formulated in Dan Reiter, “The Weight of the Shadow of the Past,” p.495.
specificity how threats are identified. At the state level, questions on specific alliance partners largely remain unaddressed.

Nevertheless, each of the theories seems to contain useful elements which describe observed behavior in part. It may thus logically be concluded that some combination of elements drawn from the theories reviewed above may offer a more powerful explanation for alignment patterns in the post-Cold War South Caucasus. To address questions on specific alliance partners, it may be necessary to operate on two levels: first, by accepting certain general conclusions at the systemic level, but secondly by peering into the “black boxes” of foreign-policy decision-making at the unit or state level. In doing so, the gap between systemic theories of international relations and state-centric theories of foreign policy may be bridged, at least in part.
CHAPTER FOUR
DECISION MAKING, HISTORY AND ALIGNMENT

Some argue that the end of the Cold War means the end of history as we have known it. Unfortunately, every day's newspaper contains dramatic and tragic evidence that the end of the Cold War means the return to history as we used to know it.¹

After the end of the Cold War, a large number of conflicts which broke out around the world were described as being the result of "age-old" ethnic hatreds or religious animosities. Such descriptions typically suggest, as does the “tragic evidence” Huntington mentions above, that historical memories, suppressed by the essential bipolarity of the Cold War international system, were revived when the Cold War ended. If, in fact, history as it used to be known has returned in the post-Cold War world, it makes sense to ask what role this history has played and, more broadly, what role history plays, in general, in relations among states and in the making of foreign policy within states. A rich body of scholarship on the role of history, particularly as it affects foreign policy decision-making, exists and has expanded since the Cold War's end. In much of this work, history and the use of historical analogies often are identified as sources of information in the foreign policy decision-making process.² Before assessing in depth

the use (or misuse) of history in foreign policy decision making, a brief review of the traditional conception of foreign policy decision making will be helpful.

The Rational Actor Model

The traditional or classical model of decision-making theory is the “rational actor model.” According to the model, decision-making is viewed as an optimizing behavior conditioned by two assumptions. First, the decision-maker (or group, depending on the unit of analysis) is assumed to have a specific goal or goals which, in the event that more than one goal exists, are prioritized in order of preference or importance. Second, information on the situational factors which affect the decision and the decision-maker’s pursuit of specific goals, is readily available. According to the model, the decision-maker carefully evaluates a series of alternative choices in terms of their costs, benefits and probabilities of success. Having considered exhaustively each possible alternative, the decision-maker finally selects the optimal choice based on a calculation of costs, benefits and probabilities.3

An alternative conception to the ideal of rationality, one that became widely accepted in decision-making theories, was offered by the eminent economist and organizational theorist Herbert Simon who proposed that constraints on time and resources, information required, and information-processing ability lead to "bounded

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Simon rejected the optimizing behavior postulated by the rational actor model suggesting instead what he called "satisficing" behavior. In this manner of behavior, rather than deliberatively weighing all possible alternatives in an effort to determine the single optimal solution to a problem, policymakers, instead, within the constraints placed on them, examine alternatives in sequence until they arrive at one that is minimally acceptable. In more recent scholarship, the rational actor model has formed the basis of a "strategic choice" approach to international interactions, policy making and decision theory.  

Notwithstanding its usefulness as an ideal type of behavior, the rational actor model and "strategic choice” theories have been the subject of considerable criticism. In particular, the assumption of rationality in human behavior as a central tenet of social psychology and decision-making theories was challenged by the "cognitive revolution." Cognitive psychologists demonstrated that rationality as a theoretical assumption was at great variance with the actual practice of decision making. In a revised model, decision makers were recast, no longer as rational, fully-informed problem solvers intent on maximizing their interests, but rather as suboptimal performers who, faced with a dizzying amount of information and competing claims on their time, resorted to cognitive shortcuts and mental economics to arrive at acceptable, rather than optimal, decisions.

Cognitive models

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5 See, for example, David A. Lake and Robert Powell, Strategic Choice and International Relations (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

In the fields of international relations and foreign policy, the use of history in decision making is typically studied within the context of the cognitive approach. In general terms, the cognitive approach holds that a decision-maker's beliefs and values contribute fundamentally to his/her understanding of an uncertain and complex environment. To deal with the complexity of problem-solving brought on by an overabundance of information, the decision-maker uses shortcuts or "mental economics" to process information in an attempt to understand the decision-making environment and, ultimately, to take decisions. Identifying and understanding these "mental economics" is at the core of the cognitive approach to decision-making.

Cognitive and social psychologists developed a number of competing theoretical approaches to describe and explain how individuals reason through and arrive at solutions to problems. Of particular importance among them, for the study of learning in foreign policy decision-making and for the purposes of reviewing the role of history in the process, are: schemata or operational codes, ideological beliefs, and specific historical analogies. This study, while recognizing their potential importance, will not address specifically the role played in the decision-making process by ideological beliefs or operational codes. Rather, the utility of mental images, particularly historical analogies, in explaining foreign policy decision-making behavior will be reviewed with a specific focus on the role of history and historical lessons in the choice of alignment and alliance.

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9 See Andrew Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, p.79.
partners. Before that review, a general survey of the importance of schema theory and historical learning in foreign policy decision making will put the theoretical questions posed in this research study in fuller context.

Schema Theory

A considerable amount of research in the field of cognitive psychology has been conducted in an effort to understand how individuals process information and, further, how they arrive at decisions when confronted by an overabundance of information. According to schema theory, individuals, when faced with the excess of information brought on by a new situation, attempt to match current data to previous experiences which have been conveniently organized and stored in memory. In this light, individuals are seen as “cognitive misers” and viewed, by proponents of schema theory, as “classifiers” and “labelers” who store generic concepts in memory.10 Rather than follow the dictates of rational decision-making behavior when attempting to resolve problems posed by new situations, individuals search their memory to identify patterns which seem to closely match the problem at hand.

Schema has been defined as, “[A]n explicit, declaratively-represented packet of knowledge representing either a pattern encountered (or expected) in the world or a pattern of action for the reasoner to take.”11 A simplified definition of schema is “a mental picture of something familiar which is invoked to make sense of something that is unfamiliar.”12 Integrating many of the findings of cognitive psychologists into her work

on a psychological explanation for the origins of U.S. containment policy vis-à-vis the
Soviet Union, Deborah Welch Larson defined schema as, “a generic concept stored in
memory, referring to objects, situations, events, or people.”

Schemas come in a variety of types. They may be derived from personal
experience or derived from the experiences of others, or through various other learning
processes. In his path-breaking work on the role of analogical reasoning in foreign policy
decision making, Yuen Foong Khong refers to schemas as “knowledge structures”
(adopting another term used by cognitive psychologists) and categorizes these knowledge
structures as: schemas, scripts and analogies. Distilling the work of several cognitive
psychologists, Larson identifies three types of schemata that are important in the context
of foreign policy decision-making: scripts (a stereotyped sequence of events
characterizing a particular type of situation); metaphors (the notion of war as a disease,
for example); and personae (the personality characteristics and typical behavior pattern of
“stock characters”).

As an example of a cognitive script or well-known sequence of events, Larson
refers to the “Munich” case whereby a policymaker recalls that appeasement of Hitler led
to the Second World War. On the basis of similar experiences, individuals often
generalize from single, episodic scripts to form a categorical script. In reference to the
given case, a categorical script might be that appeasement of aggression leads ultimately
to continued aggression. Concepts such as Finlandization or Balkanization are also

16 Ibid. p.54.
illustrative examples of cognitive scripts.\textsuperscript{17}

A dramatic example of a personae schema was seen during the Persian Gulf Crisis in 1990-1991. After Iraq invaded neighboring Kuwait in August of 1990, President Bush compared Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein to Adolph Hitler, a well-known and much disdained personae.\textsuperscript{18} In addition to the President’s use of the personae schema, the comparison of Saddam to Hitler and, by extension, of the Persian Gulf crisis to the onset of World War II was widespread in the media.\textsuperscript{19} In the ensuing public debate prior to the U.S. counterattack on Iraq the analogy was used persuasively. Previous U.S. support to Saddam Hussein in the war between Iraq and Iran mattered little in the face of such an overwhelming comparison.

Using the Hitler persona and reasoning analogically, President Bush (and the media) evoked the Munich script – that appeasement of aggression only leads to further aggression (also called, by many, the Munich analogy) – to build support for an immediate response to Iraqi aggression. Despite the fact that events surrounding the Gulf Crisis were dissimilar in most respects to those leading up to World War II, President Bush successfully used the analogy to mobilize domestic and international support against Saddam.\textsuperscript{20}

This brief example began as a case in point on the use of personae schemata. In

\textsuperscript{17} Yaacov Vertzberger, in: \textit{The World in Their Minds}, mentions Balkanization, p.310.
\textsuperscript{19} One source: Everette E. Dennis, et.al., \textit{The Media at War: The Press and the Persian Gulf Conflict}, (New York: Gannett Foundation Media Center, 1991) identified 1170 examples, in print and on television, linking Saddam to Hitler. p.42.
the discussion of how the schema was used, the essential role of analogical reasoning was noted. Indeed, analogical reasoning and the use of analogies to frame and solve problems are central to schema theory. Their relationship is an important one which warrants further discussion. Describing the fundamental difference between an analogy and a schema, Khong says, “...an analogy is specific and concrete, while a schema is abstract and generic.”21

Analogies and Metaphors

Metaphors, in addition to scripts and personae, were identified by Larson as another type of schema (see note 14). Metaphors play a significant role in human cognition and, in a more specialized context, in foreign policy decision-making. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a term or concept that describes one thing is used by implicit comparison to describe another. The use of metaphor is commonplace in everyday life. Common expressions such as: time is money and life is a road (or a bowlful of cherries) are examples of metaphors. In the study of foreign policy and international relations, metaphors also are encountered frequently.

Perhaps the most widely used metaphor in describing foreign relations is that of the falling domino in what has become known as the domino theory. According to one account, President Eisenhower, speaking about the dangers of communist expansion in Southeast Asia, coined the falling domino metaphor. Said Eisenhower, “…you have broader considerations that might follow what you would call the ‘falling domino’ principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what

will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. Other
metaphors in the field of foreign affairs readily come to mind. Certain alliance behavior
by states is described as “climbing on the bandwagon” or “bandwagoning” with larger
states. International relations are referred to at times as a “game” nations play. A
common metaphor describing the conduct of foreign policy during the Cold War
portrayed the United States as playing poker while the Soviet Union played chess. Other
common metaphors refer to a ‘war on drugs’ or a ‘war of ideas’ and describe war as a
disease.

While potentially useful to a certain degree in helping individuals understand
novel situations, metaphors fit Khong’s description of schema as “abstract and generic.”
As a result, their analytical value in social science, (both in cognitive psychology and
political science) would appear to be limited. In contrast, analogies, while similar in
many respects to metaphors, offer considerably more analytical and explanatory power.

An analogy is a logical inference based on the assumption that if two things are
alike in some respects, then they must be alike in other respects. The concept of analogy
was used in Ancient Greece as a mathematical and logical term referring to an equality of
ratios in the form: \(a:b = c:d\). Later it was argued that an analogy need not be strictly an
equality of ratios but might, rather, be based on a similarity of ratios. This conception
has withstood the test of time. Indeed, the shift to viewing analogies as denoting
similarity rather than equality has fostered, over time, the widespread use of analogies

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23 Both the aforementioned images are captured in the title of the volume cited in note 22: Dominoes and Bandwagons.
and analogical reasoning in fields of study well beyond mathematics and logic. In his work on the role of historical analogy in alignment decision making, Dan Reiter says, “…an analogy is a comparison of some past experience with a current decision problem, so that some important aspect of the past experience can be used as an insight into the current problem.”

This conception of analogy will be used for the purposes of this study.

To aid in the concrete analysis of analogies, scholars have defined the sides of an analogical equation (or analogues) as the source domain (a:b) and the target domain (c:d).

Typically, the formula for an analogy where A is to B as C is to D is rendered as:

\[
A:B \;::\; C:D
\]

Source Domain Target Domain

Returning for a moment to the use of the Munich analogy in the Persian Gulf Crisis, the elements of the source domain may be portrayed as: appeasement or the failure to stand up (in Munich) to aggression (the invasion of a smaller, defenseless neighbor – Czechoslovakia) by a despotic leader (Hitler) (A), and further aggression (B). The first element of the target domain analogue: appeasement or failure to stand up to aggression (the invasion of a smaller, defenseless neighbor – Kuwait) by a despotic leader (Saddam Hussein) (C), was assessed, by the Bush administration and the press, as similar or analogous to (A). Reasoning analogically, decision-makers and commentators inferred that just as failure to stand up to aggression by Hitler lead to further aggression and

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25 Dan Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs*, p.22.

26 See Keith Holyoak and au Thagard, op.cit., p. 2. Other scholars refer to the source domain as the base domain. Still others (Alex Hybel, for example, in *How Leaders Reason*, p. 25) refer to the lower order analogue as the domain and the higher order analogue as the range.
World War II, failure to stand up to aggression by Saddam Hussein would also lead to further aggression (D) and ultimately to war.

Generally speaking, analogies are a subcategory of schemata. In addition to providing a preliminary look at the mechanics of using analogies, the example above suggests another type of association between analogies and schemata. In the case of the Munich analogy, its frequent invocation has led to the development of a more generalized schema related to the policy of appeasement. According to this widely accepted construct, appeasement of aggression is ill-advised, dangerous and leads only to greater aggression at a time and place where it may be less easily resisted. While it may be generally understood that the Munich analogy was the source of this schema, a thorough-going analysis of the mapping of elements from the source to the target domain is typically not undertaken when the Munich analogy is evoked. The schema represents, in this case, a type of shorthand ‘lesson of history’ which, while often evoked, may or may not directly be appropriate to the specific situation under consideration.

Analogies and metaphors (both subcategories of schemata) are closely related, in that they both seek to explain a concept or event in terms of some other concept or event. One subtle difference, however, is analogies “involve parallels/comparisons which are drawn from the same general realm of experience.”

Another way of looking at this difference, in terms of the notational representation for analogy offered earlier, is that the analogies may be considered ‘within-domain comparisons’ as the source domain and target domain are from the same realms of experience. Metaphors, on the other hand, are viewed as ‘across-domain comparisons’; as the domains are different realms of

27 Keith Shimko, op. cit. p.659.
experience. Referring back to the two primary examples offered thus far, the domino theory is properly viewed as a metaphor; dominoes and nation-states being from quite different realms. The Munich example is an analogy from the realm of international relations: one nation-state, or leader, corresponding to another. Another example serves to reinforce this point. To describe South America as being like Africa (according, say, to certain economic indicators) would be an analogy. Describing South America as “a dagger pointed at the heart of Antarctica,” (as Henry Kissinger reportedly did) is a metaphor.

While both analogies and metaphors are often encountered in decision-making processes, analogies are decidedly more useful. Metaphors are primarily descriptive. Analogies, on the other hand, are often used prescriptively. They typically provide more specific information, and through the analogical reasoning process decision makers often make specific inferences of use in problem solving. Metaphors, according to Vertzberger, “make manifest the intelligible structure of political reality and provide economical knowledge about the world,” while analogies are “used in the more abstract and deliberate phase of thought and communication.”

Echoing this point, Shimko concludes that analogies offer policy makers direct comparisons with other, similar policy problems (within-domain comparisons) and therefore have great potential as guides to definite policies and courses of action. Being more abstract, metaphors are less helpful to policy makers than are analogies, particularly in the process where

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alternative policy options are weighed and decisions made.

**Historical Analogies**

The historical analogy, characterized by a separation of time between the source domain and the target domain, is a powerful tool for understanding the present in terms of the past. In 1990, the Munich analogy, for example, was separated by more than 50 years from the Persian Gulf crisis yet played an instrumental role in both decision-making and public opinion, as was noted above.

Writing in 1985, Larson stated that “the role played by metaphors in foreign policy making is still unexplored.” However, since that time a considerable body of literature has explored the role of historical analogies and the role of learning from history in foreign policy decision-making. Particularly impressive among these studies has been Yuen Foong Khong’s cogent analysis of the role played by historical analogies in the crucial decisions taken in 1965 by the Johnson Administration with regards to the Vietnam War. Khong carefully traces a number of different analogies and their use in the policy process. He finds evidence that the Munich analogy, a Korea analogy, and an analogy based on the French colonial experience in Vietnam, (culminating with their final defeat at Dien Bien Phu,) all played an important role in the U.S. decision-making process.

Another noteworthy contribution in the literature on the use of analogies in foreign policy decision-making is the book, *How Leaders Reason*, by Alex Hybel. In this book, Hybel considers the role played by analogies in decisions taken by various U.S. administrations to intervene in the domestic affairs of seven Caribbean and Latin

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American states. He demonstrates that U.S. intervention policy in the Caribbean was the product of three factors: attitude towards communism, attitude toward intervention, and lessons learned through historical analogies on the results of past policies.\(^\text{32}\)

Examples of the use of historical analogies to understand current events are widespread. The forced landing of a U.S. Navy EP-3 spy plane by China in April 2001 provided a good example of how historical analogies are used to understand new situations. While the plane and its crew were being detained in China, political and media commentary drew on images of similar events which had occurred previously in an attempt to shed light on this new situation. In trying to discern how the crisis might be resolved, events such as the May 1960 U-2 shoot down and subsequent internment of the pilot – Gary Powers; the USS Pueblo incident with North Korea; the seizure of the merchant ship Mayaguez during the Vietnam War; and the shoot down of a U.S. EC-121 by North Korea in 1969 were recalled almost immediately and used as schemata in a number of opinion pieces in the print media.\(^\text{33}\) Tellingly, the 1975 seizure of the Mayaguez (one schema in the EP-3 case) was, in its own time, compared by President Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to the 1968 seizure of the Pueblo (another schema in the EP-3 case).\(^\text{34}\) That the resolution of the EP-3 case paralleled closely none of the historical events used as schemata does not diminish the basic fact that to understand an unfamiliar event, more familiar, historical events were evoked.

The Munich analogy (or categorical script) has been prevalent in the minds of

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policymakers and political commentators for decades. With reference to the Munich analogy, one analyst concluded, “The analogy informed every major threatened or actual US use of force during the first two decades of the Cold War as well as the decisions to attack Iraq in 1991 and 2003.”

A generation of policy makers and opinion leaders has emerged for whom the Vietnam War period more often provides the source domain for analogical reasoning. There is no consensus, however, on lessons drawn from the Vietnam War. Many understand the lessons of Vietnam to caution against military intervention and draw analogies in opposition to military action. Others, citing the lessons of Vietnam, insist that to win wars in the future, the United States must put no political constraints on conduct of the war. This example illustrates the fact that different actors often draw different lessons from the same historical event or experience. This point will be kept in mind when the case studies are conducted.

Historical Learning/The Use of History in Decision-making

Addressing the question of how decision makers learn from history, Jervis suggests that, “Learning from history is revealed dramatically when decision makers use a past event as an analogy for a contemporary one.” To better comprehend the relationship between analogy and historical learning it is worthwhile to note Khong’s

36 A thorough analysis of the variety of lessons drawn regarding Vietnam, as well as a useful look at war and analogical reasoning is found in: Jeffrey Record, Making War, Thinking History. op.cit. Record updates some of his arguments to address the current war in Iraq in: “The Use and Abuse of History: Munich, Vietnam and Iraq.” Writing in 1992, Yuen Foong Khong in Analogies at War, pp. 257-262, called Vietnam the “reigning analogy” of its time then went on to identify the contradictory lessons drawn from Vietnam. A large volume of journal articles has addressed analogies between the current war in Iraq and the war in Vietnam. See, for example: Melvin Laird, “Iraq: Learning the Lessons of Vietnam,” Foreign Affairs Vol. 84, Iss, 6 (November/December 2005), pp.22-43, or Stephen Biddle, “Seeing Baghdad, Thinking Saigon.” Foreign Affairs, Vol. 85, Iss. 2 (March/April 2006), pp.2-14.
understanding of this link. He says,

Learning from history is said to occur when policymakers look to the past to help them deal with the present; the principal device used in this process is the historical analogy. The term historical analogy signifies an inference that if two or more events separated in time agree in one respect, then they may also agree in another.38

In this view, historical analogies are a central mechanism by which learning from history occurs. This is an important point which will be developed further below.

Before exploring further the use of history in decision making, a few words on what is understood by the term “use of history” will provide some clarity. Vertzberger, in a study of information processing, cognition and perception in foreign policy decision making, noted, “the term ‘use’ with respect to history denotes a reliance on or the employment of knowledge about past occurrences in performing or contributing to any task related to information processing and decision making in their most comprehensive sense.”39 This definition closely conforms to Reiter’s conception of learning as “the application of information derived from past experiences to acquire understanding of a particular policy question.”40

The specific focus of Khong’s inquiry in Analogies at War was how and why policy makers use historical analogies in foreign policy decision making, particularly in decisions to go to war. Khong made a compelling argument that in the foreign policy decision making process, historical analogies played a large diagnostic and inferential role in selection and rejection of policy options and in the choice between alternative options.41 Based on Khong’s conclusions, it may be productive to ask if historical

38 Yuen Foong Khong, Analogies at War, pp.6-7.
40 Dan Reiter, Crucible of Beliefs, pp.19-20.
41 Yuen Foong Khong, Analogies at War, p.253.
learning and the use of analogical reasoning applies more broadly to other types of foreign policy decisions. The focus of this study is a particular type of foreign policy decision – the choice of specific alliance and alignment partners. If Khong’s approach were applicable to alignment decisions, it might help resolve the indeterminacy demonstrated in the review of theoretical approaches to alliance formation undertaken in Chapter Three, where it was noted that, for the most part, the alignment theories under review specified general patterns of behavior, but were not specific about alignments between particular countries.

Towards a synthesis

At several points in the preceding review of alignment formation theories and learning theories, a synthesis which combines material/structural and perceptual factors to produce theoretical constructs capable of more fully explaining alignment behavior is suggested. In an analysis of alignment patterns in multipolar systems, Christensen and Snyder concluded that to produce a theoretically determinate and historically accurate account of alliance formation a “minimal number of variables from security dilemma theory and from perceptual theories,” must be added to neorealist accounts.42 Adding perceptual variables, they continue, cross-fertilizes materialist theories based on power calculations helping to provide, “…the determinate predictions that Waltz’s theory needs in order to become a theory of foreign policy.”43 In their hybrid formulation, Christensen and Snyder add perceptions of the offensive/defensive balance to the neorealist conception of the balance of power. Consideration of what application their proposal

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43 Ibid. p.145.
might have to recent events in the Caucasus is mooted for the most part by the fact that their model focuses on the alliance behavior of great powers. It is not designed for analysis of the alliance behavior of small powers. Nevertheless, the point which bears emphasis here and which is particularly relevant to efforts to understand contemporary alignment behavior in the South Caucasus is that a combination of structural and perceptual factors is required to accurately describe and eventually predict alignment patterns. The survey of alliance formation theories conducted heretofore tends to buttress this argument.

A similar point, and one which leads directly to my own conception of how alignment decisions have been made in the South Caucasus countries, is made by Michael Barnett. Reviewing Walt’s theory, Barnett recognized that because anarchy and the distribution of power alone are not sufficient to identify which states will be seen as threats, Walt introduces a perceptual factor, ‘aggressive intentions.’ into his balance-of-threat model. To explain the source of perceptions of aggressive intention, and alliance formation behavior in the Middle East, Walt draws heavily on the concept of Pan-Arabism. This is proof, Barnett says, that the real explanatory power of Walt’s theory lies in ideational, not material factors. It seems logical that learning theory, with its focus on cognitive variables and the decision making process, could contribute productively to a better understanding of alignment choices. From among the theoretical approaches reviewed in Chapter Three, Dan Reiter’s learning theory focused on cognitive (beliefs) rather than material or structural variables. At this point, to revisit briefly

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Reiter’s arguments and findings will set the stage for the basis of my own proposal. The central proposition of Reiter’s work is that, “…decision makers look to past experiences for guidance when they make foreign policy.”\textsuperscript{46} He identifies the last system-wide war as a formative event from which states learn most and posits that based on their experience in that war, small states would choose either to ally with a great power or to remain neutral. While Reiter achieves some important results, his choice of the last system-wide war as the formative event from which historical learning occurs hinders a wider application of his model. Given the dramatic increase in the number of countries in the world since World War II, many small states have no experience with system-wide wars. The three South Caucasus states fall into this category as none of them existed as independent entities during World War II. In the South Caucasus case, a different understanding of what historical event or events might be considered formative would have to be reached to make his work applicable.

Moreover, while Reiter advances his theoretical approach as an alternative to Walt’s balance-of-threat theory, there is no reason the two theoretical approaches need be viewed as incompatible; instead they might be seen as complementary. Rather than dismiss balance-of-threat theory in favor of learning theory, I suggest that combining elements of each offers a conception that may explain with more accuracy the developing alignment patterns in the Caucasus region, and may have wider applicability.

A Synthesis

It was pointed out earlier that the major shortcoming to Walt’s balance-of-threat theory was a lack of specificity on how “aggressive intentions” are determined. The

\textsuperscript{46} Dan Reiter, \textit{Crucible of Beliefs}, p.2.
review of learning theory conducted in this chapter suggests the possibility that
“aggressive intentions” or “perceived” intentions, as Walt sometimes refers to them, may
be determined through a process of historical learning. I propose that when trying to
judge the intentions of other states, foreign policy decision makers often use lessons of
history. Beginning with an historical event where the intentions of a specific foreign
country are now known, decision makers reason analogically to draw conclusions about
the current intentions of that country.\textsuperscript{47} Intentions that are determined to be aggressive or
expansionist contribute, along with material and structural factors, to the perception of
that specific country as a threat. In other words, threat perceptions are based, at least in
part, on historical learning. Perceptions of intentions are also based on current realities
and assessments of relative power. In the case studies that follow, efforts will be taken to
determine if, when and why one factor or another predominates in the decision-making
process.

The process of alignment or alliance may be thought of as consisting of two
stages. In the first step, decision makers identify threats. I will test in the case studies
that follow the proposition that historical learning plays an important role in this process.
In a second step, having identified the major threats it faces, a state must decide whether,
and with whom to align in response. It is possible that lessons from history also inform
this decision. Historical alignment behavior that was successful likely would be repeated
and, conversely, behavior that failed would be rejected. The general proposition of this
study is that decision makers are influenced significantly by historical experience when

\textsuperscript{47} Yaacov Vertzberger in: \textit{The World In their Minds}, p.300 suggests that decision makers use historical
analogies to determine the motives and intentions of other actors. The contribution made herein is not so
much new theoretical thinking but, rather, synthesizing elements from IR theory and decision making
to suggest a different approach to understanding threat perception and alignment behavior.
assessing threats and when making specific alignment choices from among potential allies. The research, therefore, is designed to determine the importance of historical lessons and the use of historical analogies in the decision processes by which states make alignment choices. To test the role history plays in a nation’s alignment choices, I will conduct case studies of the three South Caucasus countries of Georgia, Armenian and Azerbaijan since they became independent in the early 1990s. Comparisons will be made across the three cases as well as within each case.

In a detailed examination of alignment preferences and choices made by the South Caucasus states during the contemporary period: 1991-present, I will attempt to determine what, if any, role lessons drawn from history have played. With regards to the question of which lessons matter, an initial review of literature suggests that two distinct historical time periods: 1917-1921, and 1988-1991, may have been particularly important. Two principal reasons prompt selection of the 1917-1921 time period. The first, noted previously, is that, in structural terms, the collapse of the Tsarist Empire, subsequent turmoil, and eventual independence of the three South Caucasus states very closely mirror events surrounding the collapse of the Soviet Empire. When comparing the historical case to the contemporary case (1991-present), the structural similarities will provide some measure of control over variables. Secondly, the post-Tsarist period of independence was an event of major significance in the history of each of the three states. As such, the period fits Jervis’s categorization of a major event, “… by which a state gains its independence or undergoes a revolution,” and which deeply affects the perceptual predispositions of large numbers of people.\(^{48}\) Additionally, Jervis suggests

that lessons learned from major events may be long-lasting, noting that, “Although the impact will be attenuated for the post-revolutionary generations, it will still be detectable.”

The second time period (1988-1991) also fits Jervis’s category for a major event. As the Soviet empire disintegrated, each of the South Caucasus states regained their independence. We might expect that more recent events, particularly those of major significance to the person’s nation, will have a greater impact on individual and collective perceptions. Accordingly, Jervis suggests that events experienced firsthand will have the most profound effects. For this reason, the second time period, though less compatible structurally with the contemporary period, is nonetheless significant to the analysis. Both cases share a post-colonial context, the first following the collapse of the Tsarist empire, the second, the Soviet empire. The colonial histories of the three countries may thus have some bearing on their later behavior.

If historical learning has indeed played a role in the alignment decisions made by the three countries in the post-1991 context, we would expect they reviewed the relative successes and failures of the alignment and alliance choices made during the two historical time periods to arrive at usable lessons. General evidence of lessons learned from the past may be manifest in, “…historical facts, mass media reports, national mythologies, artistic impressions in writing, painting, or artifacts – all reinforced by the person’s own imagination and selective memory.” Specific indicators of alignment will be found in the diplomatic history of the South Caucasus countries since the fall of the USSR. Official documents, treaties and other agreements, where available, will serve as

49 Ibid.
definitive sources of alignment preference. Additionally, given the relatively underdeveloped governmental institutions in the countries of the region, significant decisions are made typically by the President and an elite leadership group. With this in mind, indications that history is being used in decision making will be sought in the public statements of leaders and senior officials.

Interviews with senior government and military officials in the countries of the South Caucasus region on foreign policy decision making and their countries’ alignment decision calculus supplement the diplomatic record and the elite testimony from open-source publications. While a list of officials interviewed from each country is attached as an appendix to the study, by mutual agreement, all interviews were confidential, due to the sensitive and current nature of the diplomatic issues under discussion. Citations to specific interviews will be made in a form appropriate to the context, typically describing the individual’s Ministry affiliation, i.e.: Senior Foreign Ministry Official.

In an assessment of the use of history and historical lessons in the foreign policy decision-making process, Vertzberger’s definition that “…the term ‘use’ with reference to history denotes a reliance on or the employment of, knowledge about past occurrences in performing or contributing to any task related to information processing and decisionmaking in their most comprehensive sense.”51 A detailed look at the decision making processes on alignment choice in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia will determine what factors drive the three states’ modern day alignment choices, and whether history plays a significant role in this. Studying the behavior of the various presidential administrations in each country will provide within-case variation. Additionally, cross-

51 Ibid.
case comparisons will be used to detect similarities and dissimilarities between the cases.

The design of my argument might be illustrated profitably by a sort of shorthand. The three relevant historical periods can be denoted as:

A. 1917-1921  
C. 1991-present

Two general propositions can be stated as:

Proposition 1. Lessons learned from time period A were decisive to the alignment choices made in time period C.

Proposition 2. Lessons learned from time period B were decisive to the alignment choices made in time period C.

In simple notation, we might say:

\[ H_1 = A \rightarrow C \]
\[ H_2 = B \rightarrow C \]

If historical learning has played a role in the contemporary behavior of the three South Caucasus states, as is posited, we would expect to see support for one or both of the propositions advanced above. The variety of cases to be analyzed provides for considerable variation on both the independent variable – lessons learned, and the dependent variable – alignment preference. Additionally, the length of the time period C (1991-present) provides for within-case variance on the dependent variable. Conclusions reached from within each case and by testing each proposition in three different, but similarly-structured cases, will be the basis for recommendations in both the field of theory and in the matter of practical policy prescriptions.
CHAPTER FIVE

GEORGIA

The independent republic of Georgia is a nation possessed by its own history. Like the other republics floating free after the demise of the Soviet empire, Georgia is reinventing its past, recovering what had been forgotten or distorted during the long years of Russian rule ....

The Return of History

As small states surrounded by stronger neighboring powers, the rulers of those kingdoms and principalities now comprising the Republic of Georgia to survive were forced to play a delicate three-cornered balancing game between the Persian, Ottoman and Russian empires, at least until the late 1700s. In what one analyst called the “search for a proper patron,” King Erekle II of eastern Georgia petitioned Russia, a fellow Orthodox Christian state, for protection. In July 1783, a Russo-Georgian treaty was signed at the North Caucasus fortress of Georgievsk by envoys of Erekle II and Russia’s Empress Catherine II. According to the terms of the “Georgievskiy Traktat” Georgia entered into an alliance with Russia, renouncing its sovereignty in international affairs in return for protection and military assistance.

Russian protection proved to be a two-edged sword. In 1795, Russia did not support Georgia in the face of a devastating Persian invasion which had been precipitated, in part, by Georgia’s alliance with Russia. The Georgian capital Tbilisi

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(Tbilisi) was burned to the ground and thousands of inhabitants were killed or enslaved. Subsequently, in 1801 Russia annexed eastern Georgia, unilaterally abolishing the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti and incorporating the territory into the Russian Empire as a province. Western Georgian principalities which are part of modern Georgian also were incorporated into the Russian Empire throughout the 1800s. The history of this period has been controversial and will be addressed in somewhat more detail later in this chapter. Here it is enough simply to note that Georgia’s fundamental strategic choice was, until the late 1700s, seen as one between the Christian North and Islamic South.\(^4\) Since 1783, and especially since the Russian annexation of Kartli and Kakheti in 1801, Russia has become the standard reference point for any discussion of Georgia’s political orientation. Georgia’s place in the world for the last 200 or so years has been defined first and foremost with reference to its relationship with Russia.

The centrality of Russia in Georgia’s foreign policy calculus has led to a strategic alignment choice that may be seen as binary. The choice, in modern times, is made in an “…imagined space constituted by two dimensions,” where “…the question of ‘political orientation’ can be reduced to a single choice: Russia or the West.”\(^5\) Indeed, one historian, in an in-depth review of Georgia’s foreign policy orientation throughout its history described the tension between pro-Russian and pro-Western orientations as a fundamental issue in Georgian policymaking for the last 300 years.\(^6\) A general survey of Georgia’s alignment choices since gaining its independence in 1991 was undertaken in

\(^4\) Ghia Nodia makes this point in “The Georgian Perception of the West,” op.cit. p.17.
Chapter Two. In this chapter, the proposition that Georgian decision makers have used lessons derived from history to determine which other nations are viewed as threats, and as a basis for alignment decisions will be tested. In his seminal work, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Robert Jervis, in a discussion on decision-making and learning, suggests that contact over time between states on important issues can establish firm images that may be difficult to dislodge.\(^7\) As the Soviet Union unraveled in the late 1980s, national images and historical memories that had long been suppressed resurfaced. A renewed historical narrative developed around images of Georgia as an independent state. Among these images, Georgia’s image of Russia was to be an important factor in subsequent decisions on political orientation and alignment.

*Recovery of the Past*

In September 1989, amidst dizzying changes in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Shevardnadze flew together to an historic meeting in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. During the flight, in a discussion on relations between Moscow and the Soviet Union’s constituent republics, Baker emphasized that it had been U.S. policy for 40 years not to recognize the incorporation of the Baltic republics into the USSR. Wasn’t there a difference, Baker asked, “…between the Baltic Republics, which were once independent countries, and the others, which were never independent?”\(^8\) Shevardnadze responded, as Baker noted, “…more as a former leader of Georgia and less as Soviet Foreign

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Minister.”⁹ Shevardnadze informed Baker, “You might note, that the Transcaucasus republics were independent for three years after the October Revolution…. So there might not be as much a difference here as you think and, indeed, if the Baltics were to leave, people in the Transcaucasus might say, why shouldn’t we leave also?”¹⁰ Shevardnadze’s words proved prophetic when, two years later all the Soviet Republics declared their independence. His reference to the brief history of independence of the Transcaucasus republics and its effect on the aspirations of the people would prove insightful as well.

As Baker and Shevardnadze met in Jackson Hole, among the sweeping changes taking place across the Soviet Union, one change in particular – the way the Soviet republics viewed their own history – was to have far-reaching consequences. During the Soviet era, official historiography hailed the Russian conquest of the Transcaucasus (and other regions) as progressive, liberating and enlightening. With the policy of glasnost, a critical reappraisal of Soviet history which focused in large measure on filling in the so-called “blank spots,” had begun in earnest in the Union republics. The multiplicity of new perspectives led to a “decolonization” of history.¹¹ This “decolonization” was particularly trenchant in Georgia, where a degree of nationalism based on language and religion had survived throughout the Soviet era, as had a starkly un-Soviet understanding of history which was passed from generation to generation at home and through informal

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⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ Ibid.
¹¹ Bernard Lewis, in his book, *History: Remembered; Recovered, Invented.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975) pp.91-95, makes the point that the “decolonization” of history began first with the fall of the Tsarist Russian Empire when the languages, literatures, and monuments of formerly subject peoples became the focus of scholarly enquiry. As with much that will be examined in the forthcoming pages, conditions that obtained at the end of the Tsarist period, in this case regarding the “decolonization” of history, closely resembled those seen at the end of the Soviet period.
channels within society.\textsuperscript{12} As the Communist Party’s grip on political activity loosened in the late 1980s, a number of informal political groups formed within Georgian society. The most prominent groups, the Ilia Chavchavadze Society, the Shota Rustaveli Society and the Society of St. Ilia the Righteous, took their names from historic Georgian figures and based their agendas on preservation of Georgian language, religion and history. Some groups went so far as to support openly reestablishment of Georgia’s sovereignty and independence.\textsuperscript{13} At the same time, numerous articles addressing the “blank spots” in Georgian history began to appear more and more frequently in Georgian language publications.\textsuperscript{14} One of the “blank spots” which received considerable attention was the period 1918-1921 and the history of the Democratic Republic of Georgia.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{Democratic Republic of Georgia – A Synopsis}

Before further examining the late 1980s developments pertaining to the recovery of Georgian history, a brief background of the 1918-1921 period will be beneficial. In April 1918, shortly after Soviet Russia left World War I by signing a separate peace with the Germans at Brest-Litovsk, the three Caucasus nations of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan declared independence as the Democratic Federative Republic of Transcaucasia.\textsuperscript{16} For the first time in nearly 100 years, the fate of Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijani in the Caucasus would be decided not solely by Moscow, but by the

\textsuperscript{12} Large scale street demonstrations in 1956 following Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin’s excesses, and in 1978 protesting changes in the status of Georgian as the Republic’s official language are the most poignant examples of these nationalist sentiments.


chaotic ebb and flow of Turkish, German and British fortunes in the World War I battles that waged throughout the Caucasus. The Federative Republic lasted barely a month. Differing reactions to the advance of Ottoman forces (the Armenians and Georgians were fearful while the Azeris welcomed the Turks) split the federation apart. On May 26, 1918, confident of German support against Ottoman advances into the Caucasus, Georgia proclaimed its independence as the Democratic Republic of Georgia.\(^\text{17}\) Left with few options, Armenia and Azerbaijan quickly followed suit.

Georgia’s independence was short-lived. With Germany’s defeat in the war, Georgia petitioned the victorious Entente Powers for consideration and protection. Georgian diplomats at the Paris Peace Conference anxiously appealed for recognition and support. Although Georgia eventually was recognized \textit{de facto} by the allied powers in Paris, no major power was prepared to assume a mandate in the Caucasus region. Neither were the major powers prepared to send sufficient military forces to the Caucasus to protect the fledgling states from Bolshevik aggression. In turn, the independent states of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia would fall to the Bolshevik Red Army and become parts of the Soviet Union.\(^\text{18}\)

\textit{Restoration of the Georgian Democratic Republic}

According to Soviet historiography, Georgia’s brief period of independence from 1918-1921 was little more than a seizure of state power by counter-revolutionary Mensheviks, the result of which was governmental and economic paralysis and ultimately state failure. With the establishment of Soviet power in Georgia, official sources noted,

\(^{17}\) Ibid. p.121.

\(^{18}\) Azerbaijan fell on April 28, 1920, Armenia on November 29, 1920 and Georgia on March 8, 1921.
the history of the Georgian people entered a qualitatively new stage. In the glasnost era of the late 1980s, Georgian historians and intellectuals played a central role in publically questioning the Soviet version of events and prompting a major reappraisal of this period in Georgian history. Georgia’s sovereignty and independence as the Democratic Republic of Georgia increasingly were seen as positive accomplishments. One prominent Georgian historian described the Democratic Republic of Georgia as the, “the culmination of the Georgian people’s century-long struggle against Tsarist colonial oppression.”

Another historian, with an obvious reference to Georgia’s annexation by Russia in 1801, stated that, “today in conditions of Glasnost and democratization it is again possible to commemorate May 26, 1918, as the day of the restoration of Georgian national sovereignty.”

As the narrative history of Georgia as an independent state was publicized more widely, the circumstances attending the demise of the Democratic Republic of Georgia became as much a focus as its founding, perhaps more so. Soviet historiography explained the February 1921 Bolshevik seizure of power in Georgia as a fraternal response to a plea for assistance by Georgia’s struggling workers. Georgian historians dismissed this version of events and drew conclusions more in line with those of the government-in-exile of the Democratic Republic of Georgia which, in an April 1921 pamphlet published in Paris, described the situation bluntly as an invasion of Georgia by the Soviet Russian army that destroyed the freely chosen constitution of a democratic

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19 See, for example, Soviet Georgia: Its Geography, History and Economics. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960).
republic, replacing it with Soviet Russian institutions. That Russia, in doing so, ignored the terms of the May 7, 1920 Peace Treaty between Georgia and the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic) added insult to injury. The enduring lesson drawn by Georgia’s national patriots was that Russia was an “. . . unreliable and scheming partner set on undermining the Georgian nation and state.”

When, on April 9, 1989, a brutal Soviet crackdown on demonstrators in Tbilisi resulted in 20 deaths and scores of injuries, the national movement in Georgia was galvanized, and radicalized. Georgians, many of whom until that point had been guarded towards the pro-independence movement, embraced it. The Georgian nationalist movement was transformed into a popular mass movement almost overnight, causing a surge in pro-independence sentiment. At the same time, as attitudes towards Russia hardened significantly, Russian domination was viewed increasingly as the primary obstacle to Georgian independence.

In the wake of the tragedy, nationalist demands became bolder. In June 1989, the Georgian Writers’ Union, insisting that “mistakes of the past” be rectified, demanded that the Georgian Supreme Soviet acknowledge that Russia had “… violated the May 7, 1920 Treaty with Georgia when it invaded and illegally annexed Georgia on February 25, 1921.” On March 9, 1990 the Georgian Supreme Soviet, citing political events from

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25 In interviews, several people referred to this as a significant turning point in their attitude towards Russia.
1918-1921, declared Georgia an annexed and occupied country and pushed to begin talks on the restoration of an Independent Georgian State.  

Re-examination of Georgievsk

While it was during the late 1980s glasnost period of Soviet history that Georgian aspirations towards independent nationhood became widespread, it was possible to discern manifestations of Georgian nationalism well before glasnost. One such manifestation, in the run-up to a planned 1983 celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Russian-Georgian Treaty of Georgievsk, would reverberate in the historical narrative that would define Georgia’s move towards independence in the late 1980s.

Through unofficial and illegal samizdat (self-published) sources that reached the West, it became known that in 1983, a nationalist dissident group publically rejected the official Soviet interpretation of the Treaty of Georgievsk.  The official Soviet interpretation was that Georgievsk represented a happy “union” of Russia and Georgia and reflected the desires of Russians and Georgians both. Georgian nationalists disputed this version, staging a public demonstration and calling the treaty a tragedy that subsequently led to Georgia’s annexation by Tsarist Russia.

The Historical Narrative

The historian Ronald Grigor Suny suggests that, “The history of Georgia might be read as a series of resistances from foreign domination and alien cultural inputs that

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threatened to compromise its national integrity.”30 The Georgian historical narrative that was accepted as the Soviet Union disintegrated was predicated heavily on the image of Russia as the principal threat to Georgian independence and the need to resist Russian domination.31 The vision of Georgievsk as a Russian betrayal of Georgian independence went hand in glove with the view that the Russian perfidy doomed the Democratic Republic of Georgia in 1921. In each case, Georgian independence was lost to an aggressive and untrustworthy Russia. A senior Georgian Foreign Ministry official put it succinctly, “Twice we had our independence and twice Russia took it away. For us, the bottom line was, you can’t trust Russia.”32

As Georgia moved towards independence in the late 1980s, historical memories about lost statehood and subsequent Russian domination exerted a powerful influence on national political discourse and action. These memories were reinforced painfully by the harsh April 9, 1989 Soviet repression of demonstrators in Tbilisi. Based on the historical narrative, and current realities, Russia was seen as the threat to Georgian independence. Opposition to Russia, and any hint of Russian domination or oppression, became a central element in Georgia’s developing national identity. Learning theory suggests that past experiences underlie contemporary behavior. If so, we could expect, on the strength of the historical narrative outlined above, the historical memories and historically derived

31 Although this idea became central in the large-scale mobilization of Georgians in the late 1980s, it had existed to a degree in Georgia throughout the Soviet period. Moreover, Georgian nationalists abroad strongly advocated this view of history. For example, in testimony before the U.S. Congress in 1954, Mr. Leon Dumbadze, describing the Bolshevik takeover of Georgia in 1921, said, “Thus for the second time in the period from 1801 to 1921, Russia destroyed Georgian independence by deceit, by treaty violation, and by force.” See, “Communist Takeover and Occupation of Georgia,” *Special Report No. 6 of the Select Commission on Communist Aggression*, House of Representatives, Eighty-Third Congress. December 31, 1954. p.18.
images of Russia to be instrumental in the decision making of Georgia’s post-Soviet leadership. Specifically, we might expect the role of history to be significant in identifying threats and making alignment choices.

Alignment Decision Making

Foreign policy decision makers have been described as ‘practical-intuitive historians.’33 One of the basic functions they conduct when trying to understand current events is to compare these events with past events in search of possible analogies. When such analogies are drawn, an important consideration is whether the past analogy is considered to have been a success or a failure. Given similar circumstances and reasoning by analogy, strategies that led to success should be repeated. On the other hand, strategies or decisions that led to failure should be avoided.

Based on the historical narrative and associated image of Russia which was prevalent in Georgia in the late 1980s, we could reasonably expect to see alignment decisions that reflected an historically based understanding of Russia as a threat to Georgian independence and an aversion to alignment with Russia. An examination of the alignment decisions made by successive Georgian presidential administrations and the basis for these decisions will help determine the role of history in the process.

The Gamsakhurdia Period

The pro-independence national movement that steered Georgia’s course in the late 1980s consisted loosely of two groups, described as “radicals” and “moderates.” The radicals, according to one Georgian analyst, “… based their tactics on the presumption that the annexation of the independent Georgian Republic by in 1921 had occurred in

33 Yaacov Vertzberger, “Foreign Policy Decisionmakers as Practical-Intuitive Historians,” op. cit.
violation of international law, and hence the existing state [Soviet] institutions represented ‘occupation forces.’\textsuperscript{34} One of the most popular of the radical group was Zviad Gamsakhurdia, son of the prominent Georgian novelist Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, and long-time Georgian dissident nationalist.\textsuperscript{35}

Active since the early 1970s in nationalist and human rights issues, Zviad Gamsakhurdia had been arrested in 1976 along with fellow dissident Merab Kostava by the government of then First Secretary of the Georgian Communist party Eduard Shevardnadze. Gamsakhurdia was sentenced to three years hard labor plus two years exile for anti-Soviet activity. According to his biography, Gamsakhurdia was “one of the organizers and active participants of almost all protest actions, strikes, hunger strikes, meetings and demonstrations in Georgia during 1987-1990.”\textsuperscript{36} He became the charismatic leader of a coalition of pro-independence opposition groups called “Round Table – Independent Georgia” that won a convincing victory in Georgia’s first multiparty parliamentary elections held on October 28, 1990. Later, in November, Gamsakhurdia was elected Chairman of the Georgian Supreme Soviet, subsequently renamed the Supreme Council.

Gamsakhurdia’s fervent nationalism and passionate anti-Soviet and anti-Russian views became the basis for Georgian policy. First and foremost, this meant Georgian independence and an end to Russian dominance. Gamsakhurdia viewed Georgia as a European country that “… should immediately sever all links with Russia and its Soviet

\textsuperscript{35} A 1993 biography of Gamsakhurdia published by his press bureau while he was in “exile” in Grozny, Chechnya can be found at: http://www.geocities.com/shavlego/zgbio_1.html (accessed March 16, 2009).
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
past.” Under his leadership, in March 1991, Georgia refused to participate in the all-
Union referendum on preserving a federation of Soviet republics. Echoing the tenets of
the historical narrative Gamsakhurdia said:

> It is not our referendum. We are not part of the Soviet Union. We never
joined it. Therefore, we do not recognize its Constitution and its laws.
We will hold our own referendum on 31 March and will ask the question
of whether Georgia should again become an independent state on the basis
of the declaration of independence of 26 May 1918. In 1921 our
independence was suspended by the Soviet occupation – something which
is still going on.\(^{38}\)

On March 31, 1990 Georgians voted overwhelmingly to restore Georgian independence.

*Restoration of Independence*

The idea of “restoring” rather than “declaring” Georgia’s independence was based
on the historical revivalism promoted by Gamsakhurdia and the national movement and
their contention that the incorporation of Georgia into the Soviet Union was an illegal act.
Independence represented the righting of historical wrongs perpetrated on Georgia by
Russia. After considerable discussion within the national movement about whether to
base independence demands on Georgia’s history of statehood prior to the annexation by
Russia in 1801, or on the history of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, it was decided
that the history of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, particularly the takeover by the
Bolsheviks, was the best historical and legal antecedent for the modern Georgian
Republic.\(^{39}\) Capturing the mood at the time, one analyst stated, “There was a sense that
we were not starting a new project; we were continuing what had been started, but was

37 Thomas de Waal, “Georgia and its Distant Neighbors,” in Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold,
39 The discussion was recounted by a senior official in a July 4, 2007 interview with the author.
interrupted by the Bolsheviks.”

On the second anniversary of the brutal Soviet crackdown on demonstrators in Tbilisi, April 9, 1991, the Georgian Supreme Council adopted “The Act on Restoration of the Independent Statehood of Georgia,” becoming the first Soviet Republic to secede formally from the Soviet Union. The Act on Restoration immediately asserted Georgia’s historical claims to statehood and implicated the Russian Empire and, in turn, Soviet Russia, in the loss of Georgia’s independence:

As a result of the annexation and abolishment of Georgian statehood by the Russian Empire in the 19th century, the Georgian nation lost its centuries-old statehood. The Georgian people have never reconciled itself with the loss of independence. Georgia’s abolished statehood had been restored through the Declaration of Independence on May 26, 1918. The Democratic Republic of Georgia, with the Constitution and State representative bodies elected on the principles of multi-party election was founded.

In February-March 1921, the Soviet Russia grossly violated the May 7, 1920 Peace Agreement and through the military aggression occupied Georgia, the very State it previously recognized, that resulted in its de facto annexation.”

Thus, the historical narrative developed by the national movement became the legal basis for Georgia’s modern statehood. On May 26, 1991-- the anniversary of Georgia’s 1918 Declaration of Independence -- Zviad Gamsakhurdia became the democratically elected President of an independent Georgia with more than 85% of the vote. Under Gamsakhurdia’s leadership, the initial stage of Georgia’s independent statehood could be characterized as an effort to shape the future in accordance with a vision of the past. The state symbols of the Democratic Republic of Georgia – the flag,

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42 This point is made by Stephen Jones, in “Populism in Georgia: The Gamsaxurdia Phenomenon.” In Donald V. Schwartz and Panossian, Razmik, editors., *Nationalism and History: The Politics of Nation Building in Post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Centre for Russian and East European Studies, 1994), p.133.
anthem and coat of arms -- were adopted by the new government. At the time, in fact, the Democratic Republic of Georgia served as a historical analogue symbolically and substantively. Reflecting on the role of history in Gamsakhurdia’s program, one observer noted, “It began with the restoration of national symbols, festivals, and Georgian street names, but rapidly became a passion which inspired almost every area of political life.”

In matters of foreign policy orientation and strategic alignment, the lessons drawn from past history outlined previously in this chapter directly informed the Gamsakhurdia government’s approach. It viewed Russia as the principal threat to Georgian independence and vehemently opposed any vestige of Russian imperial control, specifically plans calling for a new union or a commonwealth with Russia. Georgia’s refusal to participate in the referendum for a new Union treaty in March 1991 was one manifestation of this thinking. Its decision not to join the Commonwealth of Independent States in December 1991 (Table 2, page 51) can also be seen in the same light.

In the course of Gamsakhurdia’s short tenure as Georgia’s leader, his fervent nationalism, summarized by supporters with the slogan, “Georgia for Georgians,” alarmed Georgia’s ethnic minorities and contributed significantly to serious internal strife. Throughout 1989-1990, regional problems worsened in the Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast as the Supreme Soviets of these regions proclaimed themselves independent and requested recognition within the USSR. Gamsakhurdia’s zealous and inflexible policies severely exacerbated these problems. In fact, his authoritarian (some called it dictatorial) leadership style and growing intolerance for any opposition (he branded opponents as Russian-inspired

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43 Ibid.
“provocateurs” and “traitors to the nation”) led to an increasing personal and national isolation.\textsuperscript{44} In December 1991, besieged by a militant opposition and in fear of his life, Gamsakhurdia took refuge in the Georgian parliament building. In early January 1992 after armed attacks on Gamsakhurdia’s position, his strongest opponents declared him deposed and formed a Military Council to run the country. Gamsakhurdia fled Georgia shortly after. By the time Gamsakhurdia departed he had alienated friend and foe; the man who had almost universal support when he was elected President in March was, by December, without allies.

Faced with the recurring dilemma of Georgian political alignment: Russia or the West; the Gamsakhurdia government’s choice was “not Russia,” which, by extension, meant alignment with the West. It was a choice based on an historical view of Russia as an untrustworthy, expansionist and imperial power. This view was brought into sharp focus in the years immediately preceding Georgia’s independence and was framed, in large part, by memories of what happened the last time Georgia was independent. Though the Gamsakhurdia presidency was short-lived, the period 1988-1991, during most of which Gamsakhurdia and the national movement were leading the country, is noteworthy for the recovery of the Georgian past. To be sure, elements of the past had been preserved quietly, at home, in memories passed on by grandparents and in émigré and samizdat literature. Nevertheless, when the embryonic Georgian national movement was catapulted to national prominence during the relatively open period of glasnost and as a result of April 9, 1989, the recovery of history became part of Georgia’s developing national project. That this history became the guiding light for Georgian policy under

Gamsakhrudia is clear. What role the lessons of history developed during this period would play in later Georgian administrations is the subject to which we now turn our attention.

The Shevardnadze Period

In March 1992, in a move designed both to improve stability in a fractious country and to bolster Georgia’s legitimacy in the international arena, the State Council ruling Georgia in the wake of President Gamsakhrudia’s ouster invited former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze to return from Moscow to lead the country. By temperament, experience and background, Shevardnadze could hardly have been more different than Gamsakhrudia. Shevardnadze had been a consummate insider during the Soviet era, carefully balancing interests, negotiating compromises and cultivating powerful patrons, all the while moving upwards through the hierarchy.

In a tenure marked by contradictions, Eduard Shevardnadze had led Georgia previously as First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party from 1972-1985. He suppressed Georgian dissident nationalists, including Zviad Gamsakhrudia whom he had arrested and imprisoned in 1976, yet intervened with Moscow in support of maintaining the official status of the Georgian language. In the later case, his successful mediation diffused a vocal public demonstration in Tbilisi in 1978 that otherwise could have spun out of control. Nonetheless, many Georgians, particularly nationalists, distrusted Shevardnadze, seeing him as deferential to Moscow, recalling specifically his statement at a Georgia Communist Party Congress in 1976 that, “for Georgians, the sun rises not in

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the east, but in the north – in Russia.”

Shevarndadze returned to a Georgia rent by conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and teetering on the brink of civil war. Georgia’s physical survival as a sovereign nation was uncertain. Moreover, the invitation for Shevardnadze to return amounted to a tacit admission that the country could not govern itself; only with help from outside would Georgia survive. As Foreign Minister under Mikhail Gorbachev, Shevardnadze had been instrumental in shaping and implementing the policies of perestroika and glasnost, forging, in the process, deep and cordial relationships with the leaders of the Western world. These relationships, it was hoped, would help Georgia gain much needed Western support.

Such was the paradox of Georgia’s strategic situation in 1992. In a country where strategic alignment was framed as a choice between Russia and the West, the man who once had said that for Georgia the sun rises in the north was seen as the best hope to lead Georgia into the west. Georgia’s foreign policy course under Shevardnadze proved to be enigmatic. Yet, the main contours are discernable and will contribute much to the discussion of Georgia’s alignment preferences.

With Shevardnadze’s return to power in Georgia came a realistic pragmatism in policy making. Shevardnadze and his foreign policy team saw security in its most basic form – protection of territorial integrity – as their principal responsibility. Throughout 1992 and 1993, separatist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia continued to plague Georgia, threatening dismemberment of the country. At the same time, armed supporters of Gamsakhurdia (Zviadists) launched attacks in Western Georgia and in Tbilisi. In

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September 1993, Abkhaz forces, seemingly with support from Russia, defeated Georgian government troops in a major battle. Sukhumi, the Abkhaz capital, fell. Threatened on all sides, and with his own support deteriorating, Shevardnadze faced a difficult choice. He reportedly told a crowd of supporters, he now understood why Erekle wanted to sign a treaty with the Russians.48

*Georgia Joins the CIS*

In October 1993, Shevardnadze swallowed his pride and travelled to Moscow to request Russian help, specifically against the Zviadist uprising, but also to regain control in Abkhazia. While in Moscow, Shevardnadze was told by the Russians that because Georgia was not a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) or the Collective Security Treaty (CST), there was no legal basis for Russia to help Georgia.49 Returning from Moscow, Shevardnadze was faced with the stark recognition that to keep Georgia from disintegrating he had no choice but to make a deal with Russia. After long discussions with senior advisers, he decided the only way for Georgia to regain any measure of stability was to join the Russian-led organizations. With the approval of the Georgian Supreme Council, Georgia formally joined the CIS on December 3, 1993 and the CST on December 9.50 Shortly after Georgia joined the CIS, Russian military support was instrumental in Shevardnadze’s defeat of the Zviadist uprising. Surrounded by government forces, Gamsakhurdia reportedly committed suicide in December 1993.

Georgia’s realignment with Russia deepened in February 1994, when

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48 Ibid. p.32.
49 Russian Defense Minister General Grachev said as much publicly, “Georgia is an independent state with which Russia does not have any agreement on mutual military cooperation. Georgia is not a CIS country, and is thus not part of a collective security agreement.” Quoted in Celestine Bohlen, “After Shevardnadze’s Plea, Russia May Help Georgians,” *The New York Times*. October 20, 1993.
Shevardnadze and Russian President Yeltsin signed an agreement in Tbilisi allowing Russia to maintain military bases in Georgia.\(^{51}\) Seen initially as a tactical necessity, Georgia’s deepening rapprochement with Russia seemed to threaten the independence Georgians held dear, but were helpless to protect. Indeed, protestors in Tbilisi, decrying a new Russian military occupation, reportedly carried signs stating, “Down with Russian Imperialism,” and “Shevardnadze – the Butcher of Georgian Independence.”\(^{52}\)

Georgia’s accession to membership in the CIS and the CST, groups both understood to be dominated by Russia, was a sharp reversal of previous policy. As such it was identified in Chapter Two as an inflection point in terms of Georgia’s alignment preferences. In a series of interviews with senior Georgian officials, nearly all described the decision to align with Russia as “necessary,” seeing no other way out of Georgia’s security predicament at the time. One Foreign Ministry official described the decision in these terms: “From 1992 to 1994 the situation in Georgia was catastrophic. Our physical survival as a nation was at stake. Shevardnadze’s rapprochement with Russia was necessary, but it was purely instrumental, tactical. He needed to hold the country together and he wanted help against Gamsakhurdia and in Abkhazia.”\(^{53}\)

In terms of the alignment formation theories reviewed in previous chapters, Georgia’s 1993 decision to align with Russia might be thought of as an example of what Stephen David calls “omnibalancing” or balancing with the external power most likely and capable of protecting a regime’s hold on power. Yet, Shevardnadze and those around him had a clear understanding that Russia remained the principal threat to Georgia,

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\(^{52}\) Ibid.

believing, as they did, that Russia was supporting the Abkhaz separatists. One former Foreign Ministry official recounted that upon returning to Tbilisi after the fall of Sukhumi in September 1993, Shevardnadze indignantly stated, “The Russians can’t be trusted. From here on I will concentrate my energies on fighting Russia’s take over of Georgia.”54 Ironically, a month later, Georgia had joined the CIS.

Georgia’s decision might better be seen as an example of bandwagoning. Georgia’s perception of Russia as the principal external threat had not changed significantly. What was new was the clear understanding that there were no available allies to balance the Russian threat. Among the frequent criticisms leveled at the Gamsakhurdia government by officials of Shevardnadze’s government was the charge that Gamsakhurdia and his followers had a naïve, blind faith that the West would solve Georgia’s problems. As part of their more pragmatic approach, the Shevardnadze government was sober minded about what the West could and could not do for Georgia in 1993. As a result, they saw bandwagoning with Russia as the only viable option. Georgia’s 1993 reversal in alignment can best be understood in terms of Stephen Walt’s statement that, “If weak states see no possibility of outside assistance, they may be forced to accommodate the most imminent threat.”55

Nonetheless, Georgia’s alignment with Russia was shallow and would be relatively short-lived. Almost immediately after joining the CIS, Shevardnadze passed a message to the United States government saying that while he had joined the CIS to save Georgia from further disintegration, his outlook was pro-American and he was interested

in deeper cooperation with the U.S. and the West. Indeed, in early 1994, he instructed the foreign ministry to pursue cooperation with the U.S. and the west on a priority basis. Further, his goal, according to several former officials, was to “institutionalize” cooperation with the west. An initial tentative step in that direction was taken in March 1994, when Georgia joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace program. What followed, between 1994 and 1999, was a “step by step” realignment of Georgian policy away from Russia and towards the West, described by one former cabinet-level official as “a strategic shift from the politics of survival and necessity to the emergence of our true orientation.”

A Strategic Shift

Deliberate and skilful statesmanship in the years 1994-1999 enabled Eduard Shevardnadze and his administration to maneuver Georgia out of the Russian orbit. A detailed analysis of how this was done is beyond the scope of this paper. Herein, several key events that serve as signposts pointing out Georgia’s general direction will be noted. What’s more important, for the sake of this study, is the question of why Georgia shifted its alignment. After briefly discussing manifestations of Georgia’s changing alignment, the reasons behind the shift will be examined.

Throughout the year 1999, it was clear by virtually any indicator that Georgia had realigned itself away from Russia and towards the West. In April, Georgia was admitted into the Council of Europe. In May, Georgia chose not to renew its membership in the CIS Collective Security Treaty. Later that year, in an October interview with the press, President Shevardnadze said, “I cannot say for certain but one thing I know is that if I am

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re-elected in next April’s elections, we will be knocking very hard on the door [of NATO]. At a November summit meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Istanbul, Russia agreed to terms for the withdrawal of Russian military forces from Georgia. At the same time, on the margins of the OSCE summit, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey signed the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Crude Oil Pipeline Project (BTC); a project significant in many respects, not least of all being the fact that it would be the first major pipeline to transport oil from the Caspian Basin to world markets that did not pass through Russia. These events together illustrate that for the second time in just over five years, Georgia had made a fundamental shift in strategic alignment. How is this explained?

Several senior officials from the Shevardnadze government point to an official visit by Shevardnadze to Washington, D.C. in early Spring 1994, as the starting point for a strategic shift towards the West. While in Washington, Shevardnadze was warmly received by U.S. President Clinton and Vice President Gore. Additionally, in meetings at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, he received pledges of financial assistance for Georgia. This international financial assistance supported macroeconomic stabilization and, importantly, gave the Georgian elite some confidence that the West was prepared to support their efforts. One senior Georgian official believed the generally favorable macroeconomic picture from 1995-1997 created the basis for new strategic

thinking and allowed for a more independent choice in foreign policy alignment.\textsuperscript{61}

Economic stabilization certainly created the basis for Georgia’s participation in oil and
gas transportation projects to bring Azerbaijani oil to the Black Sea and later to the
Mediterranean. These were projects of major economic significance and also indicators
of a developing alignment between Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey and the West.

For most Georgians, the presence of Russian military bases on Georgian territory
symbolized Russian domination and Georgian helplessness. In early 1995,
Shevardnadze, under considerable pressure from the Russian military, agreed to allow
Russia bases in Georgia for 25 years. It was a humiliating concession. A close aide
suggested that until this point, Shevardnadze thought he could find common ground with
the more democratic elements in Russia. Moreover, by appeasing the Russian military,
he thought he would receive Russian assistance in dealing with Abkhazia.\textsuperscript{62} This proved
not to be the case. Yet in reaching the much maligned basing agreement with Russia,
Shevardnadze and his negotiating team had the prescience to make two stipulations:
Before Shevardnadze would submit the agreement to Parliament for ratification, Russia
had to support reestablishment of Georgian territorial integrity and to assist Georgian
military development. Neither condition was ever met, nor was the basing agreement
ever ratified.

Any confidence Shevardnadze may have had that he could deal successfully with
the secure Russian assistance in restoring Georgia’s territorial integrity waned over time.
Seemed to Russia support continued separation, going so far as issuing Russian passports
to residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Fears about Russia’s attitude towards an

\textsuperscript{61} Interview with author. July 7, 2007.
independent Georgia were reinforced further when Yevgeniy Primakov was named Foreign Minister of Russia in January 1996. Two assassination attempts on Shevardnadze’s life – in 1995 and 1998 – contributed to his grave personal doubts about Russia’s role and intentions in Georgia.

Why the Shift?

Previously Georgia’s choice to align with Russia by joining the CIS and the CST in 1993 was explained as bandwagoning behavior. But, as Walt states, “Decisions to bandwagon show a low level of commitment and are relatively fragile. Indeed, one might say they are hardly alliances at all – just temporary responses to particular situations.” This was the case in Georgia. By 1999 Georgia’s behavior had shifted and was described more accurately as balancing behavior; balancing against the threat perceived from Russia. In either case, the behavior was primarily a response to the same factor – the perceived threat from Russia. What then was behind the Georgian shift in alignment from bandwagoning with to balancing against Russia? What had changed?

Two significant changes redefined the context for Georgia’s alignment behavior. First, the availability of potential alignment choices began to expand. New opportunities for economic, military and security cooperation with the United States and the West broadened Georgia’s range of options. Options became available in the mid-1990s that were not there in 1993-1994. Secondly, Georgia’s historical perception of the threat from Russia was reinforced by contemporary events. One senior official remarked that despite the humiliation of appeasing the Russians, Shevardnadze initially believed his experience in international affairs would enable him to reach satisfactory agreements

with the Russians. This proved not to be the case. In this regard, the Russian role on the issues of Abkhazia and South Ossetia was definitive.

In contrast to the Gamsakhurdia regime, whose main goal was restoring Georgian independence, the main objective of the Shevardnadze government was to stabilize the country and restore Georgia’s territorial integrity. The lessons of history proved less of a guide for this task. Shevardnadze’s attempt to reach an accommodation with the Russians was based on a pragmatic assessment of the situation when he came to power. However, Russian actions, particularly those of the Russian military, reinforced historical perceptions of Russia as a threat to Georgia’s territorial integrity.

The central role played by Georgian history in framing perceptions of Russia as a threat to Georgian independence during the Gamsakhurdia government was described earlier in this chapter. The role of Georgian history in the Shevardnadze government was more nuanced. Shevardnadze and his advisors were keenly aware of Georgia’s history as an independent state. Indeed, in a speech later in his tenure, Shevardnadze reflected on Georgia’s history saying:

Generations were ruled by a state which they know was based on injustice, and had annexed their homeland, abusing and insulting all that was distinctively Georgian. It gobbled up the new-born democratic Republic in 1921. It slaughtered the intellectual elite and declared free initiative and the desire to improve one’s own life to be unlawful, effectively killing off any remaining sense of statehood the Georgians might have fostered.64

However, while the Shevardnadze team* understood the lessons history provided on the

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* The word is used loosely to include the Foreign Ministry and Presidential foreign policy advisors. In the early years of Shevardnadze’s presidency, the power ministries were run by officials forced on Georgia by Moscow. General Nadibaidze, for example, a Russian officer of Georgian descent, was appointed Defense Minister of Georgia and served from 1994-1998. His replacement by the western educated General Tezadze in 1998 clearly signaled Georgia’s interest in a closer security relationship with the West.
danger Russia posed to Georgian independence, what to do about it was not as clear.

One senior official described the situation like this:

There was a clear understanding among the elite that we couldn’t trust the Russians. We had current, real-world experiences that made it clear to us who we were dealing with. We were fully aware of our history with Russia, but we didn’t dwell on historical events. We had regained our independence, our task was to keep it.65

In other words, Georgians knew the threat they faced. Their perception of the threat had a clear history. The question history didn’t address was what to do about it. Georgia’s past dependably identifies the threat, but it provides no basis of successful, reliable or natural allies to which to turn in response.

To understand the dynamics of alliance formation, international relations scholars generally focus on two elements of a state’s decision-making calculus: identification of the threat, and determination of whether and with whom to ally in response to the threat.66 In the Georgian case, history significantly informs the first step, less so the second. The Shevardnadze team was acutely aware of this. To many of them, the lessons Georgian history taught about alignment choice were ambiguous. For example, one senior official, alluding to the fact that the victorious western powers at Versailles provided no protection to the South Caucasus states in the face of Bolshevik aggression stated, “In 1921 our independence was crushed by the Russian Bolsheviks. But we also felt betrayed by the West.”67 The perceived failure of the West, especially the United States, to support the independence of Georgia during Gamsakhurdia’s tenure produced

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renewed skepticism and unease.\textsuperscript{68} The strategic alignment choice facing the country has been framed consistently by Georgian scholars and foreign policy practitioners as either Russia or the West. If Georgian history taught that Russia was a threat and the West was unreliable, where did that leave Georgian decision makers? Such was the dilemma that the Shevardnadze government tried to resolve.

The Shevardnadze government approached the task of realignment cautiously, moving quietly but definitively towards the West by trying to “institutionalize” western political, economic and security cooperation as a way to mitigate concerns about the West’s overall reliability as a partner. By the end of 1999, oil and gas transit agreements, deepening cooperation with the U.S. and NATO, and Russia’s relative weakness gave the Shevardnadze team confidence enough to move decisively towards the West, shifting from bandwagoning to balancing.

After 1999, Shevardnadze was unequivocal in stating his desire and intention to integrate with Western security structures. At NATO’s Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council meeting at the Prague Summit in November, 2002, for example, Shevardnadze said, “I am happy that at the Summit … I can declare that Georgia is determined to be a full member of NATO and is resolved to work hard to prepare for this historic mission.”\textsuperscript{69} Georgian efforts to institutionalize Western cooperation earlier that year had received a big boost with the inauguration by the U.S. of the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP). Under GTEP, U.S. military forces trained and helped professionalize Georgia’s

\textsuperscript{68} A speech by President George H.W. Bush in Kiev on August 1, 1991 in which he cautioned against “suicidal nationalism” and seemed to support the continuation of some form of union among Soviet states was mentioned by several officials as a sobering reminder that western support to their independence was far from certain. Well before the speech, dubbed the “Chicken Kiev” speech by columnist William Safire, Georgia had declared independence, and was pursuing a strongly nationalist agenda.

\textsuperscript{69} Statement by President of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze at the EAPC Summit, November 22, 2002. At: http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s021122h.htm (accessed March 16, 2009).
ground forces. Reflecting back on the day in spring 2002 when U.S. military forces flew into Georgia to begin the program, one senior official said, “These were the first western forces to be stationed in Georgia since British forces were stationed here for a brief period at the end of World War I. For us it was hugely symbolic and gave us a tremendous boost in confidence.”

An unambiguous preference for strategic alignment with the West had clearly emerged in Georgia by the late 1990s. By 1997, after years of balancing factions within his own executive branch, Shevardnadze had replaced pro-Russian officials with his own, pro-western appointments. At the same time, the Parliament was a westernizing influence in Georgian politics, reflecting as it did the general pro-western orientation of the general population. But while the issue of foreign policy orientation seemed to be settled, the slow pace of domestic reforms and continuing frustration with widespread corruption caused political rifts. In 2001, several young, reform-minded officials moved into opposition to President Shevardnadze. Among them were Parliamentary Chairman Zurab Zhvania, seen as a possible successor to Shevardnadze, and Mikheil Saakashvili, who resigned as Minister of Justice in September 2001 to run for and win a seat in parliament in October. Saakashvili established the “New National Movement,” which included elements of the former national movement and a wing of pro-Gamsakhurdia followers. The New National Movement, according to one observer, “borrowed heavily in style and rhetoric from the National Movement of the 1980s.”

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72 Ibid.
The Rose Revolution

The years 2001-2003 were marked by an increasing sense of stagnation and drift. The young reformist opposition supported Shevardnadze’s pronouncements on Euro-Atlantic integration but came to see them increasingly as promises hollowed out by the dismal domestic situation. In principle, they agreed with Shevardnadze’s foreign policy orientation, but in practice they were impatient and frustrated and wanted to move faster and more decisively. In November 2003, in response to parliamentary elections widely perceived as fraudulent, the frustration boiled over. Georgia’s “Rose Revolution” was the result.

After opposition leaders refused to recognize the officially reported results of the parliamentary election, several days of large, but peaceful, demonstrations took place in Tbilisi. When some 30,000 demonstrators occupied the Georgian Parliament on November 22, 2003, President Shevardnadze resigned. In remarkable unanimity, the opposition supported Mikheil Saakashvili who was elected president overwhelmingly in January 2004 with 96% of the votes cast. With Saakashvili, a new generation of Georgian political leaders, shaped less by the Soviet legacy and more by the Georgian pro-independence movement of the 1980s and unfettered contact with the West, came to power.  

The Saakashvili Period

In his inauguration speech on Jan 25, 2004 Saakashvili struck a balanced tone on

73 Saakashvili, born in 1967, was in his early 20s during the national movement of the late 1980s. He and many of his colleagues in the Georgian leadership were educated in the west, and prefer English to Russian as a second language. They have few ties to the Russian leadership and see their future, “…tied to Georgia itself, or possibly to the West, but no longer to Moscow.” (Jaba Devdariani, “Georgia and Russia: The Troubled Road to Accommodation,” op.cit. p.201.)
Georgia’s foreign policy. Referring to Georgia’s international orientation, he said, “We need to survive in a very complicated geopolitical environment, … I am not pro-American or pro-Russian, I am pro-Georgian.” Nonetheless, the speech was marked by faint echoes from the past history of Georgian-Russian relations. Delivering the inaugural at the Georgian Parliament building, he said, “This is the place where all the devoted heroes of Georgia died for independence and the freedom of Georgia. They did everything not to allow the Bolsheviks to occupy Georgia ….”

Notwithstanding Saakashvili’s statements on a balanced foreign policy orientation, members of Saakashvili’s administration, most of whom also had served under Shevardnadze, characterized the administration’s orientation as an intensification of the pro-Western approach adopted by Shevardnadze. Shevardnadze’s caution was viewed as vacillation and indecisiveness. One official said, “We were Shevardnadze’s students and followers. We took over on the strength of his initial ideas, but brought new energy and determination to promote our independence. He had some real deeds – the Baku-Tbilisi-Cheyhan pipeline, for instance – but had allowed things to stagnate. We were impatient with the lack of reform and demanded change.”

Renewed Role of History

Soon after assuming the presidency, Saakashvili demonstrated a certain subtlety regarding the lessons of the past and their reflection in national symbols. One of his first official acts was to replace the Georgian state flag – the flag of the Democratic Republic...

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75 Ibid. The original Act of Independence of Georgia and the February 1921 Georgian Constitution currently are displayed prominently in the Parliament building.
of Georgia – with a flag harkening back to Georgia’s revered King David the Builder; the flag that had been adopted by the New National Movement. It consisted of a large red cross against a white background with four additional red crosses – one in each corner. The change was criticized roundly by many who described the move as an insult to the past. Officials closer to the decision thought otherwise. The flag of the First Republic, while respected, was seen as the flag of a weak state that was ultimately taken over by a powerful neighbor. The new flag was seen as more triumphant; it represented success, not failure. Its adoption demonstrated an optimism in the future; a new defiance that Georgia’s leaders would not let history repeat itself.

The renewed role of history in Georgian political life was clear when Saakashvili declared 2004 the “year of Zviad Gamsakhurdia.” In ceremonies scheduled to coincide with the 15th anniversary of the Soviet crackdown on demonstrators in Tbilisi and the 13th anniversary of Georgia’s declaration of independence, Saakashvili commemorated Gamsakhurdia saying, in part, “Gamsakhurdia and his generation dreamt of Georgia’s independence when others did not even dare thinking of such a thing. Here lies their main merit.” Summarizing succinctly the generally held view of Gamsakhurdia within the Saakashvili administration one official said: “He was a good dissident, but a poor statesman.”

The need for statesmanship was very much on the minds of the reform-minded young officials in the Saakashvili administration as they began their tenure. In early

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78 Cabinet official. Interview with author. July 4, 2007. Gamsakhurdia’s remains were repatriated from Chechnya and reburied during in a March 31, 2007 ceremony.
speeches, Saakashvili said Georgia was ready to forget the past and establish new relations with Russia. According to one former official, both Saakashvili and Prime Minister Zhvania tried to establish good relations with Russian President Putin. This changed quickly, however, when, according to one former official, “Russia tried to push them and us around.”

The central issue, in this context, remained Russia’s perceived role in Georgia’s separatist regions. In May 2004, although Georgia successfully reestablished control over the breakaway region of Adjaria, having chased strongman Aslan Abashidze out of the country, Russia’s role was viewed with suspicion. Russia’s role in Abkhazia and South Ossetia also remained a constant source of mistrust and mutual recrimination.

**Russian Military Bases**

An issue emblematic of Georgian-Russian relations throughout the Saakashvili administration, and one where historical memory played a considerable role on the Georgian side was the presence of Russian military forces in Georgia. In his inaugural address, Saakashvili displayed concerns over Russia’s intentions in Georgia when, describing the continued presence of Russian military forces in Georgia, he said, “Now they are not useful for Russian security. They have symbolic importance to bolster the imperial self-confidence of some people in Moscow. Why we are worried by [this], however, is that it is a good framework for any potential future intervention in Georgia.”

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In 1999, Georgia and Russia agreed at the OSCE summit in Istanbul that Russia would close two of the four military bases they had in Georgia by July 2001 and that the two sides would complete negotiations on the other two in 2000. Russia’s sluggishness on the last two bases – initially they reported needing 15 years to complete the withdrawal – was the source of considerable vexation in Georgia. By 2005, the Georgian Parliament began discussing a draft resolution to declare the Russian military presence illegal. The draft resolution described the Russian military presence as, “a holdover of the annexation and occupation of Georgia by Soviet Russia in 1921.”

In May 2005, in Moscow, Russia and Georgia agreed on terms for the withdrawal of Russia’s remaining military forces from Georgia. Commenting on this long-sought agreement, Saakashvili identified the Russian military presence in Georgia as one of the two most painful issues in the Georgian-Russian relationship, the second being the separatist conflicts. He then put the agreement in historical perspective: “Russia’s military presence in Georgia has lasted more than 200 years. It has always been there, apart from a short three-year period of independence [in 1918-1921].” For Georgians, Russian military presence on their territory was a significant factor in the continued perception of Russia as a threat. With the base withdrawal agreement, some once again thought a new relationship with Russia might be possible. That this proved not to be the case is testimony, in no small measure, to the pervasiveness of historical memories and the threat perceptions that often are derived from them.

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82 Civil Georgia, March 7, 2005. At: http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=9281 (accessed March 16, 2009). Parliament’s approach reflected that of the Georgian delegation in Istanbul in 1999. One of the delegation members, in a July 5, 2007 interview with the author, described a moment when the Russian side asked smugly, “And what will you do if we decide not to leave?” “We will declare you an occupying power,” was the curt Georgian reply.  
2006 is not 1921

In the period prior to, and since Georgia gained its independence, it has been commonplace to compare issues, events and problems faced in this modern era with similar, past occurrences from the period of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. An historical narrative developed around these themes and became the basis for Georgia’s perception of Russia as a threat to its independence. In early 2006, President Saakashvili took the analogy a step farther.

In January 2006, near simultaneous bomb explosions in Russia’s North Ossetia region damaged both the main and auxiliary gas pipelines which supplied the bulk of Georgia’s energy. Later that same day, an explosion in Russia’s Karachay-Cherkessia region knocked out the high-voltage electrical transmission line that supplied electricity from Russia to Georgia. Together, the blasts had the effect of cutting off the main energy supplies to Georgia in the middle of a particularly cold winter. Russian officials attributed the attacks to sabotage. Georgians, on their side, saw more sinister designs. President Saakashvili reportedly told BBC News that the attacks were pre-planned actions orchestrated by Russia.84 Georgian Prime Minister Noghaideli said Russia was seeking to create instability in Georgia.85 This perception of yet another threat from Moscow reinforced and intensified the already bleak perceptions of the Russian threat.

On February 25, 2006 – the 85th anniversary of the Bolshevik takeover of Tbilisi – President Saakashvili delivered a speech at a memorial to Georgian cadets who died in

85 Ibid.
battle resisting the Bolsheviks. In his remarks, Saakashvili explicitly compared the
current threat with a threat from the 1918-1921 time period, through the use of historical
Giorgadze plays this role ….”86 Giorgadze is a former Georgian security minister wanted
for complicity in the 1995 assassination attempt on then-President Shevardnadze. After
the attempt, he fled to Russia where he has lived since, appearing often in the period
since the Rose Revolution on Russian state television commenting negatively on
developments in Georgia and calling for change in the country. Giorgadze reportedly
threatened to stage a ‘Revolution of Nettles’ in Georgia unless early elections were
called. Comparing Giorgadze to Orjonikidze, the Bolshevik revolutionary of Georgian
descent who advocated and participated in the Red Army takeover of Georgia, was a case
of historical analogy being used not simply to identify a general threat from another
country, but, more specifically, to identify how and by whom the threat might be
operationalized.

Georgian-Russian relations deteriorated further in 2006 when trade disputes led to
a Russian ban on import of Georgian wines and mineral waters due to ‘unacceptable’
levels of dangerous chemicals. Russia was by far the largest market for these products
and the Russian move was seen widely in Georgia as part of a larger effort to pressure
Georgia to change its foreign policy course. Instead it added to the growing perception of
the Russian threat.

The opening, on Independence Day, May 26, 2006, of the Museum of the Soviet
Occupation was a poignant example of the use of history to frame current policy issues.

The museum enshrines, in documents and photographs, the main parameters of the 20th century Georgian historical narrative from the 1918 Act of Independence, through the 1921 invasion by the Red Army, the brutal April 9, 1989 crackdown on peaceful, pro-independence demonstrators in Tbilisi, to Georgia’s subsequent move to independence. One observer called it “a perfectly staged cathartic tragedy,” ending in “a resurrection of hope with scenes from the Rose Revolution’s democratic triumph.”

In a speech at the museum’s opening, President Saakashvili was defiant that the history the museum chronicled not repeat itself:

In 1918-1921 Georgia did not manage and did not have time to establish itself as a state although its leaders realized the threat they were facing…. We have reached a historical juncture, we have avoided many obstacles and established ourselves as a state. This means that no one will ever again be able to bring Georgia to its knees as happened in 1921.

Today everything is ready. Ordzhonikidze and his whole brigade are poised, his armies are poised,… Georgia is facing an all-out campaign of slander, pressure and blackmail. However, they have not taken into account the most important thing – Georgia is not like it was in 1921.

The President’s determination was echoed by one of his cabinet ministers who said, “We will pay whatever price is required to maintain our independence and western orientation. If need be, we will die for it.”

Neutrality – A Third Option?

Georgia’s strategic alignment choice has been framed typically as either Russia or the West. Yet, a number of international relations scholars propose that neutrality or non-alignment is an alternative to alignment, particularly for small states. Dan Reiter, arguing

that decision makers look to past experience for guidance when they make foreign policy, frames his hypotheses on the strategic choice facing small states as alignment or neutrality. Reiter refines his argument, positing that “…small powers learn lessons about alliance and neutrality from their experiences in world wars ….”\textsuperscript{90} The idea of neutrality as a strategic choice was considered in the context of Georgia’s alignment options, but was dismissed as unviable.

In September 2006, the NATO Alliance offered Georgia an ‘Intensified Dialogue.’ Amounting to a half step forward in terms of membership in the alliance, Intensified Dialogue was described as offering Georgia “…access to a more intense political exchange with NATO allies on its membership aspirations.”\textsuperscript{91} President Saakashvili hailed the step as signifying that Georgia’s process towards NATO membership had become “irreversible.” To many in Moscow who viewed developments in the Caucasus region with a zero-sum mentality, Georgia’s movement towards NATO was not welcome news.

In a February 2007 press conference in Tbilisi, Russian Ambassador to Georgia Vyacheslav Kovalenko said Russia wanted to see Georgia as a “…sovereign, independent, neutral state with neighborly relations with Russia.”\textsuperscript{92} Kovalenko’s suggestion implied that Russia would be willing to accept Georgian neutrality as an alternative to Georgia’s membership in NATO. Yet, Georgian government officials and opinion leaders dismissed the idea of neutrality, relying, in the process, on reasoning based on historical analogy. Speaker of Parliament Nino Burjanadze said, “Neutrality is

\textsuperscript{90} Dan Reiter, \textit{Crucible of Beliefs}. p.3.
\textsuperscript{91} http://www.nato.int/docu/update/2006/09-september/e0921c.htm (accessed March 16, 2009).
incompatible with the tasks and principles important for Georgia and its aspirations towards Western values.”

Referring to the history of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, Burjanadze went on to explain that the government at that time chose neutrality, but neutrality did not save them from Soviet occupation.

President Saakashvili emphatically rejected the idea of neutrality in a speech to graduating officers at the military training academy. Vowing to “never again undertake such obligations that will bind our hands and hinder us and our friends from defending Georgia’s independence, Saakashvili grounded the idea of neutrality firmly in the historical narrative of Georgia’s relations with Russia:

Now they want to push the idea of Georgia’s neutrality. Our country signed an agreement on neutrality with an updated variant of the Russian empire, Bolshevik Russia, in 1920 and within six months Georgia was once again occupied and enslaved.

At that time we signed the document because politicians here at home thought Europe could not help us anyway. They advised having talks with the conquerors, hoping that if Georgia maintained its neutrality, Russia would be appeased and would not want more.

We were faced with a similar problem at the time the Georgievsk Treaty was signed ….

In a related statement Saakashvili said:

Some ill-wishers beyond and inside Georgia urge the society and the country’s authorities to pursue the policy of neutrality. I answer to them that earlier Georgia, last time in 1920-1921, strongly suffered and lost its independence as a result of the policy of neutrality and will never agree to such policy.

Today in Georgia we will not repeat the mistakes of the past ….
With regards to Georgia and the neutrality option, Dan Reiter’s propositions are substantiated to a degree. Georgia’s decision makers have learned lessons from history on the efficacy of neutrality, believing history to have shown it to be a failed strategy. Reiter’s proposition that such lessons are learned from experience in the most recent world war is, in the case of Georgia, a bit off the mark. The source domain for Georgia’s lesson on neutrality was 1918-1921 – the last time it was an independent state. Nevertheless, the fact that historically based analogical reasoning directly informed Georgian decision makers understanding of neutrality as an alignment option is an important point that merits emphasis.

Skeptics might argue that the public invocation of historical analogies by President Saakashvili and other senior Georgian government officials is rhetorical, designed to advocate for or justify policy decisions. Indeed, faced with an anti-NATO campaign that promotes Georgian neutrality as the prudential alignment option, there is reason to consider that public statements dismissing neutrality could be delivered with an eye towards convincing the general public. Yet the general public, by any measure, hardly needs convincing. Most sources reflect overwhelming support among the public for a western orientation, including membership in NATO. Likewise, though senior officials currently in office were not at liberty to discuss specific policy decisions, in a series of interviews conducted by the author, there was unanimity of support for western

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97 In his book, Analogies at War, Yuen Foong Khong identifies two schools of thought on the use of historical analogies in policy making. He labels these the analytical view and the skeptics’ view. The analytical view suggests that policy makers use historical analogies as aids to decision making and analysis of foreign policy dilemmas. The skeptics’ view suggests public officials use historical analogies to advocate for or justify policy decisions. See pp.3-18. Khong correctly notes that the two are not mutually exclusive.

98 Most recently, in a January 5, 2008 referendum accompanying the presidential election, 77% of Georgians answered affirmatively the question, “Do you support the idea of Georgia’s NATO membership?” http://www.regnum.ru/english/georgia/944417.html (accessed March 16, 2009).
orientation and NATO membership, while neutrality was dismissed as unviable, in almost every case based on historical failure.

The question of neutrality is not new to Georgian policy makers, nor is Russian interest in promoting this foreign policy alternative in Georgia. At one point in 1999, having made the notable remark about Georgia “knocking on the door of NATO,” Shevardnadze, pressured by Russia, publicly said that neutrality was an option that Georgia should explore. The comment came as a surprise to many of his advisors. Subsequently, Shevardnadze tasked the Foreign Ministry to study the idea of neutrality to determine if it would solve Georgia’s security dilemma. The Foreign Ministry produced a detailed study on the idea of neutrality. After examining international law, current geopolitics and historical experience, the study concluded that neutrality was not a viable option for Georgia, equating neutrality to the status quo and further dependence on Russia. Tellingly, the experience of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in 1920-1921 was included in the study as a leading historical example of a failed attempt at neutrality. The results of the study reportedly were discussed in the Georgian National Security Council, where a unanimous conclusion that neutrality was not a viable option for Georgia was reached. According to participants, Georgia’s failed attempt at neutrality in 1918-1921 was an important factor in the discussions. Several members of the Saakashvili administration were involved at the senior staff level in the foreign ministry’s study on neutrality undertaken during Shevardnadze’s tenure. Based, in part, on the results of that study, but more broadly on the general perception of Russia as a threat, they continue to believe neutrality is not a feasible course of action for Georgia. Said one

99 The description that follows is based on interviews by the author in July 2007 with three senior officials who were directly involved in the study.
official, “Who would guarantee our neutrality? Russia? That was already shown to have failed in 1921, when an agreement approved by Lenin himself in 1920 failed to keep Russia from invading us.”

The Sources of Georgian Alignment

The current Georgian disposition to see threats to its stability as modern manifestations of Russian historical designs has proved to be particularly acute during crises. The aggressive dispersal by riot police of the large-scale, relatively peaceful, anti-government demonstrations in Tbilisi in November 2007 was an example of this. In a statement following the crisis and his decision to call new presidential elections, President Saakashvili defended the government’s actions saying:

I, as this country’s leader, need an unequivocal mandate to cope with all foreign threats, … with perfidious plans for the appropriation of Georgian territories, which I am absolutely sure exist, … with plans aimed at destabilizing and shattering Georgia … and with returning us to the year 1921 – to the period of Georgia’s annexation and enslavement, and the demise of Georgian democracy.

While the tone of this statement might be exhortative, it once again demonstrates the propensity in Georgia to attribute aggressive intentions to Russia based on historical memories. In President Saakashvili’s second inaugural address in January 2008, he repeated a theme from the first inauguration, offering again to extend a hand in friendship and cooperation to Russia. However, the burdens of history weigh heavily on both sides. As a result, is not hard to imagine relations getting worse rather than better.

Georgia’s fundamental alignment choice, framed consistently by political analysts

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and policy makers alike, was summarized succinctly by Ghia Nodia:

Georgia views its fundamental political choices in the system constituted by two poles: Russia and the west. … Russia mainly represents a threat to the newly acquired Georgian independence and symbolizes the past, while the west represents hope of security protection and consolidating independent statehood, but also hope for future development, that is democracy and market economy.\(^\text{102}\) [emphasis added]

The focus of this chapter has been the threat-based variable in Georgia’s alignment calculus. As the italicized portions of the above statement indicate, Russia has been seen as the primary threat to Georgia. The west, in terms of the threat calculus, is seen as the best hope for protection and security. Some general conclusions on Georgia’s perception of threat will be drawn forthwith. At the same time, it is important to note that in the above statement the west is seen as more than just a potential source of security, it is seen as Georgia’s hope for future development, politically and economically. Moreover, there is a powerful sense among Georgians of belonging to the West. One former official described the sources of Georgia’s western orientation as twofold: the threat from Russia – a security-driven variable; and the desire to be part of the West, to develop democratically according to a European or western model – a value-driven variable.\(^\text{103}\)

This assessment was repeated in numerous interviews by a range of Georgian officials and academics who stressed that Georgia’s strategic alignment choice is not only a function of threat-based calculations, but is derived as well through values-based considerations. In the summary that follows, both of these factors will be reviewed.


\(^{103}\) Interview with author. July 6, 2007.
The Threat

In *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Robert Jervis suggests that one lesson decision makers draw from history about other state actors is that,...

“...states that have been expansionist under one set of circumstances or leaders are likely to be seen as posing a continuing threat.” Similariy, Yaacov Vertzberger says, “the past can also be the source of specific policy directions for certain issue-areas or toward specific actors; it could contain cues for friendliness, trust, or alliance or a very specific policy recommendation for a particular situation.”

And so it is with Georgia’s perception of Russia. Through the use of historical analogy, Georgian leaders and a majority of the public have compared past events to present and drawn conclusions about what they believe to be Russia’s intentions and likely behavior. The general view of Russian behavior is summarized concisely in the following passage: “In analyzing the history of Georgian-Russian relations, we see a recurring picture: Russia recognizes Georgia as an independent country, but then violates a signed international accord, annexing Georgia to Russia.” The image of Russia that emerges from this line of reasoning is undependable, aggressive, and imperialistic. More recent Russian behavior, from the April 9, 1989 tragedy to economic embargoes, restrictive visa regimes and military basing are seen as contemporary examples of the Russian threat – a threat that, left unchecked, will lead to the loss of Georgian independence.

This picture of Russia as the primary threat to Georgian independence has influenced each of Georgia’s three presidents and their administrations, though to different degrees. The main reference points of the Georgian historical narrative on relations with Russia, long discussed in private, developed widely as the Soviet Union disintegrated. For Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his fellow Georgian nationalist leaders, Georgian independence was understood not simply as independence from the Soviet Union, but, more so, as independence from Russia. Based on the widespread appraisal of history made possible by the Soviet policy of glasnost, it was broadly understood that Russia was the existential threat to Georgian independence.

Gamsakhurdia and the Georgian national movement came to power in the late 1980s on the crest of a formidable pro-independence wave. The principal obstacle to Georgia’s independence was understood, through the developing historical narrative, to be Russia. After declaring its independence from the Soviet Union, Georgia continued to see Russia as the principal threat to its newly gained independence. Historical evidence from the last time Georgia was an independent state – 1918-1921 – was applied to the contemporary situation through analogical reasoning to determine Russia’s contemporary intentions and likely behavior. A general analogy haunted the Georgian elite and public during the initial years of independence: From 1918-1921 we were independent; but we lost our independence when Russia (the Bolsheviks) invaded. We are again today independent; again the main threat to our independence is Russia.

By adding the 1920 Moscow Treaty (and, to a lesser degree, the 1783 Georgievskiy Traktat) the analogy was further specified: In 1920 Russia signed a treaty recognizing our independence; but in 1921 they invaded us, taking away our
independence. Russia is again offering to officially recognize our independence (in the CIS Declaration, for example); their likely intention is again to ignore any agreements and take away our independence. Based on Georgia’s historical experience, through perceptions derived analogically, aggressive intentions were attributed to Russia, making it the principal threat to Georgian independence. Notwithstanding Russia’s decline in the early post-Soviet period, in material terms it continued to dwarf Georgia, or any of the other newly independent states and its geographic proximity made the threat imminently tangible.

Gamsakhurdia’s zealous nationalism was instrumental in promoting the restoration of independence in Georgia. Later, it tended towards ultra-nationalism and eventually paranoia. While he successfully mobilized Georgians against the threat perceived from Russia, his zealotry threatened Georgia’s minorities and alienated most countries internationally. Gamsakhurdia’s blind faith in Western support proved to be simplistically naïve and, in the end, irresponsible. When the West didn’t respond to Georgian pleas for help, the country slipped farther and farther into chaos and anarchy.

With Eduard Shevardnadze’s return to power in Georgia, zealous nationalism gave way to pragmatic realism. The military council that ruled Georgia after Gamsakhurdia fled the country saw in Shevardnadze (schooled in the Soviet system, yet with close ties to the West) a leader who could gain outside support in resolving Georgia’s mounting problems. Seeing no alternative, Shevardnadze initially bandwagoned with Russia, appeasing Russian hard-liners while trying to cooperate with
the more democratic elements in Russia, including President Yeltsin. The possibility of genuine democratic change in Russia seemed to offer one way out of the unhappy legacy of past Russian-Georgian relations. Shevardnadze and his team understood the challenges to success facing the ‘democratic’ Russians. They also understood clearly the lessons history provided on Russian-Georgian relations. These lessons were reinforced painfully by Russia’s actions in Abkhazia and elsewhere during the early years of Shevardnadze’s rule.

At the same time, Shevardnadze and his administration understood that history offered no successful model for dealing with the Russian threat. The West had not proven to be a viable alternative. To the contrary, both the history of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, and the more recent Gamsakhurdia period from 1988-1991, were marked by Western ambivalence towards Georgian independence. After bandwagoning with Russia, Shevardnadze and his administration began a deliberate hedging strategy with efforts to institutionalize cooperation with the West. Deepening political, economic and security cooperation with the West precipitated a step-by-step change in Georgia’s alignment. By 1999, though still plagued by frozen separatist conflicts, Georgia was stable enough internally, and had sufficiently institutionalized cooperation with the West, to base its strategic alignment on external threats. As a result, Georgia’s strategic relationship with Russia shifted, over time, from bandwagoning to balancing.

Stagnation, corruption and the impatience of a new generation eventually doomed

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107 Georgian analyst Ghia Nodia suggests Shevardnadze tried “to discriminate between two Russias: one good (that is, democratic, pro-Western) and one bad (reactionary, red-brown, communist).” The Georgian Perception of the West,” op.cit. p.31.
108 One senior official said Shevardnadze read in great detail about the history of the Democratic Republic of Georgia and after becoming President of Georgia was influenced acutely by this period of Georgian history. Interview with author. July 4, 2007.
the Shevardnadze government. The young, reform-minded Saakashvili government that followed represented a new era in Georgian political life. With fewer ties to Soviet or Russia institutions, they are influenced predominantly by the Georgian independence movement of the late 1980s and by their education and professional training in the West. Compared to Shevardnadze’s “pragmatic realism” and Gamsakhurdia’s “zealous nationalism” one might describe the approach of the Saakashvili administration as “pragmatic nationalism.” Nationalism and Georgia’s historical narrative on relations with Russia once again is the prime motive force driving the issue of strategic alignment. Georgian leaders today readily identify Russia as the principal threat to Georgia’s security and statehood, oftentimes citing historical precedent. The pragmatism of the Saakashvili administration has been demonstrated, not in its readiness to balance external relations, as did the Shevardnadze administration, but, rather, in its understanding that to be an attractive partner to the West, Georgia has to undertake fundamental domestic reforms. The Saakashvili government’s ongoing battle with corruption is perhaps the best example of their commitment to domestic reform.

The central role history plays in the threat calculus of President Saakashvili and his government is clear both in their public statements and in private discussions. The perception of aggressive Russian intentions towards Georgia is palpable and driven largely by historical memory. The prevailing belief that Russia poses the principal threat to Georgian independence, based on historical perception, but reinforced by current events, has become deeply ingrained in the official and public psyche. To balance the threat, Georgia looks westward for security assistance, and potential guarantees. In security terms, the West means NATO, but, first and foremost, the United States. In the
face of the threat perceived from Russia, Georgia chooses to align, as tightly as possible,
with the United States and NATO. But, as noted above, there is an additional element to
Georgia’s western orientation that is not driven by the security threat. It is wider than
strategy and survival. It is driven by values, and a broad conception of national identity.

The West

There is a strongly held belief among Georgians, voiced consistently by the
foreign policy elite and the general public that, in terms of national identity, Georgia is
western. Georgia sees itself as a part of a Western European civilization and culture
based, in the first instance, on Christianity. This element of Georgian national identity
was most eloquently expressed by the late Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania, who, in an
April 1999 speech in Strasbourg acknowledging Georgia’s membership in the Council of
Europe, said, “I am Georgian, and, therefore, I am European.”109

Georgia’s sense of Europeanness was expressed time and again in interviews.
Most officials interviewed, when asked to describe the basis for Georgia’s strategic
orientation, in addition to strategic considerations, mentioned European identity, political
beliefs and values as primary determining factors. One cabinet official said, “Our
strategic alignment choice is not determined solely by the threat from Russia. We are not
simply anti-something; we are pro-Western.”110 Similarly, a Georgian analyst said, “Our
pro-Western orientation is not just security from Russia, it’s pro-Democracy.”111 In

109 A U.S. Senate resolution commemorating Zhvania’s life resolved, in part, “Whereas Zurab Zhvania’s
vision of the historical destiny of Georgia was eloquently expressed before the Council of Europe on April
27, 1999, when he said, ‘I am Georgian and therefore, I am European.’” http://theweekincongress.com/
Member/FEB05_FULL/SR46ZURABsFEB11.htm (accessed March 17, 2009).
111 Interview with author. July 10, 2007. In the introduction to Statehood and Security: Georgia after the
Rose Revolution, p.10, Robert Legvold suggests that Georgia’s commitment to the democratic model is
instrumental; made for security’s sake. In the series of interviews conducted for this study, many of the
Georgian foreign policy elite earnestly suggested otherwise.
effect, officials and analysts argue that Georgia’s international alignment is a combination of strategy and identity; material and ideational factors. One leading analyst describes two major paradigms that inform Georgia’s orientation. “One has to do with answering the question ‘who are we?’ or ‘where do we belong?’; the other concerns political strategy in the modern world.”112 As has been shown throughout this chapter, Georgia’s political strategy in the modern world has been derived in large part from the perception of Russia as a threat which, in turn, is very much a function of historical memory. At the same time, a sense of Europeanness as an element of Georgian national identity has played a significant role in Georgia’s alignment decisions.

Georgians view themselves historically as part of a broader European, Christian, and Western culture. While no conscious decision to this effect can be identified, the long-standing, dominant psychological and historical perspective in Georgia is that, based on religion and language, Georgia is part of Europe. Incidentally, many Georgians believe that, throughout the period of the Tsarist Empire, Russia was also part of Europe and that western influences reached Georgia through Russia; through Russian higher education, science and literature. With the Bolshevik Revolution, Russia chose to move away from the West and, Georgians believe, their national identity and that of Russia diverged. During the Shevardnadze period, there was some sense that Russia (President Yeltsin, in particular) might move decisively towards the West and that Georgia might benefit as a result. With subsequent developments that hope was dashed. Georgians increasingly longed for direct contacts with Western institutions, rather than contacts mediated through Russia.

The Georgian sense of Western cultural and historical orientation has been more pronounced since Mikheil Saakashvili became president. Shortly after taking office, Saakashvili wrote, “Our past identity and our future destiny lie in the values and aspirations that unite the Euro-Atlantic community. Today, we are on our way home but we know our journey has only begun.”113 On this issue of Georgia’s place in the world Saakashvili has been consistent. In his 2008 inaugural speech, he said, “Georgia is forever yoked to Europe. We are joined by a common and unbreakable bond – one based on culture – on shared history and identity – and on a common set of values that has at its heart, the celebration of peace, and the establishment of fair and prosperous societies.”114

In the Georgia case, a cultural and psychological orientation towards the West is complementary with a strategic orientation based, as it is, on countering the perceived threat from Russia. That is, both factors point Georgia westward. The result is a strong consensus both within the political elite and in society at large for strategic alignment with the West. That a country’s strategy and identity should orient it in the same direction is by no means given, as we shall see as we turn our attention to the cases of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Epilogue

Most of the research and writing of the Georgia case study in Chapter Five was done prior to the August 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict over South Ossetia. Nevertheless, the results of the conflict corroborate conclusions reached about Georgia’s alignment preferences under the Saakashvili government. A few brief examples will bear out this point.

114 http://www.president.gov.ge/?l=E&m=0&sm=3&st=0&id=2489 (accessed March 16, 2009).
Well before the outbreak of violence in August 2008, the Saaksahvili government perceived an increased threat from Russia’s support to the separatist regions. Saakashvili, as he had done on many previous occasions, put the current threat in historical perspective, saying, for example:

One can clearly see how those events [of 1921] resemble those of today,… At that time the Bolshevik army intruded [into Georgia] under the pretext of assisting as if (sic.) oppressed minority. At that time it ended up with Georgia’s occupation and annexation. What is now going on is an obvious act of annexation; a prelude to the act of annexation and act of occupation.\textsuperscript{115}

In the aftermath of the conflict, the historical analogy to 1921 was used repeatedly to describe Russia’s aggressive intentions. Yet, in public, at least, several of President Saakashvili’s statements and those of other Georgian leaders have added a new dimensions to the process of reasoning by historical analogy.

The 1921 annexation of Georgia by the Bolshevik Red Army has served as the source domain used by contemporary Georgian leaders and society to deduce Russia’s modern-day intentions (the target domain). The process has led to near universal view of Russia as a threat to Georgia’s independence. However, while history has provided a lesson central to generating a threat perception, it has been less helpful in providing lessons on how successfully to respond. It is generally held that through analogical reasoning leaders learn from past successes what to do, and from past failures what not to do.\textsuperscript{116} Georgia’s history offers no positive example of how to maintain the state’s independence in the face of Russian expansion. Until now, according to the new logic of the Georgian leadership.

In an address to the Georgian people in the aftermath of the August conflict,

\textsuperscript{116}See, for example, Yaacov Vertzberger, \textit{The World in their Minds}, p.319.
Saakashvili summarized Russia’s intentions, but also added a note on why, in the contemporary context, he thought Georgia had succeeded in resisting these intentions. “Russia’s actions so far were directed towards leaving Georgia without supporters and alone as was the case in 1921 when the Bolshevik Red Army invaded Georgia. …But now Georgia has gained a huge international support and solidarity from all over the world and support towards our territorial integrity ….” In a September speech before Parliament, he reiterated the new logic, saying, “This war showed us one more thing. For the first time in our history, Georgia is not alone. For the first time in our history the whole civilized society stood together as a whole to protect Georgia.”

Exactly what the international community did, or didn’t do to support Georgia during the August 2008 conflict likely will be the subject of future scholarship. Yet, among Georgians, a new lesson seems to have been drawn from the crisis. In the face of Russian threats, Georgia’s ability to resist depends on support from the international community, on world opinion and, particularly, on the West. In a letter to President Saakashvili during the conflict, Redjeb Jordania, the son of Georgia’s President in 1921, expressed support and described his view of what was happening: “The invasion of Georgia by the Russian forces is a repeat of what happened in 1921, when my father Noe Jordania was President of Georgia. …This time, however, history will not repeat itself: the Western powers are unanimously supporting Georgia in this uneven struggle. With their support we are convinced that our country will remain free…”

The August 2008 conflict has reinforced Georgia’s perception of Russia as a

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threat to its independence. To the Georgian mind, recent Russian actions confirm Russia’s aggressive intentions. This view is based in large part on historical analogy.

This year, on February 25, 2009, Georgians marked with newfound ardor the 88th anniversary of the Red Army’s occupation of Georgia. Parliament discussed declaring the date “The Day of Russian Annexation.” In remarks that reveal the continuing centrality in Georgia of historical reasoning, Speaker of Parliament David Bakradze said, “From the perspective of the aggression in August, events of February 1921 acquire a very special meaning. I think that everyone should ponder the historical parallels with today and everyone should realize what our county escaped in August…”

CHAPTER SIX

ARMENIA

*However sincerely the new Armenian leadership may try to strike out on a new course in foreign relations the ghost of the past is ever present to beckon them back to the parameters formed by the collective historical experience.*

Introduction

Central to any discussion of Armenia’s foreign policy orientation and strategic alignment are two principal factors – geography and history. The interrelationship of these two factors as they evolved over time is essential to understanding the policy of modern day Armenia. As a small state surrounded by much bigger neighboring powers, Armenia’s geographical predicament is similar to that faced by her South Caucasus neighbors, Georgia and Azerbaijan. In contrast to Georgia, however, Armenia faces the added challenge of being land-locked. It must, as a result, depend on its neighbors for access to the world’s oceans and ocean-going commerce.

Throughout its long history, Armenia has been compelled to maneuver between and attempt to balance the rival Russian, Ottoman, and Persian empires. In a frontier zone constantly pressured by the expansion and contraction of these regional empires, Armenia often suffered at the hands of its neighbors and was obliged to pursue a strategy of reliance on an “outside” force to ensure its survival. Reliance on Russia as protector has, since the late 18th century, engendered within Armenia a traditional Russia-centric orientation. The tragic history of Armenia’s relationship with Ottoman Turkey, portrayed

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most vividly by events in 1915 during which as many as a million Armenians were killed or died during mass deportations and massacres, powerfully reinforced Armenia’s Russian orientation. Yet the traditional Russian orientation is complicated, in a geographical sense, by the physical distance between Yerevan and Moscow and the fact that Armenia and Russia are non-contiguous.

Emerging from the collapse of the Soviet Union as the smallest of the newly independent republics, Armenia constituted only a fraction of the territory considered by most Armenians to be their ancient homeland. The idea of an ancient homeland bears significantly on Armenia’s foreign policy orientation and strategic alignment choice. Armenians have long considered that in the ebb and flow of imperial fortunes their nation was divided generally into two parts: ‘western’ (referred to variously as Ottoman, Turkish or Anatolian) Armenia, and ‘eastern’ (Russian, Soviet or Caucasian) Armenia. The fate of these two areas was to be drastically different, and will provide much of the context for understanding the principal tenets of modern Armenian political thinking.

**Historical Background**

Collectively, the array of diplomatic, military and commercial issues associated with the decline in the late 19th century of the Ottoman Empire (referred to as the “sick man of Europe,” by Russian Tsar Nicholas I) was known as the “Eastern Question.” Those issues that dealt with the conditions of Armenians living on the territory of the Ottoman Empire and the consequent rise of Armenian national self-consciousness – an

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3 “Turkish Armenia” was understood typically to include the six eastern vilayets of the Ottoman Empire: Erzerum, Van, Bitlis, Diarbakir, Harput and Sivas. See Libaridian, Gerard J., *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004) p.19. Given the historical and political sensitivities of territorial issues, I will use quotation marks when referring to the two parts of what most Armenians consider their historic nation.
integral subset of the “Eastern Question” – became known commonly as the “Armenian Question.”

By the 1890s, tensions between Turks and Armenians in eastern Anatolia (‘western Armenia’) reached a boiling point. Armenian nationalists resisted by force of arms increasingly severe treatment at the hands of the Ottoman authorities. From 1894-1896, wide-spread massacres of Armenians, largely perpetrated by Kurdish troops, took place throughout the region. Tragically, the result was a death toll of approximately 100,000 Armenians.

In 1913, a group of nationalistic Young Turk officers led by Enver Pasha took control of the government and established a military regime. A marked shift in policy driven by aggressive Turkish nationalism and Pan-Turkish expansionism followed, leading Turkey into World War I on the side of Germany in 1914. For Armenians, the onset of World War I found them in a precarious position, divided between Turkey and Russia, now belligerents in the Great War.

*World War I*

In late 1914, a large Turkish army marched against tsarist Russian forces on the Caucasian front. Turkish forces enjoyed successes initially, but the harsh winter of upland Anatolia weakened the force which suffered a serious defeat at the Battle of Sarikamish in December 1914. Subsequently, Turkish forces were routed in early 1915 by the Russians. After the battles, Ottoman Armenians “fled to areas occupied by the Russians, confirming in Turkish minds the treachery that marked the Christian

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4 Simon Payaslian says “more than 100,000 (and by some estimates about 300,000)”, *The History of Armenia: From the Origins to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.120.
On the Caucasus Front, the continuing Russian advances led to tragedy. The Turks, bitter at their losses of men and land, blamed the local Armenian population for cooperating with the Russian invaders. Starting on April 8, tens of thousands of Armenian men were rounded up and shot. Hundreds of thousands of women, old men and children were deported southward across the mountains…. 

Throughout 1915 and much of 1916, mass deportations and massacres in effect eliminated the Armenian population in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire.

Historian Ronald Suny summarized the dreadful result:

Estimates of the Armenians killed in the deportations and massacres of 1915-1916 range from a few hundred thousand to 1,500,000. Whatever the actual number of those killed, the result was the physical annihilation of Armenians in the greater part of historic Armenia, the final breaking of a continuous inhabitation of that region by people who called themselves Armenians.

The Armenian Question in Ottoman Turkey had, for all intents and purposes, been resolved tragically through what has been described as “the extinction of Turkish or Western Armenia in a series of deaths through deportations, massacres, disease, famine and war which the Armenians and many others refer to as the first genocide of the twentieth century.” Collective memory of the 1915 ‘genocide’ would become the most fundamental element of modern Armenian national identity. One scholar, in fact, has stated that:

It is impossible to understand twentieth-century Armenian identity…

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8 Denise Aghanian, The Armenian Diaspora: Cohesion and Fracture (Lanham, Md: the University Press of America, 2007) pp.17-18. In acknowledgement of the highly-charged and extremely polarized political, legal and historical debate that wages about the use of the word ‘genocide’ to describe the 1915-1916 atrocities, the word herein is enclosed in quotations marks.
without situating the Genocide at its very centre. This elimination from their ancient lands is seen as the ultimate ‘catastrophe’ by Armenians. The Genocide itself, and its subsequent denial by Turkish authorities, became the defining moment – the ‘founding symbol’ – of contemporary Armenian identity.  

In addition to the large number of Armenians who were deported to Mesopotamia, thousands of Armenian refugees streamed into the Caucasus where, together with their co-ethnics, they developed a national political consciousness that increasingly viewed Armenian interests as coinciding with those of Russia. Russian victory on the Caucasian Front, where the Tsarist army occupied much of ‘western’ Armenia, was considered of paramount importance to the future of the Armenian nation. Revolutionary developments in Russia, however, were to frustrate Armenian pan-national aspirations.

With the overthrow of Russian Tsar Nicholas II in the February Revolution of 1917, military discipline collapsed and Russian troops abandoned the Caucasian Front in droves. The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 and the ensuing civil war effectively ended Russian rule in the Caucasus. In the face of growing anarchy in the region, the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic was proclaimed in April 1918. Divergent interests, particularly as regards the advance of the Ottoman Turks towards Transcaucasia, split the federation after just more than a month. In May 1918, in rapid succession, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia declared independence as separate republics. While Azerbaijan welcomed the advance of the Turks, Georgia sought the protection of the Germans, leaving Armenia isolated in the region, anxiously seeking

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10 Firuz Kazemzadeh, op. cit. p105. See Chapter Five, note 1.
support from one or another of the Great Powers.

At the Paris Peace Conference aspirations for a ‘Greater Armenia’ were encouraged by allied leaders, especially U.S. President Woodrow Wilson. In May 1920, President Wilson petitioned Congress to authorize the United States to assume a mandate over Armenia but was rebuffed.\(^\text{11}\) Nonetheless, in the Treaty of Sevres, signed in August 1920 by the Entente Powers and Turkey, Armenian independence was recognized and determination of the Armenian-Turkish frontier was submitted by the Supreme Council to the President of the United States for arbitration. Wilson’s subsequent decision on the Armenian-Turkish boundary granted Armenia much of eastern Anatolia or ‘western Armenia’.\(^\text{12}\) Unfortunately for the Armenians, the Treaty of Sevres was never ratified.

When Russian Bolsheviks, prompted by western intervention in the Russian civil war, found common cause with Turkish nationalists, who railed against Allied plans for partitioning, Armenia found itself “between the Soviet anvil and the Turkish hammer.”\(^\text{13}\) In September 1920, the Kemalist nationalist movement in Turkey marched on Armenia to resolve by force of arms the dispute over the eastern Anatolian provinces (‘western Armenia’).\(^\text{14}\) Heavily outnumbered, ill-equipped, and demoralized, the Armenian army was no match for the advancing Turks. Armenia called on the Allied powers for military assistance, but received none and sued for peace. The Turks demanded that Armenia


\(^{13}\) Ronald Suny, *Looking toward Ararat*, p.130.

renounce the Treaty of Sevres, forsaking territorial claims to ‘western Armenia.’ With but little choice, Armenia agreed.

*Sovietization of Armenia*

Having taken Baku in early 1920 and proclaimed a Soviet Republic in Azerbaijan, the Bolsheviks, hoping to blunt the Turkish advance, ordered the 11th Red Army to march on Armenia from Azerbaijan. Entering Armenian territory, the Bolsheviks, “…insisted that Armenia’s salvation lay in becoming a Bolshevik state, denouncing the Treaty of Sevres, and cutting its ties to the West.” In the face of unrelenting Turkish advances, Armenian leaders agreed and the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia was declared in December 1920. Despite Armenian hopes, the Soviets did not confront Turkey to redress Armenia’s territorial issues. Indeed, in October 1921, the Soviets (including the four Soviet republics of Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) and the Turks signed the Treaty of Kars granting to Turkey most of the territories in dispute. To the present day, many Armenians reject the Treaty of Kars as the basis for the settlement of issues with Turkey and uphold the Treaty of Sevres as more legitimate. This view continues to be important in current foreign policy debates, as will be seen later in this chapter.

The Soviet Republic of Armenia lasted seven decades, from 1921-1991. It is beyond the scope of this study to review in any depth the Soviet-era history of Armenia. It is nevertheless important to note that a measure of Armenian nationalism continued to exist throughout the period. In the less repressive atmosphere of the post-Stalin Soviet

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Union, Armenian nationalism grew. This was especially evident when on April 24, 1965, on the margins of a quiet, official commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the 1915 ‘genocide,’ thousands of Armenians demonstrated in Yerevan demanding Turkey return Armenian lands.  

**The Collective Historical Experience**

The Armenian nation, having survived frequent wars, great power conflicts, religious and ethnic persecutions, is imbued with a profound sense of isolation, loss, vulnerability and historical injustice. Both reflecting and reinforcing collective memories, the voluminous scholarship on Armenian history has established, over the course of time, an accumulation of traditionally-held, generalized lessons and beliefs. Together they represent the collective experience on Armenia’s place in the world, and its relations with neighboring powers. These lessons and beliefs have been, to a large degree, promulgated throughout the widespread Armenian diaspora, that is, Armenians who were dispersed from their historic homelands.

**The Armenian Diaspora**

Dispersion and exile have been common throughout the history of the Armenian nation. As a result of the massacres and deportations of the 1915-1916 ‘genocide,’ a large number of ‘western’ Armenians emigrated to ‘eastern’ Armenia. An equally large number dispersed throughout the Middle East, Europe (including Russia) and the United States, building substantial and well-organized diaspora communities in the host states.

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18 Ibid. p.120 and Ronald Suny, *Looking toward Ararat*, p.186.
The Sovietization of the Republic of Armenia led to a distinct polarization of national views within the Armenian Diaspora based primarily on attitudes towards Soviet rule.\(^{20}\) The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (or Dashnaktskutiun) – the principal political party that had led the independent Republic of Armenia – considered itself the government-in-exile, and was pro-independence and anti-Soviet. Other diaspora groups either accepted or even welcomed Soviet rule as necessary based on Armenia’s perilous geopolitical environment and difficult history, believing that the survival of the Armenian nation depended on close association with Russia.

After the 1920 fall of the independent Republic of Armenia, the Dashnak Party became the leading political organization in the Diaspora. Their political platform was based on pursuit of the ‘Armenian Cause’ (usually rendered from Armenian as ‘Hay Tad’). The Armenian Cause could be summarized by the slogan adopted as the basis for its political program by the Dashnak Party while still in power: “Free, Independent and United Armenia.”\(^{21}\) This slogan informed the political efforts of the Dashnaks, though with subtle changes in emphasis over the years. By the early 1970s, the Dashnak position was increasingly focused on genocide recognition and was, as a result, less anti-Soviet, and more anti-Turkish.\(^{22}\)

Contemporary observers and analysts describe the Armenian Cause as including


\[^{21}\text{Gerard Libaridian,}\text{ The Challenge of Statehood,}\ p.81.\]

\[^{22}\text{M.M. Gunter,}\text{ “Transnational Armenian Activism,”}\ p.41; Gerard Libaridian,}\text{ The Challenge of Statehood,}\ pp.82, 128; Ronald Grigor Suny,}\text{ Looking towards Ararat,}\ p.228; Denise Aghanian,}\text{ The Armenian Diaspora, p.105.}\]
principally ‘genocide’ recognition and territorial claims to a greater Armenian homeland. This conclusion is borne out in a communiqué issued jointly by the three principal Diaspora groups in 1987. On a list of demands made in the communiqué, the first two were:

1. that the Turkish government, as the heirs of the Ottoman Governments, recognize the Armenian Genocide;

2. that Turkey return the historic homeland to the Armenian people[.]

With a largely parallel process of identity formation in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, the major tenets of a generally-accepted Armenian collective historical experience were discernible. This collective experience was shaped primarily by two major events over the course of the last century: the 1915-1916 ‘genocide’ and the history of the first Republic of Armenia. Among these historically-based beliefs, of primary importance to an analysis of contemporary Armenian strategic alignment behavior are the traditional views that developed regarding Turkey, Russia, and the West.

*Turkey – Eternal Enemy*

The conventional Armenian view of Turkey was described incisively by historian Richard Hovannisian, who said, “For Armenians, Turkey has been the scourge of history.” In the Armenian Diaspora, in Soviet Armenia and in post-Soviet, independent

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25 Razmik Panossian describes the formation of Armenian national identity as a “dual-track” process, taking place in parallel both in the diaspora and in the state, with the diaspora playing a central role, as he says: “… in some ways replacing the role of the state …” Razmik Panossian, “Homeland-diaspora relations,” in Herzig and Kurkchiyan, *The Armenians*. p.242.

Armenia, Turkey has been viewed as an eternal threat, a dangerous enemy, based first and foremost on the memory of the 1915-1916 ‘genocide.’ Illustrative of this view is Hovannisian’s observation that, “For most Armenians, Turkey remains the genocidal regime par excellence.”

The centrality of Turkey in Armenian threat calculations was summarized by one observer who noted, “Armenians seem to believe their survival – regardless of how they survive – means victory over Turkey.”

While the historically-derived view of Turkey as eternal enemy has been held throughout the Armenian nation, it has been most prevalent within the Diaspora. Noting this, historian Ronald Suny said, “The Armenian Genocide of 1915, in many ways one of the most potent sources of twentieth-century Armenian identity, appears to resonate far more loudly in the Armenian diaspora communities than in the republic itself ….”

Explaining this difference, a former cabinet level official said, “In the main, the Diaspora was dispossessed by Turkey. For eastern Armenians, Turkey is a threat, but also a neighbor with which we must get along.” As Armenia moved towards independence in the late 1980s, differences between Diaspora and homeland perceptions of Turkey would play a central role in the formation of Armenia’s foreign policy.

A second historical event of major significance that has compounded the perception of Turkey as an enemy was the Turkish belligerence against the independent Republic of Armenia and the Republic’s subsequent collapse and Sovietization. One Armenian political analyst described Turkey as the central threat to both the Armenian

27 Ibid
nation (based on the 1915 ‘genocide’) and to the Armenian state (based on 1918-1920).\textsuperscript{31} Echoing this view, one senior Armenian official noted, “The First Republic sealed the lesson. Russia was our eternal friend, Turkey our eternal enemy.”\textsuperscript{32}

\textit{Russia – Eternal Friend and Protector}

On the basis of collective historical memory, Armenian conventional wisdom views Russia as savior, protector and friend. This view has its roots in the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century struggles between the Persian, Ottoman and Tsarist empires for control over the Caucasus. During that period, Armenians came to see their Russian co-religionists as liberators and protectors against the Muslim Ottomans and Persians. Reflecting the common view of this period in Armenian history, one senior government official said, “The incorporation of Armenia into the Russian Empire in 1828 was a positive, progressive step, particularly when compared to the alternatives of being part of the Islamic Persian or Ottoman Turkish empires.”\textsuperscript{33}

The view of Russia as savior was reinforced in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century by the 1915 ‘genocide’ and the short-lived experience of the First Republic of Armenia, two seminal historical events that demonstrated the basic necessity of Russian protection and friendship to defend Armenia against the Turkish threat. Professing it sufficient to “look into the folds of history,” Zori Balayan, an original member of Armenia’s independent movement in the late 1980s, stated, in a 1989 session of the Armenian Supreme Soviet: “One thing is clear: the Armenian and Russian peoples have together shed blood against the common enemy in order to see Armenia enter the structure of a unified Russian state.

\textsuperscript{31} Roundtable discussion with author organized by the Spectrum Center for Strategic Analysis, Yerevan, July 16, 2007.
\textsuperscript{32} Interview with author. July 15, 2007.
\textsuperscript{33} Interview with author. July 17, 2007.
And Armenia did enter that state, by escaping from the fatal and barbaric Ottoman rule.” One Armenian cabinet level official described the choice facing independent Armenia in 1920 on the eve of Sovietization as “salvation or occupation” and concluded that had it not been for the Red Army, not even ‘eastern’ Armenia would have survived. In addition to physical protection, the considerable religious and linguistic autonomy Armenia enjoyed under the Soviet regime helped preserve, in the eyes of many, the cultural uniqueness of the Armenian nation.

To a significant degree based on its unique historical experience, Armenia thus developed a traditional foreign policy orientation towards Russia. The foundation of this orientation is the threat perceived from Turkey, again based fundamentally on historical experience. The typical view of the West in Armenia, considered in the next section, is also conditioned by historical memory.

*The West – Hope and Disillusion*

Lessons drawn from the formative period of the First Armenian Republic inform contemporary Armenian views of the United States and the West as they do views of Turkey and Russia. By the end of World War I, Armenia had aligned itself with the Entente Powers. An Armenian delegation arrived at the Paris Peace Conference confident their support to the allied cause would be rewarded in the terms of the peace settlement. Armenians were encouraged by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson’s

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36 When the Republic of Armenia delegation arrived in Paris, a second Armenian delegation representing ‘western’ Armenians and Armenians in diaspora was already there. Ultimately the two delegations presented a united front, requesting the territory of the Armenian state be extended from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. More detail on the issue of Armenian representation in Paris can be found at: Simon Payaslian, *The History of Armenia*, pp.153-154; and George Bournoutian, *A Concise History of the Armenian People*, p.300.
emphasis on national self-determination in the Fourteen Points. Armenian hopes were dashed, however, when the U.S. Senate refused in May 1920 to accept a mandate over Armenia. The Treaty of Sevres, signed in August 1920 by the Allies and the Ottoman Empire, offered some hope that the allies would support Armenia’s aspirations. However, Kemalist Turkey’s refusal to acknowledge the terms of the treaty and continued aggression eventually would dampen these hopes as well.

Hovanissian described the subsequent fate of Armenia: “Placed in an inescapable vise formed by the Turkish Nationalists and the Soviet Red Army, the Armenian government had to cede half of Russian Armenia to Turkey and save the rest of the country by relinquishing power and acquiescing in the proclamation of Soviet Rule.”

The absence of decisive western support to Armenia’s independence in 1920 is remembered today. One senior government official said, “We believed promises by the Entente that it would establish Armenia’s borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Yet the borders were ultimately determined by Russia and Turkey based on military realities on the ground. The Dashnaks believed the West would save Armenia. They were wrong.”

The unwillingness of the West to deploy military forces to protect Armenia is often cited as an important lesson derived from the experience of the First Republic. To this end, one Armenian government official said, “In 1920 we counted on the West, but they provided no military forces. The military forces were Russian and Kemalist Turk.” After noting repeated attempts by Armenia to gain Western support, Hovannisian concluded: “Western diplomatic support without military intervention only

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aggravated Armenian suffering. This is a major historical lesson that the present Armenian leaders may or may not heed, in view of the powerful draw of the West.”

In the absence of decisive support from the West, Armenia was faced with its more traditional geopolitical conundrum, its fate resolved by the ebb and flow of neighboring empires. Suny suggested that, “Without Western support Armenia survived as an independent state only so long as her two most powerful neighbors, Russia and Turkey, could not physically threaten her.” Compounding the lesson on western unreliability, was the stark reality that has come to define Armenia’s geopolitical position between Turkey and Russia. Again, Ronald Suny articulates this well:

If the two powers were evenly matched or in alliance, Armenia was likely to be divided between them. This outcome was not a new occurrence in Armenian history. For thousands of years, Armenia had lain between great rival empires, and it was almost a law of Armenian history that she could enjoy autonomy or independence only when the great empires on her borders were weak, distracted by more important affairs in other parts of the world, or so evenly balanced one with the other that they were willing to accept a relatively autonomous Armenian buffer state between them. [emphasis added]

Armenia Moves Towards Independence

When, in the late 1980s, the Soviet Union began to unravel and the Communist Party’s monopoly on political power began to erode, it was, in Armenia, lessons drawn from the past that provided the framework for addressing the novel geopolitical challenges the fledgling republic would face. As political movements emerged in many of the Republics of the Soviet Union, independent political activity coalesced initially in Armenia around environmental issues. Typical of many parts of the Soviet Union,

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41 Ronald Grigor Suny, Looking towards Ararat, p.129.
42 Ibid. p.126.
Armenia had suffered ecological degradation due to heavy industrialization, mismanagement and negligence during the Soviet period. An embryonic environmental movement organized demonstrations of several thousands in 1987 to protest a toxic chemical plant in Yerevan and the potentially hazardous nuclear plant, Medzamor, located outside Yerevan near major geological fault lines. Yet Armenian national politics, set in motion by environmental issues, soon galvanized around political, economic and historical concerns. Foremost among these was the developing political situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, a predominantly Armenian populated region in the neighboring Soviet republic of Azerbaijan.

**Nagorno-Karabakh**

Like many important developments in the Caucasus, the bitter divisiveness of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict had historical roots that could be found in the political developments immediately following World War I and the geopolitical rivalries of the Ottoman, Tsarist and British empires. With the emergence of the three independent Caucasus republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, ethnic and territorial tensions, previously submerged, surfaced. Growing unrest among ethnic Armenians against Azerbaijani control in Nagorno-Karabakh led, in March 1920, to an armed rebellion that was suppressed harshly by Azerbaijani troops with hundreds killed. When both

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43 Competing Armenian and Azerbaijani historical interpretations base respective claims to Nagorno-Karabakh on ethno-historical accounts often dating as far back as the 4th century. For the purposes of this study there is no productive reason to engage in that debate. I instead will follow the reasoning of Stuart Kaufman who says, “… Nagorno-Karabakh has “historical roots” which include both genuine precedents going back about a century and more dubious interpretations of much earlier history.” (Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: the Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001) p.40. de Waal also questions the idea of Nagorno-Karabakh as an “ancient conflict,” citing approvingly Laitin and Suny who suggest the conflict’s origins may be “shrouded in the mists of the twentieth century.” Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003) pp.126-127.
Azerbaijan and Armenia were Sovietized shortly thereafter, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was subsumed by decisions of the Soviet government which ultimately determined to assign Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan.\footnote{A good description of the Soviet decisions on Nagorno-Karabakh is in: Thomas de Waal, \textit{Black Garden}, pp.129-131.}


Armenians rapidly mobilized around the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh. Within a week of the resolution requesting transfer to Armenian jurisdiction, hundreds of thousands demonstrated their support in the streets of Yerevan. The demonstrations were significant as the first visible signs of large scale national mobilization in the Soviet Union. The growing national movement in Armenia was organized by an informal group of young, non-Party intellectuals not connected to the government, that came to be known as the “Karabakh Committee.”\footnote{Nora Dudwick, “Armenia, Paradise Lost?” in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, eds. \textit{New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations} (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.485.} In addition to supporting Nagorno-Karabakh, the Karabakh Committee served as the focus of Armenian national opposition to decisions made by the Soviet Union and the republic’s Soviet government.

The reaction in Azerbaijan to the mass of popular sentiment in Armenia for
unification of Nagorno-Karabakh was negative and powerful, as strong nationalist sentiments around the question of Nagorno-Karabakh were aroused there as well. On February 27, 1988, passions flared in the Azerbaijani industrial city of Sumgait, when, speaking at a rally of several hundred, Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia accused Armenians of murder and other atrocities. The demonstration turned violent, escalating into an uncontrolled two-day spasm of violence against local Armenians. Mobs armed with makeshift weapons brutally attacked Armenians and their homes while both Soviet and local government authorities reacted slowly, if at all. Soviet troops eventually entered Sumgait to stop the rioting, but not until more than 30 people had been killed. An escalating spiral of violence between Azerbaijanis and Armenians led eventually to full-scale war over Nagorno-Karabakh. Insomuch as the war is well-chronicled in sources cited previously (note 43), the details will not be examined here. The impact the outbreak and progress of the war had on the development of Armenia’s threat perceptions and its strategic orientation was, however, significant and will be examined presently.

In Armenia, the Sumgait violence was almost immediately described as the beginning of a new ‘genocide.’ Once again, the survival of a sizeable Armenian population located within a Muslim dominated political entity was threatened. Subsequently, the idea of a new ‘genocide’ was attached to the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. The comparison was made explicit when the first five Armenian casualties from the Nagorno-Karabakh war were buried at the Genocide Memorial in Yerevan.49

48 The account of the Sumgait events is based on Joseph R. Masih and Robert O. Krikorian, Armenia at the crossroads, (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1999) pp.7-8. Other balanced accounts are: Stuart Kaufman, Modern Hatreds, pp.63-65, and Thomas de Waal, Black Garden, pp.31-44.
49 This fact was related by an Armenian official during a tour of the Genocide Memorial and in an interview with the author. July 17, 2007.
Completing the analogy that compared the violence in Sumgait and the subsequent war in Nagorno-Karabakh with the 1915 Armenian ‘genocide,’ the Azerbaijanis, perpetrators of the new ‘genocide,’ were equated with the dreaded Turks. Describing this mindset, Richard Hovannisian said,

> The terms “massacre,” “pogrom,” and even “genocide” became current, and immediate, spontaneous associations with 1915 were made everywhere. The Azerbaijanis, related by race, language, and culture to the Turks, became in Armenian minds the same heartless people who had participated in the genocide of 1915.50

As Armenia moved towards independence, historical memories of Turkey as the cardinal threat to Armenian survival were revitalized and associated with Azerbaijan through the violence in Sumgait and the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Karabakh became, in the words of one Diaspora leader, the “last frontier of Armenian history.”51

In the wake of Sumgait and the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the traditional role ascribed to Russia as protector of Armenia against the threat posed by the Turks was called into question. Soviet interests as articulated by Mikhail Gorbachev, predicated on keeping the Soviet Union together, were increasingly incompatible with the burgeoning nationalist movement in Armenia. The apparent apathy with which Soviet officials approached the mayhem in Sumgait raised suspicions among the Armenian intelligentsia. One former senior official expressed such concerns: “The historic role of Russia as Armenia’s protector was challenged by Sumgait.”52

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52 Interview with author. February 16, 2008.
defender. The Kremlin decision not to transfer Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, and its efforts to stanch nationalist independence movements throughout the Soviet Union engendered, in Armenia, concerns about Russian intentions. At the same time, as Armenia’s movement towards independence gained momentum, Armenia’s history, and the lessons drawn therefrom, assumed a pivotal place in the national discourse.

A Reinterpretation of History

Throughout the former Soviet Union, the policy of glasnost allowed for a critical re-examination of Soviet history manifest in the desire to fill in the many ‘blank’ or ‘white spots’ of the past. As in Georgia at the time, the history of the post-World War I independent republic was a primary focus of this historical reassessment. A western researcher described a plethora of academic and popular articles on the history of the First Republic of Armenia as well as the symbolic and widespread proliferation of that Republic’s red, blue and orange tricolor flag and said, “After 1989, as Armenians moved towards sovereignty, they looked to 1918-1920 in search of inspiration.”

In addition to the centrality of the ‘genocide’ in Armenian political thought, the experience of the First Republic was fundamental. The anniversary of the founding of the First Republic of Armenia – May 28th – assumed an ever increasing symbolic importance in the discourse, second only to April 24th – the day of recognition of the Armenian ‘genocide’. Gerard Libaridian described the debate that occurred within Armenia at that time as, “… a debate that considered the relationship between the two most important and consequential events for Armenians in the twentieth century: the

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Genocide and the experience of the First Republic of Armenia, 1918-1920.”

In the debate that ensued, competing interpretations of the lessons to be drawn from the two consequential events were framed. The Karabakh Committee which had, in 1989, joined with other reform-minded groups and individuals to become the Armenian National Movement (ANM) was at the forefront of an historical reassessment process. Sharp differences emerged between the ANM and those who held to the more conventional views outlined previously, particularly as regards the perception of threats posed by neighboring states. In an assessment of the evolution of political views in Armenia at that time, one scholar noted, “From the beginning, one major area of disagreement was Armenia’s external orientation, most notably its future relations with Russia and Turkey.”

In the section which follows, a closer look at the Armenian National Movement’s views on relations with Armenia’s neighbors and, consequently, the country’s strategic orientation, will be undertaken. In the process, it is important to note how an essentially different interpretation of history than that traditionally held by Armenians led to quite different policy prescriptions.

The Ter-Petrosian Period

On August 23, 1990, the Armenian Supreme Soviet, led by the Armenian National Movement (ANM), adopted the “Declaration on the Independence of Armenia,”

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54 Gerard Libaridian, Modern Armenia, p.266. Anticipating the effort to tie the empirical and the theoretical strands of this study together in the concluding chapter, it is worthwhile to note these two events fit neatly into Robert Jervis’ conception that, “…a person learns most from events that are experienced firsthand, that influence his career, or that have major consequences for his nation.” [emphasis added]. Robert Jervis, Perception and Misperception in International Politics, p.235.

55 The ANM is also referred to variously as the Armenian Pan-national Movement (APNM) and, at times, the Pan-Armenian National Movement (PANM). ANM will be used herein. A detailed account of the development, personalities, views and activities of the Karabagh Committee is: Mark Malkasian, Ghara-bagh: The Emergence of the National Democratic Movement in Armenia. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996).

renaming the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic the Republic of Armenia, and declaring “…the beginning of the process of establishing an independent statehood.” In September 1991 the independence process would culminate with a referendum on secession from the Soviet Union. As the independence process unfolded, a thorough-going and emotionally charged debate on the future was centered on a reassessment of the past. Intellectuals who comprised the core of the Armenian National Movement outlined a new agenda for Armenia’s foreign relations.

Levon Ter-Petrosian, who led the ANM, served as parliamentary leader, and in October 1991 was elected the first president of independent Armenia, framed the context of the ANM approach as follows: “It is time, finally, that we study seriously the lessons of our bitter historical experience; instead of an audacious, romantic nation, we must become a cold, realistic and pragmatic nation,….” The intellectual basis of the ANM reassessment of history is presented in a series of essays, interviews and speeches (in English translation) compiled by Gerard Libaridian in *Armenia at the Crossroads: Democracy and Nationhood in the Post-Soviet Era.*

*The Three-Hundred-Year-Old Mistake*

One of the fundamental premises of the ANM’s new thinking on foreign policy was that Armenia had relied throughout its history on outside powers for protection and support. The idea was summarized most succinctly by the historian Rafael Ishkhanian who said, “When we look carefully at our political history during the last 300 years, we

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57 The Declaration is reprinted in English translation at: Gerard Libaridian, editor. *Armenia at the Crossroads.* pp.107-110.
58 Ibid. p.118.
59 Ibid. p. vii. Stephan Astourian provides detailed bibliographic data on Armenian sources for the main articles that defined this new approach” in “From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian,” note 64, p.17.
see that with one or two exceptions it was always based on reliance on the third force.”

It was axiomatic that the ‘third force’ on which Armenian relied was more powerful than herself, bringing security in one sense but dependency in another, given the inequality of the relationship. ANM theorists identified the West as having served the role of ‘third force’ at various times in Armenian history, and they dismissed the false promise of Western support. Yet, typically, the third force was understood to have been Russia and the argument against reliance on a ‘third force’ became, to a large extent, an argument against reflexive orientation towards Russia as ‘eternal friend.’ This view was expressed by a senior official from the Ter-Petrosian administration who said, “For three hundred years Russia has been telling us Turkey is your eternal enemy, Russia is your eternal friend. … We must have relations with Russia, but not at the price of independence or sovereignty.”

As Armenia moved towards independence in the late 1980s and early 1990s, challenges to the conventional thinking and Soviet historiography that portrayed Russia as Armenia’s eternal friend were raised. Indeed, an alternative historical narrative developed which, contrary to seeing Russia as historic savior, portrayed instead an, “…exploitative Russia which had betrayed Armenia’s interests to Turkey whenever expedient, and deliberately exacerbated Armenian fears of Turkey to discourage longings for independence.” The basic lesson drawn from this line of reasoning was that Russia would pursue its national interests in its relations with Turkey and that, “Armenia was

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62 Nora Dudwick, “Memory, Identity and Politics in Armenia,” pp.411-412. Dudwick describes competing views of Russia as savior and Russia as betrayer at pp.405-413.
expendable to the Soviets and always subordinate to Russia’s revolutionary goals.”

This reasoning was echoed by one senior official in the Armenian government of the time, who said, “We reviewed the history of the First Republic and concluded that Russia can’t be the only guarantor of our security. … An Imperial Russia is not our friend.”

In June, 1990, while many Armenians urged caution, ANM member (and later Prime Minister) VazGen Manukian pressed for independence from the Soviet Union in an influential essay titled, “It is Time to Jump off the Train.” Yet, though advocating strongly for independence from the USSR, the ANM position was not anti-Russian. Said one official, “We didn’t want to lose Russia, we just didn’t want to rely on them solely for our security.” Ishkhanian went further, “Not to rely on Russia, not to make plans based on its power does not mean to be enemies with Russia. Let us be friends, but let us not rely on them, be so fully devoted to them, believe so much that they are our saviors.”

The new thinking that emerged about Russia and the questions it raised about Armenia’s strategic orientation was based, in the first instance, on an alternative view of history. The historical basis for the second pillar of traditional Armenian thinking on foreign relations – the view of Turkey as eternal enemy – was, above all, the 1915 ‘genocide.’ In this case, the result of the critical scrutiny was not an historical reinterpretation, but, rather, a reassessment of what role this tragic history should play in

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65 Vazgen Manukian, “It is Time to Jump off the Train,” in Gerard Libaridian, editor. *Armenia at the Crossroads,* pp.51-86.
policy decisions.

_Relations with Turkey - The Role of the ‘Genocide’ in Foreign Policy_

A fundamental tenet of the new thinking promulgated by the Armenian National Movement was the need to normalize relations with all neighboring states, including Turkey. In relations with Turkey the ANM believed it was a mistake to put the ‘genocide’ and the pursuit of its recognition at the center of policy. Explaining the ANM’s reasoning, Gerard Libaridian, who served as a foreign policy advisor to Ter-Petrosian, and has written extensively about the political philosophy of Ter-Petrosian and the ANM, states, “Looking at the Genocide as a political rather than historical event was bound to limit independent Armenia’s options and might lead to a repetition of historical mistakes.”68 Neither the historical fact of the ‘genocide,’ nor its significance were in dispute. The question was on what role genocide recognition should play in foreign policy. Libaridian phrased the question as, “…how to interpret the event, how to analyze the policies and strategies of the First Republic, how to view the current state of world and regional affairs, and, above all, how to imagine the future.”69 Evident in these comments is the central role historical interpretation played in framing policy choices. While the ANM’s conclusions differed from traditional Armenian thinking, they were based, no less, on efforts to discern lessons of history.

The debate over the appropriate role of the ‘genocide’ in Armenian foreign policy was acute as the Armenian Supreme Soviet prepared the 1990 Declaration on Independence. Ter-Petrosian and the ANM argued against including a ‘genocide’ clause in the declaration. One former senior government official framed the ANM view as, “If

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69 Ibid. p.268.
genocide was first, independence was second. We believed that independence was first.”

For others, particularly in the Diaspora, genocide recognition, historic rights and territorial restitution were the foundation stones of policy. In the 1990 declaration, a compromise in the language was reached stating, “The Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of [achieving] international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia.” After the Declaration on Independence was passed, Ter-Petrosian and the ANM were assailed for having abandoned the Armenian Cause.

The ANM reinterpretation of history led to a different approach to Armenian-Turkish relations; an approach that would not be based on the ‘genocide’ nor its recognition. More traditional Armenian thinkers disagreed fervently with the new worldview propounded by Ter-Petrosian and the ANM, and continued to perceive Turkey as the principal threat to Armenian sovereignty and independence. In doing so, they often raised the specter of pan-Turkism which they believed to be as ominous in 1990 as it was in 1920. From their side, the ANM dismissed Pan-Turkism as no longer relevant in a world where Turkey pursued a national and secular, rather than imperial, path. Moreover, the ANM believed pan-Turkism was a “scarecrow” that distorted Armenia’s past and encouraged Russian imperialism.

For the ANM, the cornerstone of a prudent foreign policy for an independent Armenia was normalization of relations with all

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71 The 1990 Declaration on Independence is reprinted in Gerard Libaridian, Armenia at the Crossroads, pp.107-110.
72 Stephan Astourian, “From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian,” p.20.
73 Gerard Libaridian, Armenia at the Crossroads, pp.4,26. Based on a reading of Armenian sources, Stephan Astourian makes this same point in “From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian,” p.26-27. In Armenia at the Crossroads, a speech by Zori Balayan, “The Threat of Pan-Turanism,” is presented as a representative example of the school of thought that saw Turkish expansion as a resurgent threat. pp.151-154.
neighbors, which meant, in the first case, Turkey. Fear of Turkey, according to ANM thinking, had distorted perceptions of Armenia’s national interests and clouded its strategic thinking.\(^74\) Determined to break from the traditional mindset, the ANM moved boldly to translate its new ideas into action as they led the government.

Summary – New Thinking vs. Traditional Views

Before examining the result of the ANM reinterpretation of history as measured by the effectiveness of its foreign policy, it will be useful to summarize the major tenets of both the ‘new thinking’ and the conventional wisdom. Gerard Libaridian characterized the two schools of thought on foreign policy orientation as “pragmatic” and “ideological” and identified their principal tenets.\(^75\) The main precepts of the ideological or conventional school, consisting, according to Libaridian, of Armenian communists, nationalists and diasporans, were:

- Turkey is an eternal enemy, based on “historical” antagonism;
- Unchanging circumstances compel a Russian orientation;
- Foreign policy and security issues flow from alliance with Russia;
- Alignment North-South with Russia and, to a lesser extent, Iran, would counter a developing East-West axis from Turkey to Azerbaijan.\(^76\)

The “new thinking” or pragmatic school, represented by the Armenian National Movement and its leader, Levon Ter-Petrosian, derived a different set of principles from their reinterpretation of Armenia’s history. Their foreign policy approach was based on the following tenets:

- Armenia had relied for too long on a “third force”; Loss of independence was the result;

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\(^76\) Ibid. p.33.
– No States were considered, a priori, friend or foe;
– Normalization of relations with all neighbors was a main goal;
– Seek long-term security through diplomacy and regional cooperation;
– The ‘genocide’ should be left off Armenia’s political agenda.  

Ter-Petrosian and the ANM in Power

When the Armenian National Movement was formed, incorporating the Karabakh Committee along with other reform-minded groups, some were concerned that the movement’s primary focus on Nagorno-Karabakh would be diluted or subsumed by other issues on the national agenda. Yet as events unfolded in the Caucasus, no issue would be more significant for both Armenia and Azerbaijan than the worsening tension of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Indeed, the struggle over Nagorno-Karabakh would bedevil the new thinking in Armenian foreign policy, undermining the best laid plans.

In early 1991, Armenia, led by the ANM, declined to participate in the scheduled March 1991 referendum on a new Union treaty that was to redefine the relationship between Russia and the other republics of the Soviet Union. Charting a different course, Armenia would instead, in accordance with existing Soviet laws, begin the process of secession from the Soviet Union. One effect of Armenia’s boycott of the referendum and its movement towards independence was that Gorbachev and the Soviet government increasingly supported Azerbaijan in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan, led at that time by Communist First Secretary Ayaz Mutalibov, had participated in the referendum and voted, according to official results, overwhelmingly in favor of the new

77 These are derived from Ibid. p.33, and Stephan Astourian, “From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian,” pp.17-19.  
Fueling a downward spiral, Moscow’s cooperation with Azerbaijan further exacerbated tensions between an independent-minded Armenia and the Soviet Union. On September 21, 1991, in the wake of the failed August coup in Moscow, Armenians voted overwhelmingly (99.31%) to secede from the Soviet Union, pushing the Soviet Union nearer the breaking point. In September 1991, Levon Ter-Petrosian was elected President of Armenia, determined to pursue, “…a realistic foreign policy unburdened by the weight of the past…” and “…resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis.” Subsequent experience showed the pursuing both goals simultaneously posed a challenging dilemma.

In December 1991, as the Soviet Union collapsed, Armenia signed the Alma-Ata Declaration, joining the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The decision to join the CIS was explained by a senior official in the Armenian government of that time as an effort to establish good relations with Yeltsin’s Russia, which was seen as a very different entity than Gorbachev’s Soviet Union, democratic rather than imperialistic. Joining the CIS was not seen as inconsistent with the overall goal of good relations with all of Armenia’s neighbors. Further, it was hoped that a democratic Russia would be more sympathetic to Armenia’s position on Nagorno-Karabakh than Gorbachev had been.

**New Thinking Derailed – Nagorno-Karabakh**

With the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991, the

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81 Stephan Astourian, “From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian,” p.2.
Nagorno-Karabakh conflict became an interstate, rather than an internal, dispute. The moderating effect of the central Soviet government was lost, and the parties to the conflict began acting independently, triggering a dramatic escalation in violence. While the Ter-Petrosian government asserted the fighting was between Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijanis, the conflict, at least in the international arena, pitted Armenia and Azerbaijan against each other. As fighting waged in 1992, newly independent Armenia and Azerbaijan both endeavored to gain the support of other countries, particularly those in the immediate region. According to a senior official of the Ter-Petrosian administration, Armenia’s foreign policy goals at that time were first to solve the Karabakh problem and, secondly, to establish good relations with all of its neighbors, particularly with Turkey.\(^{83}\) From its side, the Turkish government of Suleyman Demirel initially maintained a neutral posture towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and seemed receptive to Armenian efforts at rapprochement.

By May 1992, the tide of the war in Karabakh had turned decisively in favor of the Armenians and Turkey’s neutral stance became more untenable. On May 15, 1992, meeting in Tashkent, Armenia joined Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan in signing the CIS Collective Security Treaty, with the members pledging not to attack each other, and to defend each other against outside aggression.\(^{84}\) For the Armenian leadership, the Collective Security Treaty represented a defensive alliance that could help stabilize the situation in the Caucasus and would also provide support against a potential Turkish threat. Georgia did not join the Collective Security Treaty, nor did

\(^{83}\) Ibid.

Azerbaijan where a volatile domestic political situation precluded much discussion of the Treaty.

Within days of the signing of the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty, Armenian advances into key Azerbaijani territories beyond Nagorno-Karabakh moved the Turkish Foreign Ministry to caution Armenia that “…faits accomplis created through the use of force cannot be accepted.” The Turkish warning was followed quickly by responses from both Armenia and Russia. While visiting Moscow, on May 21, Armenian Foreign Minister Raffi Hovanissian noted Turkey’s growing “…political, economic and military support of Azerbaijan,” and raised concerns about possible Turkish military intervention in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and asked Russia to maintain Commonwealth armed forces on Armenia’s territory. In a May 22 press conference, Foreign Minister Hovanissian asserted that, “Armenia will not hesitate and will use its possibilities in accordance with the signed Tashkent May 15 Treaty on collective security in case of a Turkish military intervention.” Speaking in Lisbon, Portugal, on the same day, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev stated bluntly that Russia had warned Turkey “…in the event of an attack by the Turkish Armed Forces against Armenia, Russia will come to the latter’s rescue.”

Although as a matter of principle Armenian President Ter-Petrosian continued to strive for good relations with all neighbors, in practice relations with Russia improved while relations with Turkey worsened. Many in Armenia at the time saw this as a

86 Moscow Itar-Tass, 21May 92, in FBIS-SOV-92-100, p.55.
87 Moscow INTERFAX, 22 May 92, in FBIS-SOV-92-100, p.54.
vindication of the conventional view of Armenian history. One individual with long service in the Armenian government believed the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict galvanized for Armenians the familiar lessons of history related to national security and stated, “Our foreign policy orientation depends, first and foremost, on security. When our security is threatened, like during the Nagorno-Karabakh War, we find protection from Russia.”

Indeed, as the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh continued, an alignment pattern characterized by Russia and Armenia on one side and Turkey and Azerbaijan on the other came into sharper focus. Abulfaz Elchibey, the zealous, pro-Turkish, anti-Russian, nationalist leader of the Azerbaijan Popular Front, was elected President of Azerbaijan in June 1992 and contributed much to the growing convergence in Azerbaijan-Turkish relations. Moreover, suggestions of a military alliance between Turkey and Azerbaijan were common and led to expectations on all sides that such would be the case. On the other side, the Russian Defense Ministry – the principal Russian actor in Caucasus affairs at the time – increasingly seemed to favor Armenia in the conflict, although weapons and equipment were sold or provided to both sides.

By the time a cease-fire was agreed to, in May 1994, Armenian forces controlled Nagorno-Karabakh and considerable Azerbaijani territory around it – territory they control to the present day – to the south extending to the border with Iran, and to the west extending back to the Armenian border. Additionally, and more to the point of the present study, Armenia had embarked on a strategic partnership with Russia, focused initially on security and military affairs, that increasingly would define Armenia’s foreign policy orientation. The bold thinking and initial moves of Ter-Petrosian and the

Armenian National Movement to redirect Armenia’s strategic future foundered in Nagorno-Karabakh. While some progress in Armenian-Turkish relations was made, formal diplomatic relations were never established. Turkey explicitly tied improved relations with Armenia to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Prime Minister Demirel said, “Armenia’s maintaining good relations with Turkey depends on the country’s adopting a peaceful stand in Azerbaijan.”

Further, from among a list of Turkish conditions for improved relations passed to an Armenian government delegation, one was: “Armenia should agree to a cease-fire in Nagorno-Karabakh under conditions dictated by the government of Azerbaijan.”

After pointing out that Armenia had established diplomatic relations with Georgia and Iran, but not with Azerbaijan and Turkey, one observer concluded, “That has aligned Armenia on a north-south axis and precluded it from the other directions in its immediate vicinity. This orientation was not made by choice. It was compelled by the process of elimination.”

Echoes of a sense of resignation in Armenia’s foreign policy options were widespread both in and out of the government. A general belief that Armenia’s options were dictated by outside forces, not decided within, prevailed. Describing this situation, Masih and Krikorian said:

Turkish policy forced the Armenian leadership to seek a new security structure. It was during the heightened tensions in the summer of 1992, when Nagorno-Karabakh’s situation was desperate… that Armenia looked to Russia for recreating the security environment which existed on Armenia’s border with Turkey during the Soviet Union.

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91 Ibid.
93 Joseph R. Masih and Robert O. Krikorian, Armenia at the crossroads, p.102.
An official serving in the government at the time said, “Turkish support to Azerbaijan on Nagorno-Karabakh reinforced the view of Turkey as the historical threat to our security. We thus followed a political-military orientation towards Russia, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Collective Security Treaty.”  

The ensuing years of the Ter-Petrosian presidency saw a strengthening of Armenia’s military and political orientation towards Russia, and the advent of deeper economic cooperation. In addition to cooperation in the context of the Russian-led multilateral organizations identified in Table 2 (page 51), Armenia broadened cooperation with Russian on a bilateral basis. In March 1995, for example, Armenia and Russia signed a treaty providing Russia military basing rights in Armenia for 25 years. Moreover, according to analysts, in 1996 Armenia and Russia signed no fewer than eleven bilateral protocols covering military cooperation on a wide range of issues from training to operations and research.

The high point of Armenian-Russian relations under Ter-Petrosian came with the 1997 signing of a “Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance,” between him and Russian President Yeltsin. The treaty confirmed broad cooperation in the political, military-strategic, and economic spheres. Significantly, a major focus of the treaty was on strategic bilateral relations in the power generation and gas supply spheres. To this end, joint ventures and production-sharing arrangements were agreed. From this time on, the strategic bilateral relationship between Armenia and Russia would take on a

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decidedly economic, as well as military and political character.

**The Demise of Ter-Petrosian**

In February 1998, Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian resigned from office, a victim, as was his foreign policy orientation, of events in Nagorno-Karabakh, a struggling economy and poor relations with the Armenian Diaspora. Additionally, doubts surrounding the propriety of his reelection in 1996 had weakened Ter-Petrosian’s stature. On the economic front, outside investment was sorely lacking. A poorly managed privatization process combined with the lack of a reliable legal system and tax code to stifle foreign investment in Armenia. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development estimated that from 1991 to 1997, foreign direct investment (FDI) in Armenia was $102 million, while in 1998, under the first year of Robert Kocharian’s tenure and a more reasoned economic policy, FDI increased to $228 million.98

The proximate cause of Ter-Petrosian’s demise, however, was the fundamental disagreement with political opponents and allies over the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. Sharp differences on this issue precipitated a political crisis that led to his resignation.99 Ter-Petrosian’s seeming readiness to move towards a compromise solution on Nagorno-Karabakh in order to normalize international relations in the region reportedly was opposed by members of his own cabinet and by influential diasporan groups. In effect, Ter-Petrosian fell victim to opponents who contested his foreign policy

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99 It is generally understood that Ter-Petrosian resigned under pressure, particularly from key members of his own cabinet who opposed his move towards a compromise position on settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. Gerard Libaridian, who served six years as an advisor and member of the Ter-Petrosian foreign policy team, takes a broader view of the resignation, identifying different understandings among the leadership on the relationship between economic and social development and the continued state of “no war no peace.” See Gerard Libaridian, *The Challenge of Statehood: Armenian Political Thinking Since Independence* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blue Crane Books, 1999), pp.47-68.
orientation. Ironically, a day before Ter-Petrosian’s resignation, the Armenian parliament ratified the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance he had signed with Russian President Boris Yeltsin. The increasingly close relations between Armenia and Russia, demonstrated distinctly by the treaty, stood in sharp contrast to Armenian relations with Turkey which Ter-Petrosian, to the end, and to his detriment, attempted to normalize.

In the wake of Ter-Petrosian’s resignation, most analyses assessed negatively the legacy of his new thinking in foreign policy. As recently as 1996 LTP suggested the most important foreign policy achievement of his administration was the fact that, “…Turkey remained neutral in the Karabakh conflict and also the fact that in the last six years Armenian-Turkish relations added no new contradictions....”

Presenting a different verdict on Ter-Petrosian’s attempts to balance Armenia’s relations with Russia with those of other neighbors through a “southern orientation,” one analyst said, “…the ideas of the often-brilliant intellectuals that formed the Karabagh Committee failed the test of practice, at least during Ter-Petrosian’s tenure,” and further suggested, “In fact, what was at first a wise policy became, at least in the medium run, a humiliating embarrassment for most Armenians.” Ter-Petrosian’s long-time advisor, Gerard Libaridian, observed that, in the end, “Ter-Petrosian had nothing to show for the revolutionary thinking he had displayed.... Seven years of attempts to normalize, to rule out preconditions, failed, and the thinking reemerged in Armenia that Turkey is and may be in fact the eternal enemy and Ter-Petrosian was wrong.”

101 Stephan Astourian, “From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian,” p.27 and p.32.
The Kocharian Administration

In March 1998, a month after the resignation of Ter-Petrosian, Prime Minister Robert Kocharian, the former president of Nagorno-Karabakh who had been brought into the Armenian government by Ter-Petrosian, was elected President of Armenia. By 1998, the political context for the Kocharian administration was distinctly different from that which initially faced the Ter-Petrosian administration. In 1991, and later, the Ter-Petrosian administration had to deal with a war waged in Nagorno-Karabakh. By 1998, the May 1994 cease-fire had held for four years and President Kocharian’s foreign policy efforts were directed more towards maintaining the status quo in Nagorno-Karabakh and developing Armenia’s economy.

Initial Steps

Among the initial steps taken by the Kocharian administration, particularly noteworthy was endorsement of genocide recognition as a guiding principle of foreign policy – a distinct break with Ter-Petrosian’s policy. In further conciliatory moves towards the Diaspora, Kocharian immediately lifted a ban on the Dashnak Party that had been imposed by Ter-Petrosian in December 1994 and established a department in the Foreign Ministry to institutionalize Diaspora relations. Describing the shift in emphasis of the Kocharian administration’s foreign policy, one scholar said:

Almost immediately the new government reverted to a more traditional nationalism, one more congenial to the diaspora and in accord with the hard-line position adopted by the Karabakh government. Armenia reverted to a Russia orientation and reemphasized the genocide issue, always a source of pain and emotion for Armenians and a powerful wedge.

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The renewed emphasis on genocide recognition and diaspora relations was a shift towards a more conventionally nationalist approach to policy based on Armenia’s collective historical experience. The result was a tougher position on both genocide recognition and on Nagorno-Karabakh. In April 1998, Armenia’s newly appointed Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian, acknowledged the shift in emphasis saying, “…factors such as our historical past and traditions will be leaving their mark on the country’s foreign policy more than ever before.” At the same time, the Kocharian administration took great pains to craft a balanced approach to foreign relations. The self-styled approach to balanced relations they devised was called ‘complementarity.’

**Complementarity**

The principle of “complementarity” was the basis for Armenia’s foreign policy throughout the Kocharian administration and continues, to some extent, to the present. Complementarity was based on the desire to develop positive and productive relations with all of Armenia’s neighbors and with the major world powers. Several observers believed the policy was a hedging strategy based on lessons learned from the First Republic of Armenia in 1918-1920, when Armenia’s fate was determined by rapidly shifting great power interests. A senior official involved in conceiving the policy stressed it implied neither equilibrium nor balance. In fact, in any substantive area, cooperation could be deeper with one country than others. In the security arena, for

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107 Roundtable discussion with author organized by the Spectrum Center for Strategic Analysis, Yerevan, July 16, 2007.
example, relations were much closer with Russia. In economics, relations were perhaps closer with the west.\textsuperscript{108} Then Armenian Defense Minister Serge Sargsyan described the policy, in security terms, as, “…the premise that all of [Armenia’s] security arrangements in the context of the international environment are complementary and balancing components of the post-Cold War world order.”\textsuperscript{109}

The policy of complementarity as defined by the Kocharian administration did not differ significantly from the pragmatic policy approach pursued by Ter-Petrosian. Yet, a major focus of Ter-Petrosian’s policy was normalizing relations with Turkey. The policy of complementarity under the Kocharian administration was focused less on Turkey and more on striving for simultaneously good relations with Russia, on the one hand, and the West, on the other. Striking such a balance was not an easy task, and over the course of time, Armenia’s alignment and orientation shifted decidedly towards Russia. What was, in theory, a multi-directional approach, became less so, in practice. A senior official described the practical difficulty in implementing the policy as stemming from the fact that Russia, under President Putin, had a more pronounced zero-sum game mentality. Growing east-west tensions made it increasingly difficult for Armenia to maintain balance in its approach, and to refrain from taking sides.\textsuperscript{110}

\textit{Relations with Turkey}

The decision by the Kocharian administration to pursue genocide recognition as a central tenet in Armenia’s foreign policy returned history to a prominent place in

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{108} Interview with author. July 19, 2007.\
\textsuperscript{110} Interview with author. July 19, 2007.}
Armenia’s international discourse and reinforced the view of Turkey as Armenia’s primary enemy. One former senior official stated that pursuit of genocide recognition was the best antidote or defense against Turkish aggression.\footnote{Ibid.} While continuing the Ter-Petrosian administration’s position of not putting preconditions on normalization of relations with Turkey, Armenian Foreign Minister Oskanian regularly linked any improvement in regional cooperation and security to Turkey’s willingness to address the history of the ‘genocide.’ “We are hopeful that the day would come soon when the people with whom we have shared a long history are themselves ready to own up to the truth about their own history. Then and only then, can we move on together to build our regional cooperation and security arrangements ….”\footnote{Address to the Permanent Council Meeting of the OSCE. Vienna, Austria October 8, 1998 at: http://www.armeniaforeignministry.com/speeches/981008osce_vienna.html. See also, for example: Address in the British House of Lords, March 17, 1999 at: http://www.armeniaforeignministry.com/htms/speeches/house_of_lords.html. (Both accessed on March 29, 2009).}

Pursuit of genocide recognition had the effect of exacerbating the security dilemma between Armenia and Turkey. Armenia, in large part based on its historical experience, viewed Turkey as a threat and believed Turkey’s reconciliation with history would diminish that threat. From its side, Turkey viewed the recognition issue as part of a larger agenda that would eventually include territorial claims. This perception aggravated in Turkey the Sevres Syndrome, conjuring memories of the Treaty of Sevres and the planned, though never implemented, territorial dismemberment of Turkey at the hands of the allies.\footnote{See David L. Phillips, David L. Unsilencing the Past: Track Two Diplomacy and Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005) pp.39-40.} Mutual suspicions, based on threats derived in large part from historical events, fed increased competition, material and psychological. The depth of feeling on the Armenian side on this issue was expressed by President Kocharian in
September 2000 when he said, “The Armenian nation is unfortunately destined to carry the problems of the past century into the new Millennium. Turkey's continuing denial of the Genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire has been only intensifying our aspirations for historical justice.”

The current reality of Turkey’s continued support for Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute also contributed to Armenia’s perception of Turkey as a threat. Particularly troublesome in this regard was Turkey’s continued support of an Azerbaijani economic embargo. By closing its border with Armenia in 1993, Turkey had exacerbated already difficulty living conditions in Armenia. With two of its four borders closed, Armenia was dependent on transit through Georgia, to the north, for the bulk of its imports from Russia, and on Iran, to the south, to a lesser degree. Constrained, in this manner, geographically, Armenia’s dependence on Georgia represented a considerable risk, particularly given the unpredictability of relations between Georgia and Russia. Foreign Minister Oskanian summarized the Kocharian administration’s position on Turkey: “We see no progress in Turkey’s attitude to us and we do not understand this. Our common border is closed and Ankara's blockade leaves us with only Georgia as an outlet to the outside world, …. Turkey is lining up with Azerbaijan on the subject of Karabakh, but it is not a problem of concern to Turkey. Are we interfering in Cyprus?”

In 2005, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and President Kocharian exchanged letters in which they discussed the possible formation of a joint commission to review the

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116 “Oskanian on Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia, Turkey, Oil,” La Libre Belgique, 30 May-1 Jun 98, p.5. (accessed in World News Connection).
contentious issues between the two countries. Despite initial hopes on both sides, no agreement was reached. Armenian-Turkish relations were thus stalemated for the duration of the Kocharian period.

*Relations with Russia*

As the possibilities for progress in Armenian-Turkish relations deteriorated, on a parallel track relations between Armenia and Russia deepened. In the course of the Kocharian administration, the bilateral relationship with Russia grew closer in nearly every sphere. What had been a close relationship in the military and security sphere expanded greatly and was complemented by significant agreements in the economic and political spheres. In September 2000, Presidents Kocharian and Putin signed a declaration on allied cooperation for the twenty-first century that expanded upon the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance signed by Presidents Ter-Petrosian and Yeltsin in 1997.117

In the economic sector, for example, a 2002 assets-for-debt deal transferred from Armenia to Russia ownership of five state-owned industrial enterprises, including Armenia’s main thermal electricity plant, in exchange for relief of around $94 million in debt.118 In 2003, Armenia transferred ownership of six hydroelectric plants and management of the Metsamor nuclear plant to Russia’s state-run United Energy Systems (UES), deepening its economic dependence on Russia, particularly in the energy sector.119 This dependence gave rise to strategic vulnerabilities that Armenia was hard

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119 Ibid.
pressed to withstand.

When Russia’s Gazprom took the decision in early 2006 to charge “market prices” for gas provided to the former Soviet republics, Armenia, despite being a ‘strategic partner’ of Russia, was hit as hard as its neighbors, Georgia and Azerbaijan. As will be seen in Chapter Seven, Azerbaijan, with gas of its own, chose to no longer purchase gas from Russia and to supply gas to Georgia. Armenia’s near total dependence on Russian gas left it with little alternative but to bear the new costs. In subsequent discussions, Armenia was granted a three month delay before the new price was charged, but the delay was cold comfort.120

Remittances from Armenians living and working in Russia represent another potential economic vulnerability from which Armenia currently has no protection. Accounts vary on the overall contribution of remittances from Russia to the Armenian economy. One source quotes an official estimate of 10% of overall GDP, but suggests independent studies put the figure at closer to 25%, and a dollar value of 940 million dollars in 2005.121 While other sources put the figure somewhat less, there is no debate that Armenia is highly dependent economically on Russia.

As the type of structural economic dependencies noted here grow, Armenia is left with very little room for maneuver in its alignment policies. In this new millennium, Armenia’s strategic orientation, while officially described as multidirectional complementarity, appears to tend towards overdependence on Russia. The risks of this

are obvious, but perhaps unavoidable. Assessing the situation that had developed by 2006, one scholar said: “Armenia’s relations with Russia began as strategic partnership between two countries with a common regional policy and security outlook. However, over the past decade, that relationship evolved into an absolute dependence of Armenia on Russia in military, strategic and economic spheres.”

A former high-ranking official in the Ter-Petrosian administration echoed this view explaining, “Our relations with Russia aren’t a strategic partnership, they are vertical, not horizontal…. We have all but divested pockets of our sovereignty to Russia.”

Indeed, despite efforts to balance relations through cooperation with NATO and the United States, Armenia’s policy of complementarity, over time, became more and more asymmetrical. Armenia’s alignment with Russia, undertaken cautiously by Ter-Petrosian and focussed initially on security cooperation, had become, in the course of the Kocharian administration, a clear reliance on Russia based on economic and security dependence.

**Relations with the United States**

As noted previously, Armenia’s foreign policy of complementarity was intended to support close relations with the United States and the West, as well as with Russia. In that spirit, Armenia’s relations with the United States progressed satisfactorily throughout the Kocharian administration in the political, economic and security spheres. Notable among the various cooperative programs between the two countries in the economic sphere was the March 2006 signing of a Compact Agreement between the U.S.

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Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the Government of Armenia. Under the terms of the agreement, the U.S. would provide $235 million in funding to assist Armenia’s efforts to reduce rural poverty through improvement of Armenia’s agricultural sector. The MCC compact continues to serve as a positive symbol of the cooperative relationship between Armenia and the United States.

In the political sphere, bilateral relations between the U.S. and Armenia are given a significant boost by the large Armenian Caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives, and the organizational efforts of the Armenian National Committee of America and the Armenian Assembly of America. Support for bilateral programs is broad, and by all accounts, the programs are successful. Yet, notwithstanding the high level of bilateral relations in the political arena, Armenia’s strategic alignment choice places certain limits on its flexibility in the security arena.

In the security sphere, Armenia cooperates with the United States bilaterally, and with NATO through the Partnership for Peace Program. In contrast to Georgia and Azerbaijan, however, each of which has expressed aspirations to eventually become a member of NATO, Armenia has stated an interest in cooperating but not in becoming a member. Making this distinction clear, Armenia’s former Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian said, in 2004, “At present, our decision is to deepen relations with NATO without joining the alliance.” Armenia’s policy of complementarity, in this case, has

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125 A list of the members of the caucus is at: http://www.anca.org/hill_staff/armenian_caucus.php. Information on the work of the Armenian National Committee of America and the Armenian Assembly of America can be found on their respective websites: http://wwwanca.org/ and http://www.aaainc.org/ (all accessed on March 29, 2009).
supported cooperation with NATO and the West, while not threatening its strategic
to relationship with Russia and the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization.
Again, former Foreign Minister Oskanian noted the limits on Armenia’s strategic choice,
“Contradictions may appear only if Armenia raises the issue of its membership of NATO,
however, we have no plans on that score today.” Nonetheless, there were signs that
even a modest level of cooperation between Armenia and NATO caused concern in
Moscow.

Armenia’s strategic alignment in security terms have been defined fundamentally
by membership in the CSTO and ‘strategic partnership’ with Russia. Through the policy
of complementarity, Armenia has sought to maintain a balance in security relations and
has succeeded to the extent that relations between Russia and the West, between the
CSTO and NATO, have not forced Armenia or the other countries in the region to make a
choice between the two. In this regard, Armenia has been keenly aware of fluctuations in
the level of east-west tensions, and has had to respond accordingly.

Election of Serge Sargsyan

In February 2008, former Prime Minister and Nagorno-Karabakh native Serge
Sargsyan was elected to succeed Robert Kocharian as President of Armenia in an election
strongly contested by former president Ter-Petrosian. In early March, large scale public
demonstrations protesting the election outcome turned violent and several protestors and
a police officer were killed. It was amid considerable domestic unrest that Sargsyan was
sworn-in as Armenia’s third President since gaining its independence in 1991.

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127 Mediamax news agency, Yerevan, 16 Apr 04. BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit (accessed in
World News Connection).
(accessed in World News Connection).
Having served throughout the Kocharian administration as Defense Minister, Secretary of the National Security Council and later, as Prime Minister, President Sargsyan had played a central role in the development of foreign policy. In that respect, it could well be assumed that the cardinal points of Armenian foreign policy under a Sargsyan administration would approximate closely those under Kocharian. Indeed, as Secretary of the National Security Council (and Defense Minister), Sargsyan had chaired an interagency commission that developed the Armenian National Security Strategy adopted in February 2007. The document defines complementarity as the basic principle in Armenian foreign policy, identifies bilateral relations with Russia as a ‘strategic partnership’ serving as a principal component of political-military strategy, while also listing participation in the Collective Security Treaty Organization and cooperation with the U.S., NATO and other countries and organizations as important. In addressing relations with Turkey, the 2007 National Security Strategy says, “Armenia aspires for the universal recognition and condemnation, including by Turkey, of the Armenian Genocide, and sees it both as a restoration of historical justice and as a way to improve the overall situation in the region, while also preventing similar crimes in the future.”

In a March 2008 letter to the editors of The Washington Post, co-written with opposition candidate Arthur Baghdasaryan, then president-elect Sargsyan identified the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh as the primary external challenge facing Armenia and highlighted the challenge of normalizing relations with Turkey, while continuing to push

130 Ibid. p.128.
for recognition of the Armenian ‘genocide.’\textsuperscript{131} It is clear that in the face of the continuing perception of Turkey as a possible threat to Armenia, primacy in security relations will be maintained with Russia and the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization). In July 2008, during an official visit to Moscow, President Sargsyan, pushed in a press interview to identify his foreign policy orientation, particularly his views on NATO, stated that Armenia’s foreign policy agenda did not include NATO membership and emphasized that Armenia was part of a single alliance – the CSTO.\textsuperscript{132}

At the same time, however, President Sargsyan took steps intended to explore normalization of relations with Turkey, extending an invitation to Turkish President Gul to attend an Armenian-Turkish World Cup qualifying soccer game in Yerevan in September. The proposal, dubbed ‘football diplomacy’ by pundits recalling U.S.-Chinese ‘ping pong diplomacy,’ reportedly included a readiness on the part of the Sargsyan administration to form a commission of Armenian and Turkish historians whose charter it would be to examine the mass killings and deportations of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire from 1915-1918.\textsuperscript{133} Reflecting their position on the centrality of memory and historical justice, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, a part of the coalition government, issued a statement saying, “The ARF Bureau is adamant that the facts of the Armenian Genocide not be up for discussion, and that no high-ranking official representing Armenia have a different approach…. Universal recognition of the genocide is vital for the existence, security, and future of our people and statehood.”\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{132} “Armenian President Sargsyan Happy with CSTO, Optimistic About Thaw With Turkey,” Interview by Kommersant correspondent, (accessed in World News Connection).
In the first visit of a Turkish President to Armenia, President Gul did attend the soccer game in Yerevan, giving a boost to the possibility of normalizing bilateral relations. At the time of this writing, it is too soon to tell where the ‘football diplomacy’ initiative will lead. While it has promise, two principal obstacles remain squarely in the path to Armenian-Turkish rapprochement: the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; and the settlement of historical grievances stemming from the tragedy of 1915-1918.

The role of history and historical memory looms large in each case. Recalling Richard Hovannisian’s observation on the omnipresence of the ‘ghost of the past,’ in Armenian thinking (cited in the epigraph to this chapter), one wonders if, in fact, the ghost could at last be exorcised.

**Summary of Armenia’s Strategic Alignment**

Armenia’s alignment choices since gaining independence in 1991 have been driven by a combination of material and structural factors, and an acute, historically-based sense of national identity. Central to Armenian national identity is the victimization of the nation at the hands of the Turks in the Armenian ‘genocide.’ Identifying this significance, one scholar says, “It is impossible to understand 20th century Armenian consciousness – particularly until 1988 – without situating the Genocide at its very center.”

Until 1988, the generally accepted conventional wisdom, based on the pain of historical memory, portrayed Turkey as the principal threat to Armenia – an ‘eternal enemy.’ The logical response to the threat, again historically determined, was to seek protection from Russia – an ‘eternal friend.’ As Armenia moved

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towards independence, the Armenian National Movement and its leader, Levon Ter-Petrosian, challenged the basis for this conventional thinking.

The ANM’s ‘new thinking’ was frustrated by developments related to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. By 1993, in response to Armenian advances in the conflict, Turkey closed its border with Armenia, effectively ending any bilateral relations. The ANM’s policy of seeking normal relations with Turkey thus foundered on the basis of a current threat, not a misinterpretation of history. Yet, the perception of the Turkish threat, while based on a pragmatic assessment of realities on the ground, was magnified markedly by the national collective memory of Turkey’s role in both the Armenian ‘genocide’ and the demise of the First Armenian Republic. Armenia’s perception of threat was thus comprised of two primary elements: current realities, and past historical experiences. When Turkey closed the border, both elements combined to cast Turkey as the primary threat to Armenia. Aggressive intentions were ascribed to the Turks based on their current policies and historical experiences.

The initiation of close military and security relations with Russia, despite reservations on the risks ultimately involved, was driven primarily by security calculations, specifically the perception of the real-time threat posed by Turkish support to Azerbaijan. Describing the decision to initiate closer relations with Russia, one official said, “The war in Nagorno-Karabakh forced us to make some political, military and economic choices in favor of Russia.”136 Though predominantly an issue of current security fueled by a security dilemma with Azerbaijan, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has its roots and significance in the history of the Caucasus region. It also, as noted

earlier, lent itself readily to comparisons with historical Turkish aggression. Once again, current events and past experiences coalesced to define Armenia’s threat perceptions.

When Ter-Petrosian resigned in February 1998, he had little to show for his efforts to create normal relations with Turkey and such efforts were highly discredited. Appraising the role of history and national identity in the fall of Ter-Petrosian, Ronald Suny said:

The power and coherence of the Armenian national identity, the popular projection of the images of genocide onto the Karabakh conflict, and the closing off of the Turkish option all contributed to the fall of a once-popular national leader whose move beyond the limits of the Armenian identity choices and national discourse had not brought the expected political payoff.¹³⁷

Upon coming to power, the Kocharian government embraced a more traditional view of Armenia’s historical identity, establishing genocide recognition as a key element of its foreign policy. The move reinforced the view of Turkey as Armenia’s principal threat, and contributed to a widening impasse between the two countries. Commenting on Kocharian’s foreign policy, one former member of the Ter-Petrosian administration said, “The main goal of foreign policy is the Armenian question, and this means that today’s authorities are looking for the future of the Armenian state in a place where it cannot be found – in our past.”¹³⁸ Yet others saw adoption of genocide recognition as a more subtle, largely tactical shift in policy. Simultaneously, in what appeared to be a hedging strategy, the government made efforts to balance relations as much as possible through its policy of ‘complementarity.’

The principal threat faced by Armenia, perceived through elements of both security and identity, has been Turkey, notwithstanding Ter-Petrosian and the ANM’s efforts to reassess the historical basis for this conclusion. To balance this threat, Armenia has aligned itself with Russia. Such an alignment was validated in terms of security and identity and seemed to confirm a conclusion suggested by the historian Richard Hovannisian, who said, “In the end, the historical record may demonstrate that there is no more viable alternative than a permanent, close association with Russia, even in the absence of a common boundary, and that Russia will inevitably emerge as a major regional and even world power.”\(^{139}\) However, by the end of the Kocharian administration, concerns appeared that perhaps Armenia’s alignment with Russia was turning into an overreliance, which could threaten or, at a minimum, limit Armenia’s sovereignty. Remarking on the ambiguities in Russia’s historic role vis-à-vis Armenia, one former official said, “Russia is a bit of a two-edged sword; it has been historically, and it is now.”\(^{140}\)

The initial days of the Sargsyan administration in Armenia were marked by domestic tumult and unrest and, accordingly, the government’s attentions were directed primarily inwards. Soon, however, President Sargsyan invited Turkish President Gul to visit Yerevan, initiating ‘football diplomacy.’ The balance between concrete security concerns and issues of national identity in the making of Armenian foreign policy would seem, in this instance, to tip towards pragmatic security concerns which increasingly, include matters of economic development. Nonetheless, history continues to play a role. While President Sargsyan has voiced support for a joint commission to examine the

\(^{139}\) Richard Hovannisian, “Historical Memory and Foreign Relations,” p.271.
\(^{140}\) Interview with author. July 19, 2008.
historical record of atrocities against Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, the genocide recognition issue remains unresolved and will cast its shadow over future developments. At this writing it is too soon to tell how this most recent opening to Turkey will develop. What can be said with some confidence is that any initiative intended to recast Armenia’s threat perceptions, formed as they are on the basis of both security concerns and historical identity, must adequately address both components to be successful.

Afterword

At about the same time ‘football diplomacy’ was playing out between Armenia and Turkey, Russia and Georgia were engaged in an armed conflict in South Ossetia that would have serious ramifications for all the countries in the region. In the aftermath of the conflict, Turkey proposed formation of a Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform that would include Turkey, Russia, and the three South Caucasus states.141 Using an analogy drawn from history, Former Foreign Minister Raffi Hovannisian saw in the proposal, “… the specter of a replay of the events more than 85 years ago, when Bolshevik Russia and a Kemalist Turkey not content with the legacy of the Great Genocide and National Dispossession of 1915 partitioned the Armenian homeland…”142 Attributing aggressive intentions to both Russia and Turkey based on historical analogy reflects the thinking of the former Ter-Petrosian administration. On the other hand, former Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian saw in wake of the conflict a historic opportunity to create a neutral, non-aligned Caucasus, free of security relationships and

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adversarial alliances. Oskanian’s vision is decidedly geopolitical, as compared to the historical vision of Hovanissian. It reflects the basic inclination of the complementarity policy of the Kocharian administration.

The differences in how two former Armenian Foreign Ministers reacted after the Georgia-Russia conflict demonstrate the differences in threat perceptions and the role of history in forming them. Based on the study down to this point, it is likely Armenia will continue to develop its threat perceptions based on a combination of historical and geopolitical thinking, drawing on both structural and perceptual factors.

CHAPTER SEVEN
AZERBAIJAN

Baku is well aware that its very existence depends on its ability to tack between the winds of Russian assertiveness and Western power.¹

The Republic of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy aims to preserve the country’s pro-western orientation and accommodate its national interests in a tough neighborhood.²

Introduction

Azerbaijan’s geographic location in the lands between the major powers Russia, Turkey and Iran has had a definitive influence on its historical, political and cultural development, as has been the case with its South Caucasus neighbors. Yet, in addition to being a geographical borderland, the region, and Azerbaijan in particular, bestrides cultural, ethnic and religious divides. Alluding to the intricacies of Azerbaijan’s location, a leading western academic described the country as a “quintessential borderland, many times over: between Europe and Asia, Islam and Christianity, Russia and the Middle East, Turks and Iranians, Shi’a and Sunni Islam.”³

The general dilemma shared with Georgia and Armenia – that of being at the crossroads of empires and major powers – is compounded further in Azerbaijan by a complex web of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, historical and political links to Turkey, Iran and Russia. Each of these major powers retains a significant interest in developments in Azerbaijan, seeing the country as within its traditional sphere of interest. Indeed, in contrast to a more benign interpretation that situates Azerbaijan at a “crossroads,”

emerges another explanation suggesting it is located on a civilizational “fault line.”

Moreover, Azerbaijan’s considerable deposits of oil and gas attract outside interests and sharpen external pressures. Factoring the interests of the United States and the West into the geopolitical equation yields an even more complex matrix, intensifying rivalries described by one observer as turning Azerbaijan into a “devil’s playground.”

The tangled web of regional and global interests defines the context within which Azerbaijan’s foreign policy is conceived. At the same time, the country’s mixed ethnopolitical and religious legacy complicates both its domestic political development and its efforts to chart a foreign policy course. To set the stage for an analysis of Azerbaijan’s political orientation and strategic alignment choices in the post-Soviet era, a brief review of some aspects of Azerbaijani thinking as the republic moved towards independence is warranted. Of particular interest were new interpretations of Azerbaijan’s history.

Historical Antecedents

As an historical reawakening took place in much of the former Soviet Union, two specific topics received the most attention in Azerbaijan: the division of the Azeri people and territory by the Treaty of Turkmenchai, and the history of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic of 1918-1920.

“One Azerbaijan” – The Treaty of Turkmenchai

Decisive Russian military successes against Persia were codified in the Treaties of Gulistan (1813) and Turkmenchai (1828); both treaties adding considerable territory in

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the Caucasus region to the Russian empire. The frontier between the Russian and Persian
empires was fixed generally along the Araz River. The line has endured largely intact
and represents the modern-day border between Azerbaijan and Iran. Of fundamental
significance for Azeris, this borderline divided the nation into two parts. The northern
part developed subsequently within the Tsarist, and later, Soviet, empires. When the
Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, this part became the Republic of Azerbaijan. Azeris in
the south developed quite differently as part of the Persian empire and later Iran. They
constitute today as many as 25 million ethnic Azeris living predominantly in the
northwest part of Iran.

In Soviet historiography, the division of the Azeri people and territory by the
Treaty of Turkmenchai was seen as a providential occurrence for those in the north who
thus became Soviet citizens. Soviet-era texts on Azerbaijani history asserted that being
annexed to Russia “played a great progressive role in the historical fate of the Azerbaijani
people.”6 Similarly, we read that the joining with Russia “promoted the political,
economic and cultural development of Azerbaijan,” and that

The annexation to Russia saved the Azerbaijani people from the danger of
enslavement by backwards Iran and Turkey. Due only to their destiny with the
Russian people, the peoples of the Caucasus, preyed upon by foreign conquerors,
were saved from destruction and were delivered from the devastating invasions
and raids of the Iranian and Turkish feudal lords.7

In the post-World War II period, the question of a divided Azerbaijan was used by
Soviet authorities as a lever in relations with Iran. A body of Azeri literature was
promoted that stressed the theme of one nation split by the Araz River. The literature

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7 Akademiya Nauk Azerbaidzhanskoy SSR. *Istoriia Azerbaidzhana: Pod red. I.A. Guseinova* (Baku: Izd-vo
expressed a “longing” and nostalgia for lost ties with ethnic Azeris in the south. In 1982 Soviet authorities endorsed a “One Azerbaijan” campaign that openly called for national liberation in northwest Iran and implicitly encouraged discussion of a unified Azerbaijan, ostensibly within the borders of the Soviet Union. The Treaty of Turkmenchai was portrayed frequently as a “monument to historical injustice” or an “open wound,” and the “one Azerbaijan” campaign served as an outlet for the expression of Azeri national sentiment.

When Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union, the “one Azerbaijan” campaign was considered potentially disruptive in relations with Iran and was called off. As the policy of glasnost offered new opportunities to explore previously unmentionable subjects, in Azerbaijan the idea of a nation divided between Russia and Persia remained important, but was eclipsed by a wealth of new information on the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic of 1918-1920.

**The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic**

In the years between the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the consolidation of Bolshevik rule over most of the territory of the former Tsarist empire in 1920-1921, a distinctly Azeri collective identity emerged on the basis of both national and state attributes. Amidst the turmoil and confusion of World War I and the Russian

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10 Ibid. p.286.
Revolution, Azerbaijan, along with many parts of the former Tsarist empire, went through tumultuous political changes.

When the short-lived Transcaucasian Federation between Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan collapsed in May 1918, Azeri nationalists led by the Musavat (Equality) party declared independence, forming on May 28 the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR).\(^\text{12}\) In its 23-month existence, the ADR managed to unite the territory of Azerbaijan by defeating, with Ottoman assistance, the Bolshevik-led Baku Commune. Nonetheless, the republic, fragile from the outset and incapable of meeting the threat posed by either Red or White Russian forces, anxiously pursued ties with outside powers to provide security. The ADR survived in large part due to Turkish and, later, British occupation.

As British occupation troops prepared to leave Baku in late summer of 1919, the head of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic’s delegation to the peace conference at Versailles, Ali Mardan Topchibashev, in discussions with his Georgian counterparts, summarized their plight: “The question of orientation is not new, … at the present time, the duration of which is hard to determine, we cannot survive without foreign assistance and support. Given this, to find support, … we must look to the right and to the left.”\(^\text{13}\) The ADR’s search for security ultimately failed. While the limited contingent of Azerbaijan’s armed forces fought in Karabakh against Armenians, the XI Red Army


moved towards Baku in April 1920. Unable to mount any meaningful or organized resistance, the ADR Parliament resolved to disband and transfer power to the Bolsheviks.\footnote{Firuz Kazemzadeh, \textit{The Struggle For TransCaucasia (1917-1921)} p.284.}

During the Soviet era, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was portrayed as a puppet state created and supported by western imperialists, particularly the British. Typically, the Musavat regime was described as “counterrevolutionary” and “maintained by the “bayonets of international interventionists.”\footnote{See, for example: Akademiya Nauk Azerbaidzhanskoy SSR, \textit{Istoriia Azerbaidzhana}. p.139.} At the same time, the Sovietization of Azerbaijan by the XI Red Army was described as, “a shining example of that fraternal assistance which the Russian people gave to the toilers of Azerbaijan.”\footnote{E.A. Tokarzhevskii, \textit{Ocherk is istoriii sovetskogo Azerbaidzhana v period perekhoda na miruiiu rabotu po vosstanovleniiu narodnogo khoziaistva (1921-1925 gg) (Baku, 1956) p. 24. Quoted in Altstadt, \textit{The Azerbaijani Turks}: p.108.}

Towards Independence

As was noted in earlier chapters, the Gorbachev-era policy of glasnost in the Soviet Union accelerated a process of historical reflection and reinterpretation of many historical topics and personalities that had been proscribed previously. In Azerbaijan, the limited process of historical reinterpretation that had begun in the 1960s in the Azerbaijani-language literature and press expanded in the years of glasnost to include formerly forbidden topics and, eventually, Russian-language publications.\footnote{See: Audrey L. Altstadt. “Azerbaijan’s struggle toward democracy,” in in Dawisha, Karen and Bruce Parrott, editors. \textit{Conflict, cleavage and change in Central Asia and the Caucasus} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.117, and Audrey L. Altstadt, “Azerbaijanis Reassess Their History,” \textit{RFE/RL Report on the USSR}, August 18, 1989, pp.18-19.} In a certain sense, in the late 1980s Azerbaijanis began to witness a “liberation of the past,” led by the intelligentsia, and increasingly calling for the reevaluation and reassessment of their
history, particularly the history of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. Reflecting on the period of historical reinterpretation, one Azerbaijani historian noted, “The beginning of the process of perestroika and glasnost allowed the lifting of the prohibition on the history of the Azerbaijani Republic of 1918-1920.”

**Emergence of the Azerbaijan Popular Front**

In November 1988 a group of Azerbaijani intellectuals formed the Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF) to promote and assist in implementing the policy of perestroika in the republic. In the course of the next several years, as monumental changes swept through the Soviet empire, the APF was transformed from a group of intellectuals to Azerbaijan’s ruling party. A review of the nascent APF political program provides a useful foundation for understanding subsequent developments.

Included among those topics covered in the first issue (May 1989) of the APF’s unofficial publication *Bulletin of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan*, were: APF support for democracy and sovereignty; an appeal on the deteriorating situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, insisting the region was an inalienable part of Azerbaijan; a congratulatory statement on Azerbaijan’s Independence Day, May 28 – the day the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was established in 1918; and a demand that all documents on the ADR held in secret archives be released. Of the topics noted in this publication, the territorial issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, and the role of history in the revival of Azerbaijani

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national identity were central in the continued development of the APF program and the reemerging Azerbaijani national identity.

New interpretations of the history of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic documenting in some detail the “invasion” of Azerbaijan by the Soviet Red Army and the subsequent “sovietization” of the ADR contradicted accounts of the “voluntary” joining of Azerbaijan to Russia and pushed the APF beyond historical rehabilitation to condemnation of Soviet rule. Many among the APF leadership were historians and as Azerbaijan’s history came into sharper focus, so too did the tendency to use the history of the ADR as a useful model for understanding current events. This tendency was described by one Azerbaijani analyst: “The traditions and memory of the independent and democratic Azerbaijan of 1918-1920 appeared to be the most powerful force in the national movement for independence, creating the main ideological basis during Azerbaijan’s transition period.”

As Azerbaijan moved closer to independence this inclination would intensify.

Tensions over Nagorno-Karabakh escalated in both Armenia and Azerbaijan throughout 1988 and 1989, progressing from large-scale street demonstrations to strikes to episodes of interethnic violence. From its inception, the Azerbaijan Popular Front led resistance in Azerbaijan to the movement among Karabakh Armenians and within Armenia to attach Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. The role of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is recognized widely as having galvanized the national movement in Azerbaijan, much as the same issue did in Armenia. One western expert on Azerbaijan observed:

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“[T]he dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh did not create national consciousness among the Azeri elite, but did act as the catalyst which accelerated the emergence of Azerbaijan’s national movement in the late 1980s.”  

As Azerbaijan’s communist leadership struggled to resolve issues within the framework of the fraying Soviet legal and legislative systems, the Popular Front claimed growing authority among the Azerbaijani people. At the same time, the APF leadership was becoming progressively more radicalized.

In the fall of 1989 protests and demonstrations over the status of Nagorno-Karabakh expanded, as did the number of incidents of violence between Azerbaijanis and Armenians. The APF pushed for increased sovereignty in Azerbaijan, straining against central control from Moscow. Alarmed generally by the growing centrifugal forces in Azerbaijan, Moscow was disturbed particularly by demonstrations on the Azerbaijan border with Iran organized by local APF activists, many of whom, in the spirit of the “one Azerbaijan” campaign, called for the unity of southern and northern Azerbaijan. However, what was seen in Azerbaijan as a return of historical consciousness was viewed in Moscow as evidence that the Azerbaijan Popular Front was guided, at least in part, by links to Islamic fundamentalism. In this light, the unrest in Azerbaijan took on broader, international ramifications for the Soviet leadership.

**Black January – A Turning Point**

On the weekend of January 13-14, 1990 a significant incident in the escalating ethnic-based violence occurring in both Armenia and Azerbaijan took place in Baku.  

Apparently provoked by news that Armenian fighters had attacked Azerbaijani villages,

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24 Audrey L. Altstadt, “Azerbaijan’s struggle toward democracy,” p.120.
25 An objective, independent analysis of these events is: Conflict in the Soviet Union: Black January in Azerbaidzhan, (Helsinki Watch/Memorial, May 1991).
angry men (many reportedly refugees, forced previously to flee violence in Armenia) split off from a demonstration in downtown Baku, coalescing into rampaging mobs that killed dozens of Armenians. Those Armenians remaining in Baku were evacuated out of the country, virtually completing the mutual, forcible segregation of the two ethnic communities. During the paroxysm, the role of Soviet internal ministry forces was questionable. Reports were widespread that they stood by idly as the violence swelled, despite appeals by APF leaders to intervene to end the violence.  

Faced with a near total loss of control by the Azerbaijan Communist Party, a Soviet delegation headed by Evgenii Primakov arrived in Baku from Moscow to address the situation. A state of emergency was imposed, curfews declared and thousands of additional Soviet troops were deployed to Baku, but were kept on the outskirts by improvised barriers erected by the APF and other opposition groups. In the face of the mounting challenge posed to Soviet authority by the unrest in Baku, a decision was taken to restore order and control over the city. Just after midnight on January 20, Soviet forces, including tanks, armored vehicles and helicopters moved into Baku, crushing barricades, cars and even ambulances. Reports indicate that in the violence that accompanied the Soviet move into Baku, conducted against little or no armed resistance, approximately 130 people, ranging in age from 14 to 75, were killed and more than 700 were injured. In its report on what came to be known in Azerbaijan as ‘Black January’ the independent military investigative group in Russia Shchit (Shield) described the

26 Ibid. p. 7. See also Audrey L. Altstadt, The Azerbaijani Turks. p.213.
28 Reports on the number of casualties vary. The figure noted here is an approximate average. See, for example, Conflict in the Soviet Union: Black January in Azerbaijan, p.30.
incident as “a war waged by the Soviet military against one of its own cities.”

Although the Soviets had succeeded in reestablishing control in Baku, ‘Black January’ was a critical turning point in Azerbaijan’s move toward independence and, indeed, in the unraveling of the Soviet Union more broadly.

In the wake of the tragedy, a new Communist Party First Secretary, Ayaz Mutalibov, was installed in Baku. He immediately blamed the tragic Baku events on the Azerbaijan Popular Front. The offices of the APF were closed and many of its members jailed. ‘Black January’ had an overwhelming effect on the development of national consciousness in Azerbaijan. The funeral services for the victims became a national day of bereavement and defiance. A Baku resident remembered the scene: “Later, I remember the mass burial of hundreds of victims at Baku's Shehidler Khiyabani (Martyrs' Alley). Millions attended the funeral. The harbor was clogged with small private boats blaring their horns. Azerbaijan was united like never before. The era of the Soviet Union was over.”

In the wake of ‘Black January’ Azerbaijan became a nation more and more united around the idea of independence from the Soviet Union. According to Audrey Altstadt, the January incident “broke whatever bonds of limited trust remained between the rulers in Moscow and their subjects in Azerbaijan….” This sentiment was echoed repeatedly during interviews with government officials, analysts and academics who cited ‘Black January’ as a national and personal turning point from which there was no going back. It

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29 Cited in Thomas de Waal, Black Garden, p.93.
was summarized succinctly by an Azerbaijani academic who said: “The January 1990 tragedy forever entered the national consciousness of the Azerbaijani people as the most sorrowful, and also, decisive, event in the history of 20th century Azerbaijan, as the deepest scar on the national memory, and as the most tragic boundary line on the way to national independence.” Although the Communist Party would continue to rule in Azerbaijan for roughly two years, the die had been cast.

The Mutilibov Period

In the period after January 1990, a state of emergency was in effect in Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani Popular Front was in disarray, with much of the leadership in jail, and others forming separate or splinter parties. In this context, the Communist Party enjoyed a minor resurgence: its leader, Ayaz Mutalibov, representing stability and blaming the APF for provoking ‘Black January,’ moved cautiously to relieve nationalist pressure by adopting or co-opting elements of the opposition program. Nonetheless the resurgence of the APF, the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, and the general decline in Communist authority in Moscow posed mounting problems.

In the wake of the failed August 1991 hard-line coup in Moscow, Azerbaijan, like many of the Soviet Republics, proclaimed its independence. On August 30, the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet passed a resolution noting the independence of Azerbaijan was recognized by the international community in 1918-1920, and proclaiming the restoration of that independence. In September 1991, running unopposed in an election boycotted by the APF because of the ongoing state of emergency, Mutalibov won the

34 An English translation of the Resolution is at: Tadeusz Swietochowski, Russia and Azerbaijan, p.216.
Presidency of Azerbaijan with a reported 98% of the vote.\textsuperscript{35} In November 1991 Mutalibov agreed under pressure from the opposition to form a National Council comprised of 50 members with equal representation from the Supreme Soviet and from the opposition. The National Council effectively replaced the Supreme Soviet as Azerbaijan’s legislative authority.\textsuperscript{36}

Notwithstanding widely divergent views among the political elite and within society at large, where anti-Russian sentiments stirred by the January 1990 events were widespread, Mutalibov was determined to chart a course for Azerbaijan in continued association with Russia and other of the Soviet Republics. Despite a unanimous “no” vote in the National Council, Mutalibov traveled to Alma Ata and signed the declaration forming the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in December 1991.\textsuperscript{37} His unilateral act was opposed vehemently by the APF. The dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of December prompted an intense debate on Azerbaijan’s foreign policy orientation, particularly its future relationship with Russia. The APF was strongly pro-Turkish, an orientation that was bolstered considerably in November when Turkey had been the first country to recognize Azerbaijan’s independence.

Following the CIS Summit in Alma-Ata, Mutalibov, widely castigated by the opposition for being Moscow’s lackey, was forced to back off his desire for closer integration with Russia and the CIS. In the run-up to a planned February 1992 CIS Heads of State meeting, Mutalibov recounts that he was, “forced to refuse to sign an


\textsuperscript{36} Tadeusz Swietochowski, \textit{Russia and Azerbaijan}. p.218.

agreement for the Azerbaijani army, which was then in the process of being created, to join the CIS Main Military Command.”38 In Mutalibov’s assessment, joining the CIS Command would have improved Azerbaijan’s prospects in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which, with the end of the Soviet Union was an international rather than internal conflict, and had also become much more deadly with an increase in the availability of Soviet weaponry.

In the event, developments in Nagorno-Karabakh interceded, overshadowing Mutalibov’s views and, ultimately, costing him the presidency. The rout of Khojaly by Armenian forces supported by armored vehicles from the Soviet 366th Motorized Rifle Regiment turned into a catastrophe when hundreds of fleeing civilians were killed.39 Mutalibov was held personally responsible, facing bitter criticism particularly over his government’s failure to raise an army that could protect the nation’s population and defend its interests. Confronted by large-scale, angry demonstrations and a hostile parliament, Mutalibov was forced to resign the presidency on March 6, 1992 and a caretaker government took over.40

In a stark assessment at the time of Mutalibov’s resignation, chairman of the Azerbaijan Popular Front, Abulfez Elchibey, stated: “We haven’t got our own government. We are a colony of Russia. Mutalibov resigned because he was the worst example of someone who was completely in the hands of Russia.”41 A more sober

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40 Mutalibov’s return is discussed in Elizabeth Fuller, “Azerbaijan After the Presidential Elections,”
assessment was pronounced by Acting President Yakub Mamedov, who said: “The differences of opinion between the president and the National Council extended to this issue [CIS]. We have to build our relations with the CIS sensibly, taking into account the experience of other countries in the world that have found themselves in a situation similar to ours.” While such advice may have been prudent, as subsequent events unfolded it was idealism – particularly idealized visions of Turkey and Turkism – not pragmatism, that would determine Azerbaijan’s foreign orientation.

On May 14, Mutalibov staged a political comeback. Supporters in parliament voted to declare null and void their vote to accept his resignation in March, thereby reinstating him as president. The timing, on the eve of a CIS heads of state summit where a treaty of collective security was to be discussed, was, according to the Popular Front opposition, no coincidence. In an appeal to the Azerbaijani people, the APF called Mutalibov’s action a “state coup” that was “staged in order to disband the republic’s national army and to have the Joint CIS Armed Forces deployed in Azerbaijan.”

Indeed, after reclaiming power, Mutalibov had announced his intention to travel to the CIS summit “to sign all documents on Azerbaijan’s membership in the CIS as quickly as possible.” The Azerbaijan Popular Front responded to Mutalibov’s comeback by organizing massive protests and a general strike, and issuing an ultimatum for him to resign. Ultimately the APF seized the reins of power in Baku. Mutalibov disappeared, showing up later in Moscow.

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In the end, Azerbaijan did not sign the CIS Collective Security Treaty agreed to in Tashkent on May 15, 1992. In an astute assessment of the importance of this development, *Izvestiya* correspondents stated:

Azerbaijan’s position is determined not only by the political situation in Baku, which was changing hourly during the Tashkent meeting, but also by the fact that [Armenian President] Levon Ter-Petrosyan signed the treaty. It is not hard to notice that this signature is turning Russia and the CIS troops into allies of Armenia in the regional conflict, which could impel Azerbaijan to turn to states outside the Commonwealth for assistance.  

Throughout the Mutalibov period, Azerbaijan’s foreign policy orientation was hotly contested, like most issues in domestic politics, and suffered in the end from a total lack of consensus. Mutalibov was pro-Russian and strongly favored joining the CIS and associated organizations. He seemed to view relations with Azerbaijan’s other big neighbors, namely Turkey and Iran, through the prism of Moscow. One former presidential advisor recalled cautioning Mutalibov in the early 1990s not to orient his policies so blindly towards Moscow in the event the Communist Party or the USSR didn’t survive the upheavals then raging. Mutalibov, however, seemed incapable of even imagining, let alone acting on a different orientation. Nevertheless, a good part of the opposition, particularly the APF, was pro-Turkish and viewed Russia, including its role in the CIS, with great suspicion. This point was very much in evidence in the campaigning prior to the June 1992 presidential elections, when every major candidate

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opposed Azerbaijan’s membership in the CIS, believing the organization to be inconsistent with national sovereignty.\textsuperscript{47}

**The Elchibey Period – A Year of the Azerbaijan Popular Front**

In June 1992, Abulfaz Elchibey, chairman of the Azerbaijan Popular Front, Middle East historian and Soviet-era dissident, was elected President of Azerbaijan. In barely one year in office, Elchibey promoted a fundamental shift in Azerbaijan’s internal and external affairs. Internally, he advocated a democratic and secular state. In terms of external alignment, he devoted a large share of his time and energy to reorienting the country’s foreign policy, recasting Azerbaijan’s relationship with Russia and, indeed, with other neighboring states, as well.

*The ADR Model*

Throughout his brief tenure, Elchibey and the ruling Azerbaijan Popular Front consciously used the history of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic of 1918-1920 as a model worthy of emulation. As the last bits and pieces of the communist system and regime faded from the scene in Baku, the history of the ADR, already for several years a matter of keen interest among the intelligentsia, was embraced by the population as well. One Azerbaijani historian noted: “The current ever-growing interest of the Azerbaijani people in their history is related, in the first place, to the period 1917-1920.”\textsuperscript{48} While in the opposition, the Popular Front had used the history of the ADR to develop its political philosophy and symbology. As the ruling party, it used the history of the ADR as an archetype, to lead the country into the future based on experience of the pre-Soviet past. Acknowledging this point, one Azerbaijani observer wrote, “The model of the ADR of

\textsuperscript{47} Elizabeth Fuller, “Azerbaijan After the Presidential Elections,” p.4.
\textsuperscript{48} Teiub Nasirov, *Bor’ba za vlast’ v Azerbaidzhane: 1917-1920 gg.* p.4.

On the symbolic level, the Popular Front had been instrumental in the Republic of Azerbaijan’s adoption of many of the national symbols of the ADR, including the flag and the national anthem. Shortly after being elected president, Elchibey stated, on a more practical level, “A democratic republic was built in Azerbaijan in 1918-1920. We will develop it and restore it; not only restore it, but develop it.”\footnote{Ostankino Television, 5 July 92, in FBIS-SOV-92-130, (7 July 1992), p.66.} He elaborated yet further on his intention to use the ADR as a model saying, “The religious and ethnic policy of the leadership of Azerbaijan will follow the traditions of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic of 1918-1920 ….”\footnote{Ibid. p.68.} The idea that the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic had been the “first democracy in the Muslim east” was of strong symbolic value in terms of domestic political development. The experience of the ADR would also play a central role in the country’s foreign policy orientation under Elchibey and the Popular Front.

External Alignment under Elchibey

Azerbaijan’s foreign policy orientation is largely a function of its relationships with its three powerful neighbors: Russia, Turkey and Iran. The orientation of Elchibey and his government was described by an advisor to the president as, “openly pro-Turkish, anti-Russian, and anti-Iranian.”\footnote{Interview with author. June 30, 2007} An assessment by Tadeusz Swietochowski identified
three principal goals of Elchibey’s foreign policy: “emancipation from Russia’s all pervasive grip, drawing closer to Turkey and establishing firm ties with their ethnic brothers across the Araxes [in Iran].”\textsuperscript{53} A review of the relationship and attitude of Elchibey and the Popular Front government towards Turkey, Russia, and Iran will provide a fuller understanding of the country’s nationalist orientation at that time.

\textit{Turkey}

Fundamentally, the bases for the Elchibey regime’s pro-Turkish orientation were cultural, ethno-linguistic and historical. Among the primary objectives of the Popular Front were promotion of the Azerbaijani language rather than Russian, and replacing the Cyrillic alphabet (then used to write Azerbaijani) with the Latin alphabet to facilitate closer communication with Turkey. The APF had been instrumental in the Azeri legislature’s December 1991 decision to adopt the Latin alphabet. As language and alphabet are fundamental elements of a nation’s identity, decisions to reorient them were good indicators of shifts in political orientation, as well. Indeed, according to one former official who worked closely with Elchibey, the President reviled the Russian language and the Cyrillic alphabet as instruments of Russian colonial control.\textsuperscript{54}

Elchibey viewed Turkey as a successful, secular, democratic state with a Muslim society, a positive example of the very model the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic had pursued in 1918-1920. After taking office as president, he stated, “I see Turkey as our most important bridge to the world, both because Turkey is a modern state and because it


\textsuperscript{54} Interview with author. June 27, 2007.
is a European and an Asian country at one and the same time.”

Furthermore, Turkey was also seen as independent Azerbaijan’s closest supporter and ally. Just as Ottoman Turkey had been the first country to recognize the independence of Azerbaijan in 1918, so too was the Republic of Turkey in 1991. Likewise, as Turkish military support had been instrumental in defending the ADR in 1918 and facilitating the capture of Baku from communists, it was hoped, as the APF took power, that Turkish military support would be instrumental in defending Azerbaijan from the two principal threats it perceived: Russia’s attempt to retain the Caucasus in its sphere of interest; and, Armenian territorial aggression.

Russia

Based on their new interpretations of Azerbaijan’s history described, in part, earlier in this chapter, Elchibey and the Popular Front viewed Russia as an essentially imperial, or, perhaps more precisely, colonial power. Indeed, references to this effect abound in Elchibey’s public statements, as well as those of the APF. While campaigning for the presidency Elchibey said, for example, “The people of Azerbaijan have entered another crucial period in their history. At the cost of dramatic struggle and enormous sacrifices we have broken the fetters of colonialism which suppressed us for decades, humiliated us and slowed down our development.” Particularly prevalent was the notion of a Russian imperial or colonial “yoke” which had to be thrown off if Azerbaijan was to attain genuine independence. In the national consciousness of the APF, the 1920

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56 These two threats are identified in: Leila Aliyeva, “The Institutions, Orientations, and Conduct of Foreign-Policy in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan,” p.289.
58 See, for example, the “imperial yoke” reference in Radio Baku Network, 16 May 92, in FBIS-SOV-92-096, (18 May 1992), p.60.
march on Baku by the XI Red Army was understood to be an invasion, not a liberation. Similarly, the Soviet crackdown of ‘Black January’ was seen by many as “the second invasion of Baku by the Red Army.” Discussing his tenure after leaving the presidency, Elchibey described his vision for Azerbaijan-Russian relations: “I wanted to believe that Azerbaijan would begin to speak to Russia not as a slave does with his master, but in the language of civilized states.”

A second major factor driving Azerbaijan’s attitude towards Russia during the Elchibey government’s tenure was the suspicion that Russia was aiding Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This factor was based not on historical memory, but on perceptions of current realities. Russia’s role in the conflict, particularly in 1992-1993, was complex and is beyond the scope of this study. It is sufficient to note here that the APF’s dark perception of the Russian role reinforced their historically-derived perception of Russia as an imperial power intent on subjugating Azerbaijani statehood and nationhood. Armenia’s agreement to join the CIS Collective Security Treaty in May 1992 confirmed for the Popular Front leadership the cooperation between Russia and Armenia, and added to the APF’s skepticism of the CIS.

Commonwealth of Independent States

To deal with the perceived neo-imperialist or neo-colonialist threat posed by post-Soviet Russia, Azerbaijan, under APF leadership, sought to establish relations based on some measure of equality, and formulated strictly on a bilateral basis. In this regard,

61 A balanced look at Russia’s involvement during this period is at: Thomas de Waal, Black Garden, pp. 200-205.
Elchibey and the Popular Front emphatically opposed membership in the CIS which they equated with a new form of Moscow-centric empire. Reflecting this view after leaving office, Elchibey stated, “Russia is using the CIS as a way of keeping the old empire in a new form and is inventing various mechanisms for this.”

 Particularly troublesome for the Popular Front government were CIS plans for a common currency and for common defenses. The APF believed strongly that national defenses and a national currency were critical attributes of an independent state. Their forcible ouster of Mutalibov after his attempted comeback in May 1992, as described above, was very much a reaction to Mutalibov’s stated intention to join CIS structures that would have put Azerbaijan in the “ruble zone” and the CIS Collective Security Treaty. Using a metaphor identified above, one Popular Front leader suggested Mutalibov, being willing to agree to the CIS terms, intended to, “liquidate [Azerbaijan’s] national sovereignty and again impose the yoke of slavery on the Azerbaijani people.”

The attitude of the Popular Front towards the CIS was based on the belief that the CIS represented a modern incarnation of the USSR or, even the Russian empire. As such, the APF saw the CIS as a threat to Azerbaijan’s independence and sovereignty. Additionally, given the historical record of assimilation, the APF saw the CIS as a threat to the Azerbaijani nation, particularly its language, ethnic and cultural traditions. In October 1992, Azerbaijan’s legislature, the National Council, embraced the Popular Front

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view, voting 43 to 1 against membership in the CIS and effectively ending debate on this issue for the brief remainder of Elchibey’s tenure.64

Iran

The Popular Front came to power having espoused strongly closer ties with the 20 or more million ethnic Azeris living in northwest Iran, or what was considered historically “South Azerbaijan,” While generally stopping short of advocating unification under the “one Azerbaijan” scenario, the APF at times went as far as promoting the idea of independence for their ethnic relatives. In an interview just prior to being elected, Elchibey said he would push to bring about the independence of his “southern Azerbaijani compatriots.”65 Memories of the 1828 division of the Azeri nation by the Treaty of Turkmenchay, stimulated during the late Soviet era, contributed fundamentally to the view of Iran as the colonial oppressor of “southern” Azeris, much as Russia was viewed vis-à-vis the north. While the Popular Front rhetoric on Iran was tempered somewhat by the realities of governing, the APF continued to agitate, at a minimum, for language and cultural rights for their ethnic brethren. The APF’s orientation towards Iran was based thus, in the first instance, on a mixture of historical and ethnic/cultural elements, not unlike those related to the Popular Front’s views on Turkey and Russia.

Throughout the post-Soviet history of Azerbaijan, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh has served as a prism through which Azerbaijan’s relations with regional and international countries are seen. So too was the case with Iran in 1992-1993. Despite Iran’s official statements of neutrality in the conflict, and its efforts to mediate a

resolution, Elchibey and the APF were distrustful of Iran. Elchibey said, “…we know
that in our conflict with Armenia, they [Iran] are supporting Armenia, albeit not
explicitly. Iran will get an appropriate reply from us. It will pay for its hostile
attitude.”

The Demise of the Elchibey Government

After significant battlefield successes in the summer and fall of 1992, Azerbaijan
suffered serious reversals in early 1993. Armenian forces expanded the fighting beyond
the borders of Nagorno-Karabakh to engulf areas in western Azerbaijan located between
Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. In April 1993, Azerbaijan lost the Kelbajar district of
Azerbaijan, an area of considerable strategic importance to both sides in the war. In the
aftermath of this loss, it looked as if the conflict might become internationalized, with
Turkey increasingly sensitive about Azerbaijani losses, and Russia bound to Armenia by
the Collective Security Treaty, should Turkey become involved. Ominously, in
Azerbaijan’s domestic political context, military leaders began to show signs of
insubordination and open rebellion against Elchibey and the Popular Front government.
In the face of seemingly insurmountable pressures, including a rebel military march
towards Baku, the Elchibey government collapsed. Former Soviet Politburo member and
communist leader of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, eventually took the reins as
Azerbaijan’s next President.

66 Ibid.
67 UN Security Council Resolution 822 [1993], adopted on 30 April 1993 called for “immediate withdrawal
of all occupying forces from the Kelbajar district and other recently occupied areas of Azerbaijan.” See:
February 4, 2009).
68 Events surrounding the fall of the Elchibey government are described in: Elizabeth Fuller, “Azerbaijan’s
served as Acting President from June – October 1993 and was elected President of Azerbaijan on October
The fall of Elchibey and the Popular Front was understood as a failure of the government’s unabashed pro-Turkish orientation. In foreign policy, the orientation towards Turkey alienated Azerbaijan’s two other large neighbors, Russia and Iran, both of which adopted more pro-Armenian positions in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Consequently, Azerbaijan’s losses in Nagorno-Karabakh contributed significantly to Elchibey’s downfall. Offering a retrospective on Elchibey’s tenure, one senior government official said, “Elchibey had not strategy, he was a dreamer.” In the end, the strongly pro-Turkish orientation of Elchibey and the Popular Front with its cultural, linguistic and historical basis, foundered in the face of harsh geopolitical realities. In an apt post-mortem, one observer noted the Popular Front government was “unable to accommodate the challenges posed by the country’s historical past and geopolitical present.”

The Return of Heydar Aliyev

Heydar Aliyev assumed the presidency of an Azerbaijan deeply rent by internal strife and in the throes of a military revolt against central authority. The dire domestic situation was compounded by continued losses in the Nagorno-Karabakh War. A common theme in interviews with a variety of government officials and academics was that the very survival of Azerbaijan as a state at that time was in doubt. One official described a national crisis comprising separatism and war in Nagorno-Karabakh, unrest and agitation among Azerbaijan’s Lezgin and Talysh minorities, Iranian revolutionary

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70 Interview with author, June 28, 2007.

activity and Russian military, economic and political pressure. Fateful choices, particularly as regards Azerbaijan’s efforts to relieve external and internal pressures, and secure outside support for its independence, were looming. In the international political context, the downfall of the Popular Front government in Azerbaijan and the assumption of power by Heydar Aliyev were viewed as positive developments in Iran and Russia and as setbacks in Turkey and in the West, more broadly. In general, foreign observers assumed that under Aliyev a pragmatism tempered by years at the highest levels of the Soviet bureaucracy would replace the brash nationalism of his predecessor.

*Commonwealth of Independent States Reconsidered*

Recognizing the failure of the APF’s idealistic reliance on Turkey and hopes for Western support, Aliyev engineered a reorientation in Azerbaijan’s foreign policy. The lack of tangible military support from Turkey in the war over Nagorno-Karabakh, and the imposition in the United States of restrictions on aid to Azerbaijan stipulated in Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, were factors that contributed decisively to a broad disillusionment with the overly pro-Turkish, pro-Western orientation. In addition, the negative state of Azerbaijan’s relations with Russia was recognized as an important factor contributing to the bleak situation in the country. Given this context, it is not surprising that recasting Azerbaijan’s relationship with Russia and the CIS was one of Heydar Aliyev’s initial policy moves.

The most pressing problem facing Azerbaijan when Aliyev took office was the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In early September 1993, he visited Moscow in an attempt to win Russian support towards finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict on

72 Interview with author, June 24, 2007.
Azerbaijan’s terms. The Russian side made it clear the price to be paid for any Russian support was membership in the CIS and its Collective Security Treaty. In comments after meeting with President Aliyev, Russian Defense Minister Grachev said, “The fact that Armenia is a CIS member and party to the agreement on collective security must be considered. We confirmed our readiness to begin working on that problem, starting tomorrow.”

After meeting with Russian President Yeltsin, President Aliyev signaled a new direction in Azerbaijan’s policy, stating, “Azerbaijan’s participation in all the structures of the CIS contradicts neither the interests of Azerbaijan nor Russia.”

On September 20, the Azerbaijani parliament, in a stark reversal of their previous position, voted 31 to 13 in favor of joining the CIS and signing the related documents. During the debate, Heydar Aliyev, while underscoring his support for Azerbaijan’s independence, said, “No state can live isolated from others,” and, addressing the anti-colonial mood in the country, stated that “the CIS does not mean the restoration of the Soviet Union.” Former APF Foreign Minister Gasymov reminded parliament they had debated the issue of CIS membership five times and rejected it each time. When he tried to draw a historical parallel to events at the turn of the last century (presumably the Bolshevik take-over of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic), Heydar Aliyev dismissed the analogy, saying, “You have said these things a thousand times. Say something new. You are rechewing the same things.”

74 Ibid. p.6.
77 Ibid.
In dismissing the historical reasoning so often employed by the Popular Front, Aliyev didn’t argue against its validity, but rather expressed impatience that nothing new was being said. Such historical reasoning wasn’t wrong necessarily; it was simply not relevant under the circumstances. Substantiating the centrality of pragmatism in Aliyev’s thinking at the time was his comment following the vote. The decision was not, “the fruit of his own policy, but the necessity dictated by the present reality.” When Heydar Aliyev traveled to Moscow in late September 1993 to sign the documents joining Azerbaijan to the CIS it represented a triumph of geopolitical realism over idealistic nationalism as the basis of the country’s foreign policy orientation. Realism would continue to characterize Aliyev’s outlook, as would his insistence on sovereignty.

_First Priority – Survival_

While he had moved quickly to bring Azerbaijan into the CIS, President Aliyev stressed that preserving Azerbaijan’s independence was the primary objective of his foreign policy and that he would act in accordance with his views of Azerbaijan’s national interests. During the parliamentary debate over joining the CIS, Aliyev made this position clear, offering an early indication that he would not accept blindly Russian control in the CIS. A report on the debate stated:

Aliyev said he would do his best to rule out the restoration of the Soviet Union and its Communist Party and that he would consistently defend the independence of Azerbaijan, whose membership in the Commonwealth, he said, would in no way restrict the sovereignty and independence of the republic. He said Azerbaijan did not have to obey those clauses in the CIS Charter which it did not accept.

As relations within the CIS developed, an issue that would prove to be a major

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78 Ibid. p.49.
bone of contention between Russia and Azerbaijan was the stationing of Russian military forces on Azerbaijani territory. The Popular Front government under President Elchibey had succeeded, for the most part, in gaining the withdrawal of Russian military forces from Azerbaijan. President Aliyev proved to be no less committed to the goal of keeping Russian forces out of the country.

Throughout late 1993 and the early 1994, as the war in Nagorno-Karabakh continued and domestic problems abounded, Azerbaijan faced considerable pressure from Russia to deploy Russian military forces in the country. To defend the CIS’s external borders, Russia proposed to deploy border guards to Azerbaijan’s border with Iran. To secure a cease-fire in Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia proposed to send in Russian peacekeeping forces. President Aliyev maneuvered carefully to parry these Russian efforts while at the same time seeking progress in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Ultimately, Azerbaijan declined to establish joint border forces with Russia, although they did agree to bilateral cooperation, particularly training.

Any expectations Azerbaijan may have had of an improved situation in Nagorno-Karabakh after its accession to the CIS and the Collective Security Treaty were not realized. While Azerbaijan pressed for Russian help in settling the conflict, Russia found itself in the awkward position of being tied by treaty to two countries more or less at war with each other. Russia’s mediation efforts included proposals to deploy a “separating” force of Russian peacekeepers between the two sides in the conflict. Having lost a substantial amount of national territory, including areas beyond Nagorno-Karabakh as the war widened, Azerbaijan was concerned not simply with “separation” of forces, but with withdrawal of outside forces from Azerbaijani territory, prior to the deployment of
peacekeepers. Wary of a unilateral Russian military presence, Azerbaijan anxiously solicited Turkey and other countries for the peacekeeping mission. While on a visit to Turkey where he requested Turkish peacekeeping forces, Foreign Minister Hasanov summarized Azerbaijan’s predicament, “All countries that have a possibility of sending their troops to Azerbaijan may do so. Including Singapore, provided it has sufficient forces…. Never before have we needed peacekeeping forces so badly.”

It soon became clear that Aliyev, having joined the CIS, in no way felt limited in his relations with other countries. By February 1994 he was visiting Turkey where he signed an agreement on Friendship and Cooperation which provided, in part, for “essential measures by each country to render assistance to the other country that was attacked, in keeping with UN and other international obligations.” At about the same time, Azerbaijan began to make clear it would seek changes to the CIS Collective Security Treaty to cover threats from within, as well as from outside the organization. By late spring 1994, it was even reported that Azerbaijan planned to withdraw from the CST over Russian pressure to deploy military forces to Azerbaijan.

Concerned to reach an agreement before Azerbaijan succeeded in internationalizing the negotiations, Russian-led mediation efforts bore some fruit in May. Under the aegis of a CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, an agreement was reached in support of a cease-fire in Nagorno-Karabakh. Reflecting Azerbaijan’s resistance to deployment of Russia forces on its soil, Azerbaijan’s Prime Minister agreed to sign only after amending the protocol to specify that any deployment

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of monitors should be “international.” The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict posed a real threat to the survival of Azerbaijan as a viable state and the cease-fire outlined in the Bishkek Protocol was a step towards alleviating the threat. However, while it may have been a necessary step, it was not seen as sufficient. At the same time, Azerbaijan was active on the international scene, searching all fronts for whatever political, economic or military support it could find.

As the CIS talks opened in Bishkek, President Aliyev was in Brussels to sign a Partnership for Peace (PfP) agreement with NATO and to encourage greater western participation in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The composition of a possible peacekeeping force was a key issue and Aliyev sought CSCE (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe) support. At a minimum, he wanted to preclude a unilateral Russian deployment, and the CSCE proved useful in that regard. No peacekeepers were ever deployed, yet, to the present day, a fragile cease-fire has largely held in Nagorno-Karabakh.

By agreeing to the cease-fire in Nagorno-Karabakh and forestalling the deployment of Russian troops to Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev relieved the most immediate threats facing the country and took the opportunity to intensify efforts to gain international support. During a visit to Baku by a team of American government officials, President Aliyev alluded to what would become the principal tenet of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy under his leadership when he said, “…development of Azerbaijan’s economic relations with other countries, the United States included, will

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play an enormous part in a strengthening of the republic’s independence.” Further, with reference to oil contract negotiations which were then on-going, he noted that “…cooperation in the sphere of oil production would make it possible to expand contacts in other spheres also….”

_Geo-Economics Emerges_

In formulating Azerbaijan’s foreign policy, Heydar Aliyev was guided by the premises identified in his statement, “Azerbaijan has two important assets – its geopolitical location and its natural resources.” On September 20, 1994 Azerbaijan signed a contract to develop its sizeable oil reserves with a consortium of foreign oil companies. Known euphemistically as the ‘contract of the century,’ it marked the beginning of a transformation in both the form and substance of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy orientation. Thenceforth, Azerbaijan followed a realist policy of hard-headed economic pragmatism based on its reserves of oil and gas and their transit to market. One government official from the Aliyev era described the ‘contract of the century’ as being the “first step in a foreign policy based on geopolitics and geo-economics.”

Linking the contract to the future security of the Azerbaijani state, Heydar Aliyev said, “The proper fulfillment of the obligations envisaged in 'The Contract of the Century' and the successful implementation of our new oil strategy is one of the main guarantors of the

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85 Ibid.
86 President Heydar Aliyev, quoted by Foreign Minister Guliyev in “We Are Not Satisfied with Russia’s Position on the Karabakh Conflict,” _Nezavisimaya Gazeta_, December 3, 1999, p.5.
eternity of the independence of the Azeri state….” Skeptical about the reliability of outside states as guarantors of Azerbaijan’s independence, Aliyev sought through oil and gas concessions to link foreign multinational companies to Azerbaijan’s sovereignty and independence. In doing so, the countries that support the multinationals would also take on a stake in Azerbaijan’s independence. Starting with economics, Azerbaijan would integrate more fully with the West which was the strategic vision behind the policy.

As important as the signing of the ‘contract of the century’ was to Azerbaijan’s development, the critical issue of transporting the oil to market had to be resolved. President Aliyev preferred a route that passed through Turkey to the Mediterranean, although how it would get from Azerbaijan to Turkey, two non-contiguous countries, remained to be seen. An advisor to the President stated that, at that time, developing an export route which would not pass through Russia was a strategic priority. Doing so would support closer integration with the West, and lessen Azerbaijan’s dependence on Russia. Still, Russia had significant influence over the ultimate decision. Lukoil, a Russian firm included initially in the consortium, pushed for transit through Russia. At the same time, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs raised concerns about the legality of the contract itself, giving rise to concerns that the Russian government might oppose development of the project entirely. In any event, it was clear from the onset that the decision on how to transport Azerbaijan’s oil and gas to market was as much a question of foreign policy alignment as it was a question of economics.

90 Nasser Sagheb and Masoud Javadi, “Azerbaijan’s ‘Contract of the Century’ Finally Signed with Western Oil Consortium.”
The pitched debate over oil export pipeline route that ensued after the signing of the ‘contract of the century’ was laden with weighty geopolitical consequences. The eventual choice of a main export pipeline route through Georgia and Turkey to the Mediterranean Sea was a major step in Azerbaijan’s strategy of integrating with the West through geo-economic ties and had broad geopolitical significance. It indicated a decision by Azerbaijan to align itself with Turkey and the West; to resist Russian and other commercial pressures. The decision fit neatly into an overall strategy of western integration. Developments in the security field occurring nearly simultaneously confirmed this conclusion.

**Orientation Based on State Interests**

President Aliyev’s most immediate goal upon taking office was to preserve the sovereignty and independence of Azerbaijan. His political orientation was, according to a close advisor, “entirely pragmatic and based on a cold analysis of threats and opportunities.” Initially the principal threats to Azerbaijan were in Nagorno-Karabakh and from Russia, which was unhappy about Azerbaijan’s wholly pro-Turkish orientation under the Popular Front government. With no other realistic alternatives, Aliyev moved swiftly towards conciliation with Russia by joining the CIS and the Collective Security Treaty. This move can be understood as bandwagoning to alleviate a threat. Yet, at the same time, he energetically pursued relations with other countries in an effort to balance Russian pressures. In fact, one senior government official suggested that the real orientation of Azerbaijan under Heydar Aliyev emerged only after the cease-fire in Nagorno-Karabakh.93

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Fundamentally, Aliyev believed Russia posed a threat to Azerbaijan’s sovereignty and the only way to relieve this threat, or at least balance it, was through integration with the West. While pursuing closer ties with the West, it was important, at the same time, that Azerbaijan keep Russia’s geopolitical interests in mind, not antagonize Russia, and seek to maintain, as much as possible, friendly relations with Russia. Seen in this light, Azerbaijan’s strategy was one of hedging and balancing. Before reviewing how this strategic approach played out in the remaining years of Heydar Aliyev’s administration, it will be productive to look in a bit more detail at the basis for his position.

The basic premise tested in this study is that alignment choices are based on elements of both national interest and national identity and, specifically, that threat perceptions are based, in large measure, on historical lessons. The discussion of Azerbaijan’s Popular Front government above suggests both these assertions were valid during that period. So far, the discussion of the Aliyev period suggests that interest, rather than identity, drove Azerbaijan’s policy choices, specifically on issues of international alignment. A look at national identity under Heydar Aliyev is necessary to determine what, if any, role identity played in the alignment decisions of that period.

In both external and internal relations, President Aliyev acted to build a secular state identity based on national interests, rather than a national identity based on ethnic, linguistic and historical elements as pursued by the Popular Front. This approach had immediate and largely positive effects on Azerbaijan’s relations with Iran and Russia. In the case of Iran, by putting his emphasis on Azerbaijani statehood, rather than cultural or

95 This point is discussed in greater depth in: Brenda Shaffer, Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002) pp.165-168.
historical identity, Aliyev reduced the friction over “South Azerbaijan.” With Russia, the
more balanced approach taken by Aliyev meant a toning down of the anti-Russian, anti-
colonial rhetoric of his predecessor. On the face of it, one could conclude that interest
was given priority over identity. The role of history, central in the minds of the Popular
Front government, did not play nearly as prominent a role under the new leadership, but
it was not entirely absent.

The Role of History

Several advisors and other officials who worked closely with Heydar Aliyev
reported he was well-versed in Azerbaijan’s history, including the history of the
Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. Addressing the nation on May 28, 1994 on the
anniversary of the founding of the ADR, Aliyev acknowledged the contemporary
international political context had much in common with the 1918-1920 period of
Azerbaijan’s history, saying, “One should learn lessons from history in order not to
repeat the mistakes which resulted in the Azeri loss of independence 74 years ago.”
Aliyev and those in his cabinet fully understood the 1920 loss of independence was at the
hands of the Bolsheviks and that Azerbaijan’s independence could well be threatened
again by Russia. The Soviet intervention in ‘Black January’ 1990 reinforced this anxiety.
Drawing a lesson from both the preceding points, one senior official from the Heydar
Aliyev government said, “History shows Russia will never see us as independent.”

If history was in some measure applicable in helping Heydar Aliyev and his
administration more clearly understand the threats it faced, it proved less reliable on the
question of how to deal with these threats. The conclusion of former President Elchibey

97 Interview with author, June 28, 2007.
and the APF, having studied the history of the ADR, was to align the country with Turkey, on ethnic, linguistic and historical grounds, including the fact that it was the one state that had actively fought in support of the ADR during its brief independence.

For the pragmatists in the government, the lesson of the ADR was that an independent Azerbaijan could rely on neither Turkey, nor the West to defend it against armed aggression. The lesson was that Azerbaijan had to find a way to use its own resources to protect itself. In the modern context that has meant harnessing the country’s oil and gas resources to a foreign policy strategy designed to protect the country’s sovereignty.

_In Search of Balance_

Joining the CIS and initiating the process of integrating the country’s oil and gas sector into the western economic system offered some hope that the country would weather the difficult circumstances in which it found itself. Still, given the level of threats Azerbaijan faced, it was not far-fetched to conclude, as one analyst did, in 1996, “It appears, then, that Azerbaijan’s loss of independence in the near future is the most likely turn of events in light of present realities.” Decisions in both the security and economic arenas eventually combined to provide some measure of stability on which confidence in the country’s survival and its future was founded. The policies resulting from these decisions were mutually reinforcing and part of a larger plan to move Azerbaijan towards the West. Three of the most significant policies will be reviewed briefly to illustrate this main point.

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98 Interview with author, June 29, 2007.
The GUAM group - Tilting Westward

The GUAM group began to form in October 1997 on the margins of a Council of Europe meeting, when the Presidents of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova met to discuss issues of mutual interest. In particular, the four countries shared interests in: peaceful settlement of conflicts; cooperation in peacekeeping; development of a Eurasian Transcaucasian transport corridor; and integration into Euro-Atlantic security structures. One analyst assessed the basis of the organization as being, “a shared pro-Western orientation, a mistrust of Russia, and the desire to profit jointly from the export of Azerbaijan’s Caspian oil…” By all accounts the formation of GUAM represented an early attempt by the member states to coordinate their security and economic policies with each other while moving some distance away from Russia and towards the West.

Following the formation of GUAM, officials from all four of the member states downplayed the security aspects of the group, focusing public remarks instead on the group’s economic potential. Yet, for each, security concerns were as important as economic concerns, if not more so. For Azerbaijan, disappointment over Russian and CIS inability to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh problem was a major influence on their decision to cooperate more formally with their GUAM partners and with the West. Additionally, reports that Russia transferred upwards of $1 billion of military equipment to Armenia in the years 1993-1997 exacerbated Azerbaijan-Russian relations, as did concerns over the Russian-Armenian Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Military

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100 The October 10, 1997 joint communiqué is at: http://www.guam.org/ (accessed February 16, 2009). The formation of GUAM is discussed in Chapter 2, pp.18-20.
Assistance signed in August 1997.\textsuperscript{103} For Azerbaijan, GUAM represented an aspiration and an opportunity to orient both its economic and security policies westward. In the security realm, this connection was made explicit in late 1997, when Azerbaijan’s Foreign Minister Hasanov advocated coordinating GUAM’s security policies within the NATO Partnership for Peace program in a “16 + 4” formula.\textsuperscript{104} Each of the GUAM states wanted closer relations with NATO and believed they could improve these relationships by acting jointly, rather than solely on a bilateral basis.

The formation of the GUAM group was based on common threat perceptions and mutual understanding of the opportunities that could potentially be realized by banding together. As such, its basis was, and remains, pragmatic and interest-based, representing an attempt to balance the military and economic power and influence of Russia. While the members share the common experience of having been part of the Tsarist and Soviet empires, this historical reality has not been advanced as the basis for cooperation, though it may be an unstated assumption. To further an understanding of Azerbaijan’s alignment preferences and policies, the subsequent development of GUAM need not be treated at any length, though it will be revisited briefly when considering the orientation and alignment policies of Azerbaijan’s current President and his administration.\textsuperscript{105} A look back at economic developments occurring in parallel with development of GUAM will supplement the discussion about the emergence of a western orientation in Azerbaijan.

\textsuperscript{103} President Aliyev expressed concern over both in a September 1997 meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Cem. See: “President Aliyev Asks Turkey’s Help in Karabakh Settlement,” \textit{ITAR-TASS}, September 8, 1997. accessed in \textit{World News Connection}.

\textsuperscript{104} “Foreign Minister: GUAM Alliance Not Aimed At Russia,” \textit{Turan}, 26 Nov 97, (accessed in \textit{World News Connection}). See also: Liz Fuller, “Introducing the Other GUAM.”

Geo-Economics Revisited – Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan

As Azerbaijan began to shift its security orientation towards the West, the question of export route for the “main oil” to be produced from its Caspian Sea reserves was the subject of intense commercial and political debate. It was noted earlier that within the GUAM group, development of an East-West transport corridor was a top priority. In this case, security and economic interests were mutually reinforcing. In the Ankara Declaration of October 1998, the Presidents of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan confirmed their political intention to develop the “Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan” (BTC) route for the main oil pipeline from the Caspian to the Mediterranean. 106 Many of the world’s leading multinational oil firms were skeptical, preferring to base commercial decisions on fiscal, not geopolitical realities. Nonetheless, the BTC pipeline was eventually built and has been in use pumping oil to the Mediterranean Sea port of Ceyhan since May 28, 2006.

The BTC pipeline and an associated natural gas pipeline running parallel into eastern Turkey were part and parcel of Azerbaijan’s strategy under Heydar Aliyev to integrate as much as possible economically with the West. The pipeline was described by one official as Azerbaijan’s “lifeline to the West,” while another described it as the second major step, after the “contract of the century,” in Azerbaijan’s pro-western orientation. 107 The choice of the BTC route, and the implicit decisions to avoid transiting Russian, Iranian and Armenian territory, had important geopolitical ramifications. 108 The

106 The details of the Ankara Declaration are reported in “Declaration on Caspian Oil Detailed,” ANATOLIYA, October 29, 1998 (accessed in World News Connection).
aforementioned countries were each perceived as posing distinct threats to Azerbaijan. To gain access to the West the remaining option was Georgia. Of the potential alternatives for access to the West, Georgia was the most attractive, as its political and economic interests were deemed to be closest to Azerbaijan’s. Indeed, in several interviews, senior officials suggested Georgia was a natural partner, acknowledging the strategic importance of Georgia for Azerbaijan, and vice versa. The sentiment: “Without Georgia, Azerbaijan can’t survive,” was voiced by many of those interviewed.\textsuperscript{109}

\textit{Collective Security Treaty Reconsidered – Withdrawal from the CST}

The renewal of the CIS Collective Security Treaty, required in May 1999, was another significant signpost in the alignment of Azerbaijan and other members of the CIS. Since at least the formation of the GUAM group, it was evident that two camps, described as “Russophiles” and “westernizers,” were developing within the CIS.\textsuperscript{110} Azerbaijan was among the “westernizers” that saw security cooperation with the NATO, the OSCE and the West as potentially beneficial and desirable. For Azerbaijan, the Collective Security Treaty’s focus on external threats, that is, threats from outside the CIS, failed to address their primary concern – the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which was a problem within the CIS. Commenting on Uzbekistan’s decision to leave the CIS Treaty, Vafa Guluzade, Foreign Policy Advisor to President Aliyev said, “This Treaty was concluded for joint defense from external threats, however, in actual fact, the parties to the treaty could not even put an end to aggression by one CIS member against another. … In connection with this, I think that Azerbaijan should also consider

\textsuperscript{109} Two senior officials used that very wording in interviews with author, July 25, 2007 and July 27, 2007.
\textsuperscript{110} Taras Kuzio, “Geopolitical Pluralism in the CIS: The Emergence of GUUAM,” op.cit. pp.81-83.
the advisability of participating in the CIS Collective Security Treaty.” In May 1994, Azerbaijan (along with Georgia and Uzbekistan) chose not to renew its membership in the CST. (Table 2, page 51). It remained a member of the CIS in general, but decided continued participation in the Collective Security Treaty was not worthwhile. At the same time, closer relations with NATO, bilaterally and through GUAM, indicated clearly Azerbaijan’s alignment preference.

Summary – Alignment under President Heydar Aliyev

Heydar Aliyev would serve as President of Azerbaijan until October 2003, yet the main parameters of his foreign policy alignment would not change significantly after 1999. Efforts to cooperate more closely with NATO on security issues, in particular, were in evidence. Additionally, after the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, Azerbaijan stepped up security cooperation with the United States in the anti-terrorism sphere. While gradually orienting its economic and security efforts westward, Azerbaijan under Heydar Aliyev moved carefully to balance political relations with all key states, particularly Russia and Iran.

What had appeared as a reorientation towards Russia when Azerbaijan joined the CIS in 1993 came to be seen, with the benefit of time, as more akin to what senior officials described as a “tactical” decision designed by President Aliyev to buy time and maneuver room. Subsequently, he carefully balanced Azerbaijan’s orientation, leading many observers to regard his foreign policy as ambiguous or vacillating. Yet, ultimately, his aim was to secure Azerbaijan’s independence through a process of integration with the West in the economic, and later security, spheres. Even opposition figures

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grudgingly praised the policy’s results. One said, “Aliyev masterfully, quietly, step-by-step got us out from under the nose of the Russian bear.”\textsuperscript{112}

In assessing Azerbaijan’s foreign policy alignment during the Heydar Aliyev era, it is noteworthy that most government officials and analysts identify two principal determinants of policy: geopolitical location and natural resources. Quoting President Aliyev, then Foreign Minister Guliyev explicitly identified this fact: “…a struggle is going on because the Caucasus region and Azerbaijan’s location are of great geopolitical significance. I would like to recall President Aliyev’s words … He said that “Azerbaijan has two important assets – its geopolitical location and its natural resources.”\textsuperscript{113} Based on these two assets a pragmatic policy of geopolitical and geo-economic balancing was undertaken. The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh was a central focus of policy, yet it was a commonly-held view within the Azerbaijani elite that, “The problem is not about Armenians, but about a Russia that does not wish to have an independent state of Azerbaijan, oriented to Turkey and the USA.”\textsuperscript{114} Aliyev’s general policy direction was summarized succinctly by a senior advisor who said: “The main threat to Azerbaijan’s survival was Russia, they only way to relieve it was through the West.”\textsuperscript{115}

The balancing policy of Heydar Aliyev was successful in preserving Azerbaijan’s independence, although he was unable to resolve the impasse over Nagorno-Karabakh. It was a vastly different country that Ilham Aliyev took over when elected president in October 2003. The world had changed much, as well. How Azerbaijan chose to orient

\textsuperscript{112} Interview with author. June 30, 2007.
\textsuperscript{113} “We Are Not Satisfied with Russia’s Position on the Karabakh Conflict.” \textit{Nezavisimaya Gazeta}, December 3, 1999, p.5. The two elements were identified in several interviews with the author and, for example, in: Leila Aliyeva, “The Institutions, Orientations, and Conduct of Foreign-Policy in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan.” op.cit. p.286.
\textsuperscript{115} Interview with author. June 27, 2007.
itself in this new context, with a new president, is reviewed in the next section.

Ilham Aliyev Era

When Ilham Aliyev took office, every expectation was that he would continue the strategy of his father: pragmatic balancing through economic and security ties with the West, coupled with political accommodation of Russia where possible, all designed to strengthen Azerbaijan’s sovereignty and gain support in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. One senior official who served both Presidents went so far as to say that, “An alternative to the policy of Heydar Aliyev doesn’t exist.” In an interview shortly after being elected, President Aliyev confirmed expectations that Azerbaijan’s foreign policy course would continue largely unchanged.

I regard Azerbaijan’s policy over the last 10 years and in the future as independent of anybody’s interests. It must be based on observing our own values …. We have no specific orientations in foreign policy. Our orientation is based on promoting by means of foreign policy activity the attainment of set objectives, the strengthening of Azerbaijan’s place in the world, and also our economic development via mutually advantageous cooperation….

The tone and tenor of this statement reflect quite closely the non-antagonistic, non-confrontational approach taken by Heydar Aliyev. Yet, such carefully worded public remarks did not reflect fully the new President’s orientation. In the first place, some momentum towards western integration had been established. Contracts had been signed, investments made and patterns of cooperation established. Secondly, close advisors described President Ilham Aliyev as “more pro-Western than his father” and suggested that his fluency in English and wide-ranging travel in the West had convinced him

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“internally” of the wisdom and necessity of western integration. One observer said, “Heydar was a Soviet man, Ilham is a Western man.” In any event, Azerbaijan’s policy continued to be balanced, though often giving the impression it was shifting one way or the other based on changing circumstances.

Balancing To and Fro

Recognizing the continuing centrality of good relations with Russia, Ilham Aliyev made an official visit to Moscow early in his tenure, in February 2004. By all accounts the visit was successful. In a press conference after the official meetings, Aliyev praised his relationship with Russian President Putin, “I have very sincere, trusting and close relations with Vladimir Putin, which I value greatly.” The closeness of this relationship stood in clear contrast with the relationship between Heydar Aliyev and Russian President Boris Yeltsin, between whom, according to reports and interviews, there existed a mutual enmity. In the wake of the Moscow meeting, analysts wondered if Ilham Aliyev and Azerbaijan could maintain for long the balanced posture for which it strived. Mindful of the Russian proverb, “you can’t sit on two stools,” most Russian analysts believed that, sooner or later, Azerbaijan would have to make a choice between Russia and the West.

Throughout 2005 and into 2006 continuing efforts by Azerbaijan and Ilham Aliyev to sustain a balanced policy were evident. In an interview prior to a February 2005 visit to Moscow, he repeated, “We are in favor of developing good relations with all

our neighbors. And our foreign policy doctrine is based on this.”122 At a time when there was much conjecture in the press about possible U.S. plans to address Iran’s nuclear program, Aliyev pledged not to let the region become and “arena for rivalry” and broadened the stricture previously directed at keeping Russian troops out of Azerbaijan to include any foreign troops. He stated Azerbaijan’s position on this unambiguously:

Our position is that we do not consider it expedient and we do not see any sense in having foreign military contingents stationed in our country. Azerbaijan is an independent state, we want to live in peace with our neighbors and we want there to be peace in the region. A foreign military presence in Azerbaijan will not serve our interests and aims, but the interests of the country whose troops are stationed on our territory.”123

This statement furthered the position, taken initially by Heydar Aliyev, that while Azerbaijan would orient westward in pursuit of its national interests, it would act independently to protect its sovereignty.

During an April 2006 visit to Washington, D.C., President Aliyev positively assessed U.S.-Azerbaijani military cooperation, but identified explicitly its limits, addressing directly the Iran issue: “In our relations with the United States, we have a very high level of mutual confidence and trust, and we continue military cooperation because it is a benefit of both countries. At the same time, Azerbaijan, of course, will not be engaged in any kind of potential operations against Iran….“124 Azerbaijan continued, under Ilham Aliyev, to put a high premium on not provoking its neighbors to the north or to the south. Caution was the watchword in Azerbaijan’s policy. Returning home from his visit to Washington, President Aliyev could say with some satisfaction that he had

123 Ibid.
visited all five of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. In symbolic terms, this represented the correct and balanced foreign policy he sought.125

What was described by government officials as balance, caution, and prudence, was viewed more often by academic analysts and journalists as vacillation and indecision. Russian commentators, in particular, were wont to describe Azerbaijan’s foreign policy orientation as a policy of “swinging to and fro” (politiki kachelyei), attributing just such a policy to both Heydar and Ilham Aliyev.126 Western commentators were less likely to see oscillation and more apt to see an effort to maintain a balance in Azerbaijan’s policy. One saw President Aliyev ‘walking a tightrope’ between Russia and the West, while another pictured Azerbaijan as navigating between the modern day equivalents of Scylla and Charybdis.127 Maintaining such equilibrium was no simple task, as events would demonstrate.

_Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Inauguration_

When the Azerbaijan section of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline was commissioned, in May 2005, President Aliyev said the line would, “change completely the political and economic panorama of the region.”128 When the entire pipeline was inaugurated in 2006, it indeed changed the regional geopolitical context. The vision of an east-west energy corridor, after more than 10 years of debate and planning, was

125 “President Says Azerbaijani Foreign Policy Correct, Balanced,” _ITAR-TASS_, May 9, 2006 (accessed in _World News Connection_).


128 “Azerbaijani Section of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline Inaugurated,” _ITAR-TASS_, May 25, 2005 (accessed in _World News Connection_).
becoming a reality. A “lifeline” now connected Azerbaijan and Georgia to Turkey and the West. Optimism about the route encouraged discussions about a parallel gas pipeline from Baku to Tbilisi to Erzerum in Turkey, and other infrastructure projects that would support the emerging east-west energy and transport corridor. The goal of economic integration with the West, long a tenet of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy, was being realized.

The importance of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan main oil pipeline went well beyond the projected economic benefits to the countries involved. President Saakashvili of Georgia was expansive on this point:

> For us, today's ceremony and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline mean far more than an economic, political or energy project. This is a historic prerequisite for our countries' freedom and independence…. From now on, the possibility of confrontational methods and a policy of diktat being used is ending and a completely new era is starting in the Caucasus….  

A new era seemed to have started in the Caucasus, but it was by no means clear what type of era it would be. Nor was it clear whether it would be characterized more by cooperation or confrontation. A new line had been drawn on the region’s map. Given the acute geopolitical competition in the Caucasus region, many analysts viewed this in zero-sum terms, seeing in the development of the east-west corridor an emerging east-west geopolitical axis.

In Azerbaijan, the opening of the BTC pipeline contributed to a growing consensus on the country’s foreign policy course. Azerbaijan’s preferred external alignment was described by a former opposition figure in this manner:

> Practically all thinkers and political-opinion leaders support the foreign policy aimed at integrating with Western structures such as NATO [and] opening a European future for Azerbaijan and strong cooperation with the United States. At the same time, to provide good cooperation with Russia and some level of

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cooperation with Iran."\textsuperscript{130} Realization of the BTC project furthered this vision, and contributed to a growing self-confidence in Azerbaijani policy.

\textit{Gas Disputes – December 2006}

In late 2006, disputes between the Russian gas company Gazprom and many of Russia’s neighboring states broke out over the price at which natural gas would be sold. In most cases, Gazprom, in effect, decided to no longer sell on preferential terms and determined instead to move towards prices based on world market levels. The effects of this revised policy had been seen in Europe in January 2006 when a Russian gas cutoff to Ukraine led to a reduction of the gas supplied to Europe, causing widespread apprehension. Azerbaijan was one of the countries affected by Russia’s revised gas policy and its reaction demonstrated the vital importance of the country’s energy resources and its links to the West.

Faced with a considerable price hike for the gas it purchased from Russia, Azerbaijan decided to forgo purchasing Russian gas, and to stop pumping Azerbaijani oil through Russia to the port of Novorossisk, ostensibly to use the oil to make up the loss in electricity generation. President Aliyev called Gazprom’s proposal and the ensuing negotiations, “at variance with the letter and spirit of Russian-Azerbaijani relations,” but tried not to politicize the issue.\textsuperscript{131} Nevertheless, Georgia also faced Russian pressure on gas, and having no reserves of its own, turned to Azerbaijan for help. Recognizing Georgia’s security as vital to Azerbaijan’s own, an agreement to supply Georgia with gas

from Azerbaijan was made. The entire sequence of events reinforced Azerbaijan’s desire to link its energy supplies with the West.

Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov called the episode a “defining moment for Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus,” and said: “Almost overnight, the price of gas has more than doubled for us. This is more than just a market message and it is unacceptable for Azerbaijan. In response, we have decided to stop buying Russian gas as well as to stop using the Russian pipeline to export Azerbaijani oil to Europe.”

Decisive steps had been taken by Azerbaijan to protect its sovereignty and that of Georgia, yet the desire for balance remained. A month after the crisis was resolved, President Aliyev continued to talk of balance, saying, “We feel equally comfortable cooperating with Russia and the European Union and the United States. This is a question of national interests, which define our policy…”

National Security Concept

In May 2007, President Aliyev endorsed the National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan which identifies the goals and principles behind Azerbaijan’s national policy, provides a good summary statement of the nation’s orientation at the time. Azerbaijan’s strategic alignment preference is clearly stated: “Integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic political, security, economic and other institutions constitutes the strategic goal of the Republic of Azerbaijan.” This statement bears out the discussion herein on Azerbaijan’s orientation under both Heydar and Ilham Aliyev. It reflects, as well, statements made by a variety of government officials during interviews.

A pro-Western orientation has been Azerbaijan’s preference for most of the period of its independence. Notwithstanding, Azerbaijan has sought balance in its relations with regional and other countries. This precept is also documented in the ‘Concept’: “The Republic of Azerbaijan pursues a multidimensional, balanced foreign policy and seeks to establish friendly relations with all countries on the basis of universally accepted norms and principles of international law….”\textsuperscript{134} To summarize, Azerbaijan’s strategic alignment since Heydar Aliyev took power in 1993, is best described as balanced in style, pro-Western in content.

\textit{GUAM Summit – Baku June 2007}

The GUAM group, widely considered moribund by observers and participants alike, had reconstituted itself in 2006 as the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (ODED-GUAM).\textsuperscript{135} At a minimum, the group continued to symbolize a desire on the part of its members to resist integration under Russian predominance and it continued to be portrayed as anti-CIS. In addition to the Presidents of Ukraine and Georgia, and the Prime Minister of Moldova, the group’s 2007 summit meeting in Baku, Azerbaijan was attended by the Presidents of Poland, Romania and Lithuania. According to reports, 25 countries and as many as eight international organizations were represented at the meeting.\textsuperscript{136} While the GUAM group continued to focus on the question of separatist conflicts on the territory of three of the members, in terms of cooperation, the main result was the continued promotion of the transit potential of the area. Host Ilham Aliyev hailed the meeting as an opportunity for GUAM to become a new form of

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid. p.12.
\textsuperscript{135} Herein, p.46 ff.
regional cooperation from the Caspian to the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea. The meeting’s final communiqué, “GUAM: Bringing Continents Together,” reflected the role the countries hoped to advance linking Europe and Asia. Geo-economics had become a central pillar of GUAM’s strategic approach.

**Recent Developments**

The familiar pattern characterized by a balanced pursuit of western integration continues to be the most identifiable feature of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy. Despite its best efforts, however, regional and international events often make it difficult to maintain equilibrium. The August 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia over the South Ossetia region was a salient example of the challenge regional tensions pose to Azerbaijan’s policy. Russia’s forceful actions in Georgia, and the perceived lack of an adequate western response raised significant doubts about the efficacy of a pro-western orientation. While the country’s strategy had been to pursue economic integration in the first place, ultimately infrastructure projects must be secured against potential threats. It appeared at times during the Russia-Georgia conflict that the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline may have been directly threatened. In the end, this seemed not to be the case, but the fear of a serious and protracted disruption to its “lifeline to the west,” and concern over what role the West was prepared to play to secure this asset, was enough to call into question the country’s foreign policy. One negative view of the West’s response said: “This weak and unprofessional response by the West will have severe negative consequences for the region, both in terms of its own image and in terms of the Euro-

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Atlantic integration of Georgia and Azerbaijan.”138 To many, it seemed the crisis in Georgia could be a defining moment, causing Azerbaijan to reassess its strategic choice. When a visit to Baku by U.S. Vice President Cheney was followed by a visit to Moscow by President Aliyev, speculation was rampant that a foreign policy reassessment was imminent.139

Yet in an October 24 inauguration speech, President Aliyev pledged to stay the course. Recalling in his first inauguration speech he had promised to continue the policy of Heydar Aliyev, he said this policy, “is the only correct choice for the present and future Azerbaijan,” and concluded, “I would like to confirm my allegiance to this policy.”140 Indeed, one month later, in November, Baku hosted officials from Europe, Turkey and the United States to discuss plans for transporting Caspian energy supplies to Europe. The meeting was a positive confirmation of the decision to press forward with a continued strategy of economic integration with the West, even in the face of a much changed security situation in the Caucasus region. Such a strategy is likely to continue in the near to mid-term.

**Summary of the Sources of Azerbaijan’s Alignment**

In a thoughtful discussion of Azerbaijan’s post-Soviet foreign policy, one analyst noted, “This strategy had to incorporate two sets of factors: the historical, religious and cultural legacies and ethnic affiliations of the Azerbaijani people, on the one hand, and

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the geopolitical and strategic considerations of the Azerbaijani state on the other.”¹⁴¹

Since independence, each of Azerbaijan’s leaders has had to reckon with each of the two factors noted above, one regarding national identity, the other geopolitics. Each of the two factors has been present in the foreign policy thinking of Azerbaijan’s post-Soviet leadership, but to varying degrees. Emphasis on the first set of factors promoted a powerful ethnic nationalism. Emphasis on the second led to a more benign state nationalism based on citizenship rather than ethnicity. In turn, each of these models led to different conclusions about Azerbaijan’s strategic alignment. To recapitulate briefly the relative importance of the different factors in Azerbaijan’s foreign policy alignment, a few points on the relative importance of each set of factors will be made.

**National Identity**

As the Soviet Union began to unravel, Azerbaijan’s sense of national identity was less developed than that of neighboring Georgia or Armenia. No consensus existed on what it meant to be an Azerbaijani, or on how Azerbaijan saw itself in the world. Four different alphabet changes in the last 80 years illustrated the dilemma of Azerbaijan’s identity. Azerbaijan’s post-Soviet history can be seen, in large measure, as a process of forming a distinctly Azerbaijani identity. Along with language and religion, the development of collective memory has been an important element in this process and the return of history that accompanied the advent of Azerbaijani statehood contributed essentially to this. During the movement towards independence, and in the one year of Abulfaz Elchibey and the Azerbaijan Popular Front’s tenure, history played a defining role in policy. Azerbaijan’s relations with Russia and Iran were based on historical

memories of the division of Azerbaijan by these two powers in 1828, and on memories of
the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. The more recent ‘Black January’ tragedy in Baku
in 1990 reinforced the Popular Front’s view of Russia as a colonial power, and thus a
threat to Azerbaijan’s independence.

Heydar Aliyev came to power in Azerbaijan as a member of the nomenklatura,
not the intelligentsia. He promoted a state, rather than national or ethnic identity. For
both him and, later, his successor/son Ilham, the role of national identity and history in
policy formulation was not as elemental as it had been for the Popular Front. On this
point, one governments official said, “The history of the First Republic had an enormous
impact, but more so in the euphoria of the early days of independence.”

Moreover, when Heydar or Ilham Aliyev and the officials who served under them looked at the
seminal events in Azerbaijan’s history they were apt to draw different conclusions.
Earlier, for example, it was noted that where Elchibey understood the lessons of the ADR
to advocate strict alignment with Turkey, Heydar and Ilham Aliyev saw more ambiguity,
recognizing in the history of the period important lessons on the source of threats to the
country, but unable to determine the appropriate response.

In spite of differences in historical interpretation and its use among the different
presidential administrations in Azerbaijan, one lesson, more recent – that of ‘Black
January – seems to have had a more uniform impact on both the intelligentsia and the
nomenklatura. In one sense, ‘Black January’ reinforced the historical memory of the
1920 Bolshevik takeover of Azerbaijan. In another, it led to the conclusion stated by a
senior government official, “Those few who thought Russia might side with us on

Nagorno-Karabakh were disabused; a fundamental shift away from Russia occurred.”

For Azerbaijanis in general, it is safe to say, the tragedy of ‘Black January’ contributed to the perception of Russia as a threat to the country’s independence.

**Geopolitics**

The thinking of Elchibey and the Popular Front administration was dominated by issues of ethnic identity and history, and nearly bereft of geopolitical considerations. The lack of strategic thought, particularly as regards foreign policy alignment, was a primary factor in President Elchibey’s downfall. Heydar Aliyev, as has been discussed, was much more pragmatic, basing his policy first and foremost on geo-economics, by which Azerbaijan would integrate with the Euro-Atlantic world. Ilham Aliyev has continued this strategic approach. The strategy has been based chiefly on interest, though some officials suggest there is also a degree of historical learning. One senior official, noting that the post-Soviet context in the Caucasus region was similar to the post-Tsarist period, attributed Azerbaijan’s loss of independence in the earlier period to the fact that “we couldn’t protect our independence, and international society wasn’t ready to defend us.” Comparing the two historical periods in somewhat more detail, he concluded that “the levers of power today are different from 1920. Today our economic potential is harnessed to our strategy.”

The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh has been central in Azerbaijan’s foreign policy calculations. In a very real sense, Azerbaijan measures its relations with outside powers by the support it receives on the Nagorno-Karabakh question. Hopes that Russia would

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143 Interview with author. August 29, 2002.
145 Ibid.
support the Azerbaijani position on the conflict gave way to the realization that, under Russian President Putin, Russia would take, at best, an impartial position. Later the belief that Russia was actually aiding, and siding with Armenia, contributed to a more western-oriented policy. Likewise, the perceived lack of Iranian support on the Nagorno-Karabakh question undermined Azerbaijan’s relations with Iran. In each case, conclusions based on contemporary geopolitical realities were supported by historical memories, both combining to portray Russia and Iran as potential threats to Azerbaijan’s independence.

Elements of both identity and interest have played a role in the choice of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy alignment since independence, though to different degrees at different times. In Azerbaijan’s case, the two elements are not contradictory. One government official identified three aspects that have contributed to Azerbaijan’s orientation: historical, military-political, and economic, and stated that all three pointed Azerbaijan to the West. Another reasoned that Azerbaijan’s threat perceptions, both contemporary and historical, lead it to pursue a western orientation.

At present, Azerbaijan’s strategic alignment choice has been made and will be pursued in the typically cautious manner that has been seen over the past several years. At the same time, the geopolitical context is ever changing and the country’s national identity continues to evolve. Active debates over the role of national identity and history in the country’s foreign policy orientation are taking place. Additionally, the

146 Ibid.
unresolved dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh will continue to weigh heavily on Azerbaijan’s foreign policy. Looking to the future, the conclusion of scholar Tadeusz Swietochowski would seem appropriate:

Whatever the future holds, the Azeris, in their dealings with the outside world, are apt to take guidance from their ancient political heritage, moderation and compromise. This is the heritage rooted in the realities of their country’s geography and history, the realities of the quintessential borderland, between different continents, religions and ethnic groups.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Tadeusz Swietochowski, Russian and Azerbaijan, op.cit. p.235.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS

*History is not, of course, a cookbook offering pretested recipes. It teaches by analogy, not by maxims. It can illuminate the consequences of actions in comparable situations, yet each generation must discover for itself what situations are in fact comparable.*

The Puzzle

This study began with an empirical puzzle – the observation that Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, three small countries that shared many similarities in the post-Soviet environment, nonetheless exhibited markedly different behavior in the security arena. An effort to understand the three states’ behavior through the prism of international relations theory proved unsatisfactory. Their behavior did not lend itself to a clear explanation in theoretical terms. The bulk of work on alliance choice has been conducted at the systemic level and did not readily address the specific choices made at the state level nor the reasons behind these choices. In other words, while much progress had been made explaining alliance behavior at the level of international relations theory, commensurate advances at the level of foreign policy theory were lacking. Why, indeed, was Georgia so pro-Western, Armenia so closely tied to Russia, and Azerbaijan cautious, but westward-leaning? How to explain the qualitatively different behaviors, particularly the differences in each state’s relationship with Russia?

Applying the generally accepted tenets of international relations theory in an effort to better understand the strategic choices made by the three countries proved to be

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unprofitable. Balance-of-power theory did not explain the differences in behavior. William Wohlforth, in an article assessing the theory’s validity in Eurasia, concluded as much, saying, “It [balance-of-power theory] is of little utility in explaining much of the variation in local responses to Russia.”² As a general recommendation on how better to understand this issue, Wohlforth said, “The answers to these questions lie in local history and politics, in the details of the imperial dissolution rather than the insights from a general theory.”³

A productive next step in understanding regional alignments was to recognize that Stephen Walt’s balance-of-threat theory potentially offered more explanatory power. Walt identified four factors used to determine threats: aggregate power; offensive power; geographical proximity; and, aggressive intentions.⁴ Three of these factors are material or structural – aggregate power, offensive power, and geographical proximity. The last factor – aggressive intentions – is a perceptual element that Walt, in fact, refers to at various times as “perceived” intentions.⁵ An initial look at the behavior observed in the South Caucasus region suggested Walt’s theory, in general, and this factor, in particular, had promise as an explanation.

Applying the logic of Walt’s fourth element to the behavior of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia is to suggest that differing perceptions of aggressive intentions yielded differing alignment preferences. Through the lens of balance-of-threat theory, Armenia’s relationship with Russia is viewed not as bandwagoning with a threat, but as

³ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid. p.5.
balancing against the threat of Turkey. This interpretation suggests that all three South Caucasus states, to one degree or another, have engaged in balancing behavior. The difference has been against whom they were balancing, and the basis for this choice has been perceptions of threat. The question then turns to how threat perceptions are generated. To address this question, a move from the systemic to the individual and/or state level of analysis is required.

Several theoretical approaches related to the alignment behavior of states and state leaders were reviewed in Chapter Three. Of these, the most promising, from the vantage point of the South Caucasus, seemed to be the work of Dan Reiter who proposed that “states make alliance policy in accordance with lessons drawn from formative historical experiences.” Reiter went on to propose an explanation of alignment behavior based on historical learning rather than realism. He tested the two theories against each other and concluded that historical learning explained alignment preferences more satisfactorily than balance-of-threat theory. While the specific hypotheses formulated by Reiter were not applicable directly to the South Caucasus case study, they did offer a fresh, and potentially constructive, perspective. Indeed, in my view, Walt’s and Reiter’s theories were not necessarily contradictory, nor in competition one with the other. Rather, combining elements from each approach to generate a new hypothesis seemed more promising.

Based on this line of reasoning, I proposed that states indeed balance against threats, as Walt proposes, and that historical learning, as suggested by Reiter, plays a

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7 Dan Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs.* p.10.
significant role in determining threat perceptions. Threat perceptions are derived from an assessment of capabilities and intentions. To determine the intentions of others, especially those that are aggressive, leaders and statesmen often look to history as a worthwhile guide. Reasoning analogically, leaders review past events where another state’s intentions are known, and compare them to current events where intentions may not be clear. The intentions inferred through this process contribute centrally to a state’s threat perceptions. Once threats are determined, a state, as Walt proposes, will balance against the threat, if at all possible. By specifying more fully the perceptual variable, and adding it to the material variables in Walt’s conception of threat, a more nuanced and, I believe, a more rigorous understanding of alignment behavior results. The case studies of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan support this proposition.

Empirical Findings

The case studies undertaken in Chapters Five - Seven show that in all three of the South Caucasus countries history and historical learning have played an important role in forming threat perceptions and that these threat perceptions, in turn, have played a central role in foreign policy alignment choices. In terms of general alignment behavior in the South Caucasus, time has shown Georgia to be clearly pro-Western, Armenia pro-Russian, while Azerbaijan has leaned tentatively towards the West. This behavior is grounded in differing threat perceptions and these differing threat perceptions are generated, not principally from material factors, but from perceptual factors rooted in different historical experiences. To the Georgian and Azerbaijani collective memories, their short-lived independence in the post-Tsarist, post-World War I period, was lost at the hands of the Russians. Armenian collective memory, on the other hand, sees from
1915, and even earlier, an existential threat to its existence from Turkey, and views incorporation into the Soviet Union as having effectively saved the one part of the Armenian state that exists today. Noting this general difference in threat perception, a former Armenian cabinet official said, “Our threat was from Turkey. … Georgia and Azerbaijan didn’t fear Turkey, they feared Russia; they lost their independence to Russia.”

The case studies done on Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan show that, at times, history and the threat perceptions derived from historical reasoning have been the most important determinant of a state’s alignment behavior. The Gamsakhurdia period in Georgia and the Elchibey period in Azerbaijan were both times when history played a predominant role in decision-making. Gamsakhurdia and Elchibey each came from the intelligentsia and had played active roles in the movements to “reclaim” the history of their country. As the first post-Soviet leaders of their respective countries, each saw the international context in which they were leading their country as post-colonial, and drew heavily on ethnic, cultural and historical arguments in pursuit of their policy preferences. Fundamentally, each saw Russia as the central threat to their nation’s independence and perceived the threat through the lens of history. The incorporation of their country into the Tsarist Empire played a role in their historical reasoning, but the history of their lost independence at the hands of the Bolsheviks was central. The perception these leaders and their administrations had of Russia is summarized in Robert Jervis’ observation that, “…states that have been expansionist under one set of circumstances or leaders are likely to be seen as posing a continuing threat.” Gamsakhurdia’s and Elchibey’s perceptions of

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Russian intentions in the post-Soviet era were derived to a large degree through their assessments of Russia’s intentions in the post-Tsarist, pre-Soviet era, or the last time each country was independent. Accordingly, they saw in Russian behavior a drive for imperial control and domination. Two specific, more recent incidents – the April 1989 Soviet crackdown in Tbilisi, and the January 1990 Soviet crackdown in Baku – greatly reinforced Georgian and Armenian threat perceptions.

The basic premises of this study: that leaders use history in deriving threat perceptions and that these threat perceptions, in turn, determine a state’s strategic alignment choices, by no means argue that leaders use history well or efficiently. Pioneering studies on the use of history by foreign policy decision-makers, in fact, argue that ordinarily policy makers use history badly. Under their first, post-Soviet, nationalistic leaders, Georgia and Azerbaijan both descended towards chaos, nearing the brink of survival. Ultimately, both Gamsakhurdia and Elchibey were swept out of office and replaced by more pragmatic, former Soviet leaders – Shevardnadze and Aliyev. Before assessing their alignment behavior, however, a look at the initial, post-Soviet period of Armenia’s independence is warranted.

In post-Soviet Armenia, history also played a significant role in threat perceptions and alignment decisions. At the center of Armenian national identity is the trauma of the 1915 ‘genocide’ at the hands of the Turks. Armenian historiography, largely conducted by the sizeable, highly-educated and literate worldwide Armenian diaspora, distilled from the lessons of history two basic perceptions: Turkey as eternal enemy; and Russia as eternal friend. Armenia’s first post-Soviet President, Ter-Petrossian, challenged these

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views, asserting these perceptions distorted Armenia’s strategic interests. His foreign policy was based on two pillars: a reassessment of Armenia’s history, particularly the conclusion that Russia was Armenia’s eternal friend; and an effort to move beyond the history of the ‘genocide’ to normalize relations with Turkey. To be clear, Ter-Petrossian and his administration did not disregard Armenia’s national tragedy, yet they argued that this bitter history should not be the sole basis for foreign policy decisions. In this case, we see a mixed use of history. To understand Russian behavior, and perceive its intentions, Ter-Petrossian and his leadership team used history, while at the same time attempting to base relations with Turkey, not on history, but, instead, on pragmatism.

One Armenian official, with regards to Ter-Petrossian’s professional background as an historian, grouped him with Gamsakhurdia and Elchibey, calling the three presidents collectively the “romantic historians of the Caucasus.”

In the immediate post-Soviet period, history played a central role in the threat perceptions and alignment preferences of all three South Caucasus states. This suggests that history and historical learning play particularly important roles as states move towards independence and in the years immediately after they have obtained independence. In more general terms it may be said that as nations move towards statehood, elements of national identity, including historical memory, play important roles in political orientation. This is not to argue that historical learning was or is the sole factor in determining alignment behavior. It does demonstrate, however, that history was an important factor in these decisions. On this point, Yuen Foong Khong’s said, in Analogies at War, “It would be sufficient for my purposes that the lessons of history be

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considered one of several major factors…"12 Indeed, in each country studied, and under each presidential administration, lessons of history contributed to threat perceptions, and to strategic alignment preferences. Material and structural factors also played a role and the relative contributions of the various factors varied over time and between different administrations.

When Eduard Shevardnadze and Heydar Aliyev became the presidents of their respective countries, pragmatism replaced historical idealism, with geography and economics taking precedence over issues of history and identity in the foreign policy decision making of Georgia and Azerbaijan. With the survival of their countries in the balance, Shevardnadze and Aliyev reversed the overtly anti-Russian courses taken by their predecessors, most noticeably by joining the Commonwealth of Independent States and its Collective Security Treaty. In terms of theory and threat perception, one could say that material and structural factors took precedence over ideational factors in the determination of strategic alignment. Senior officials who served in the Shevardnadze and Aliyev governments have said they believe the decisions to join the CIS and the CST were tactical, not strategic, designed to buy time and maneuver room. In effect, the change in Georgian and Azerbaijani behavior was a switch from balancing to bandwagoning. The perception of Russia as a threat had not changed appreciably, the difference was the conclusion reached about how to deal with this threat.

Shevardnadze and Heydar Aliyev based their decisions to join the CIS on an assessment of the failed policies of their predecessors and on the belief that the West would not, at least at that time, be their country’s salvation. Their understanding of

12 Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War*, pp.251-152.
history showed that in the face of previous Russian threats to their independence, appealing for support from the West, (at Versailles, for example,) was not a successful policy. Although history contributed to their threat perceptions, it provided no successful example of how to align themselves to alleviate the threat. Accordingly, they chose to bandwagon with Russia, believing they could address the threats to their existence better from within the CIS.

In Armenia, Ter-Petrossian’s effort to move beyond the limits of history and collective memory to normalize relations with Turkey was confounded by the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey’s eventual support for Azerbaijan in that conflict, particularly by closing the Turkish-Armenian border in support of an economic embargo, markedly strengthened the historical perception of Turkey as a threat to Armenia. Thus current realities combined with historical memories to intensify the perception of Turkey’s aggressive intentions. Under the circumstances, efforts to normalize relations between the two countries came to naught. With little in the way of concrete results to show for his efforts to reorient Armenian policy, Ter-Petrossian later resigned under pressure from many whose more conventional view of history dictated a more traditional policy.

Similarly, the role of outside powers in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict contributed importantly to Azerbaijan’s threat perceptions. Reports that Russia had provided, at various times, significant quantities of arms to Armenia led to the belief that Russia was supporting Armenia in the conflict. These suspicions reinforced a general Azerbaijani perception of Russia as a historical threat to its independence. Azerbaijan’s view of an Iranian threat likewise has been a combination of historical learning and
current realities. In both Armenia and Azerbaijan perceptions of historical threats and current threats were mutually reinforcing. In Georgia, as well, belief that Russia was supporting separatists bolstered the historical perception of Russia as a threat to state sovereignty and independence.

By the mid-1990s, the separatist conflicts in the South Caucasus region had settled into uneasy stand-offs. Cease-fires were in place, and relative advantage was sought by those involved primarily through diplomatic and economic maneuvering. While still facing high hurdles in their paths to national development, the three South Caucasus states benefited from diminished direct threats to their national survival. Under the circumstances, all three South Caucasus states maneuvered to develop economic, political and, where possible, security ties with the West. By May 1999, when the CIS Collective Security Treaty came up for renewal, a major turning point in regional alignment was reached. Georgia and Azerbaijan chose not to renew their membership in the CST, while at the same time pursuing new avenues of cooperation with the countries of the GUUAM group. Armenia chose to remain a member of the CST and to remain aloof from GUUAM.

A major underlying flaw in the Collective Security Treaty was the lack of common threat perceptions. Its focus was predominantly on threats external to the organization. For Armenia, the CST offered some guarantee against direct Turkish involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Georgia and Azerbaijan, however, were frustrated by the inability of the CST to help resolve their separatist conflicts. At the

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same time, GUUAM was seen by its members as a strategic relationship between
countries with, “. . . common problems, threat perceptions and, . . . a common vision of
the future.”\textsuperscript{14} Increasingly, in Georgia and Azerbaijan, alignment preferences were
determined by current perceptions of threat and opportunity, particularly economic
opportunity. Nevertheless, these perceptions coincided, to a significant degree, with the
lessons of history derived by previous administrations. In Armenia, the Kocharian
administration placed the issue of ‘genocide’ recognition at the forefront of its foreign
policy efforts, returning history to a central place in Armenian foreign policy.

For the most part, the alignment preferences discernable in the region from 1999
onwards have continued, although not without some significant developments. One
major development was the 2003 Rose Revolution and the coming to power in Georgia of
President Mikheil Saakashvili. Impatient with the political and economic inertia that had
befallen Georgia under the latter years of the Shevardnadze presidency, Saakashvili and
his young administration were guided by a strong sense of Georgia’s national identity,
particularly its independence from Russia. The demonstrative pro-Western, anti-Russian
orientation of the Saakashvili administration has been based on an interpretation of
Georgian history as opposition to the Russian Empire, giving rise to what has been
described as a ‘resistance identity.’\textsuperscript{15} Given the centrality of national identity and history
in public and policy discourse, the Saakashvili period has resembled more closely the
Gamsakhurdia period than the Shavardnadze period.

\textsuperscript{14} “Remarks by Georgian Ambassador Tedo Japaridze at the GUUAM Workshop, Stanford University,
magazine/84_folder/84_articles/84_guuam.html (accessed March 14, 2009).
\textsuperscript{15} Manual Castells, quoted in Jaba Devrariani, “Georgia and Russia: The Troubled Road to Accomodation,”
in Bruno Coppeters and Robert Legvold, editors, Statehood and Security: Georgia after the Rose
Revolution, p.156.
In Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev’s tenure as president has seen a general continuity in alignment policy and orientation. While history has played a role in the country’s perception of threats during this time, the options for responding to these threats have been framed more by considerations of geography and economics. Further, as in Armenia, the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh remains a pivotal issue and Azerbaijan’s perception of outside powers has as much to do with its positions on this issue as with historical memories.

After his election as President of Armenia in 2008, Serge Sargsyan faced the same basic task as his predecessors – trying to promote national security and economic development. In presidential decision-making, the weight of the past, specifically, the Armenian ‘genocide,’ continues to exert a powerful influence. Yet, concerned by the prospect of Armenia’s increasing isolation in the region, Sargsyan moved cautiously beyond the burden of the past and proposed steps towards normalization of relations with Turkey. At the time of this writing, it remains to be seen whether the effort to recast relations with Turkey will succeed and what effect there will be on regional dynamics. In any event, to be successful, the process will have to address issues of threat perception and historical identity, in addition to geopolitics and economics.

The research and analysis conducted on the three South Caucasus states of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan show that neither interest nor identity alone explains the alignment choices of these states. A combination of these factors provides for a better understanding of regional behavior. Understanding both the material and perceptual basis for the countries’ threat perceptions is the key to understanding their alignment behavior.
Implications for Theory

A general theoretical implication of this study is that to understand the alignment behavior of specific states, elements of both interest and identity must be taken into account. The results of this study in many respects support the postulates of Walt’s balance-of-threat theory. The idea that alignment is primarily a response to threat, and that states are more likely to balance against threats than bandwagon with them is born out in the South Caucasus. Yet to determine which states will be identified as threats and how, it is necessary to go beyond Walt’s theory and look at state and individual level behavior. In that regard, the proposition made here that threat perceptions are formed in large part through a process of learning by historical analogy may be seen as a complement to, or refinement of, balance-of-threat theory. History matters in the formation of threat perceptions and in making strategic alignment choices. With respect to the role of perception in identifying threats, James Goldgeier makes an important point, saying, “Because the existence of threats depends on the perceptions of individuals and societies, we need to incorporate the psychological dimension of threat perception and identity formation into our more structural analysis in order to study international security.”\(^\text{16}\) Notwithstanding the desire for parsimony among theorists, to go beyond general maxims at the international systemic level and better understand the actions of states, variables that address issues of identity, in this case, historical identity, have to be added to existing theories.

The potential value of combining perceptual and structural variables to better understand states’ alignment preferences is by no means limited to the South Caucasus.

Many similarities exist in the strategic contexts, both modern and historical, of the Baltic states and the South Caucasus. Indeed, there are some indications that the South Caucasus states look increasingly to the Baltics for support and successful examples of state-building. The possibility that states or state leaders learn from the experiences, not only of their own states, but also from other states that have faced similar circumstances is an area that might provide additional insights into the role of learning in foreign policy making. Beyond the post-Soviet Eurasian region, the relationship between historical learning and threat perception also may contribute to the development of theory.

A considerable body of scholarship on the role of history and historical memory in the security relationships among East Asian countries exists and is growing. One regional scholar said, “In East Asia, 21st century strategic alignments hinge on Cold War pasts involving Russia, Japan, China, Taiwan, and the Korean Peninsula. At stake is not so much a clash of civilizations as a clash of histories.” The role of history and collective memory has been particularly salient in the relationship between Japan and China where differing interpretations of World War II history have mobilized both societies and decision-makers, and have contributed to mutual perceptions of aggressive intent. East Asia would seem to provide a good case in which to explore further the importance of history in forming threat perceptions. Given the importance of regional

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stability in East Asia, more concentrated study on the role of history in forming threat perceptions in the Japan-China context, and in the broader regional context, may pay dividends.

Similarly, there may be other regions or bilateral relationships where the past exerts an important role on present day security calculations. One scholar suggests that this is the case in Polish-Ukrainian relations.\(^\text{20}\) The large number of cases where history and historical learning is relevant to threat perceptions suggests profitable work could be done in analyzing them through the lens of current theories. A significant challenge to progress in this endeavor will be the need to combine international relations theory with area expertise. Given the increasing specialization of each of these academic fields, close communication and collaboration between them will not be easy, but will be valuable.

In the South Caucasus case studies, formative historical experiences played a powerful role in the threat perceptions of every administration, in some cases a predominant role; in others less so. Given this mixed result, an essential follow-on question is: when is history determinative in the formation of threat perceptions and, conversely, when do immediate interests or power calculations predominate? In framing this issue, Michael Barnett says, “Far from suggesting the primacy of identity and the irrelevance of material forces, I recognize that both are important explanatory variables, though with different causal weight at different historical moments.”\(^\text{21}\) Barnett did not further specify at which historical moments material or ideational explanations may be more relevant. In the context of this study the question might be framed as: When do

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\(^{21}\) Michael Barnett, “Identity and Alliances in the Middle East,” p.446.
material factors play the most significant role in determining threat perceptions and when do historical factors?

The cases of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan indicated that history, and national identity, in a broader sense, played a particularly important role in decision-making as the states moved towards independence, and in the early years of their independence. However, the central role of history in framing the Saakashvili administration’s perception of the Russian threat since the Rose Revolution suggests that historical learning may be of central importance at periods of significant domestic change, including revolutions. Broadening the geographical scope of research along these lines may help develop more rigorous hypotheses.22

While the South Caucasus case studies provided ample evidence of history’s role in forming threat perceptions, history seemed to play less of a role in determining with whom to align in response. For Armenians, incorporation into the Soviet Union, though not without drawbacks, did ensure the country’s survival in the face of the Turkish threat. In that light, alignment with Russia in the modern context is seen as a repeat of successful behavior. For Georgia, especially, but also for Azerbaijan to a degree, incorporation into the Soviet Union was seen negatively – as a loss of independence. In these cases, there was no successful historical example of survival on which to base modern day calculations. As a result, though a general consensus on threat perception existed, there were no generally-held beliefs on what to do in response. On this point, different leaders

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drew different lessons. A broader research program could well show that history plays a more significant role in identifying threats than in responding to them as initial indications here seem to suggest.

Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan gained their independence in 1991, largely as a result of the Soviet Union’s dissolution. The lessons that mattered most as they moved towards independence were those drawn from a similar time in their history, as the Tsarist Empire declined and was eventually overthrown. In the cases of Georgia and Azerbaijan, the violent Soviet interventions in civil demonstrations in 1989 and 1990, respectively, strongly reinforced historically-based threat perceptions. In both countries, popular movements became national movements virtually overnight. The mutually-reinforcing nature of the lessons learned on the source of threats from the two periods, 1918-1921 and 1988-1991, make the resulting threat perceptions over-determined. Yet, in terms of learning theory, hypotheses that take into account the possible accumulation of lessons to look at cumulative learning, rather than the discrete lessons that lead to simple learning, may be warranted.

*Inter-regional Relations*

This study has focused on the strategic alignment preferences and behavior of the South Caucasus states with reference to the major powers in the region, at the international, systemic level. The propositions offered on history and alignment could also be used productively in an analysis of the relationships among the three South Caucasus countries. Consistent with the results of the three case studies, one would expect the relationships among the regional states to be based on a mixture of material, structural and perceptual factors. Without delving deeply into the details of interregional
relations, some brief thoughts on the importance of history and threat perception will be
offered.

Historical antagonisms have played an important role in contemporary relations
among Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. As one observer noted, “Historical memory
intensely colors the outlook of the peoples of the Russian littoral. In the Caucasus,
memories are especially long, and wounds close very slowly…. The imposition of Soviet
rule in the Caucasus suppressed but did not resolve the sources of antagonism.”

Prior to their post-Soviet independence, the last time the three South Caucasus states were
independent, and unconstrained by a central authority was during the collapse of the
Tsarist Empire and the Russian Civil War. At that time, Armenia and Azerbaijan fought
a war in Nagorno-Karabakh, and in two other ethnically mixed provinces. Ethnic
violence between Armenians and Azeris was pervasive. Georgia and Armenia fought
over their borderlands. Azerbaijan and Georgia had sharp differences over their border,
but stopped short of warfare. One observer, studying conflicts in the South Caucasus in
the 1990s, noted he felt “as though I was studying the sequel of the same conflicts …
observed 80 years ago.”

Eventually Georgia and Azerbaijan signed a mutual defense
treaty in June 1919 and offered Armenia an opportunity to join. Armenia ultimately
deployed, guided by different threat perceptions and perceived opportunities for support.

Echoes of the past reverberate in contemporary relations between the three South
Caucasus countries. Each country can assess the other’s material capabilities with some

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23 Richard G. Hovannisian, “Historical Memory and Foreign Relations: The Armenian Perspective,” in:
degree of confidence, yet defining each other’s intentions has proven to be more difficult. A complex matrix results when the intentions of external actors are added to the equation. Which country will support which, and at what level, is constantly calculated. In these calculations, historical learning plays a significant role. Accordingly, any analysis of local and regional dynamics must factor in elements of historical memory, or risk misunderstanding the situation. This basic fact is important both to the further development of theory and to the prudent development of policy.

**Implications for Policy**

For both geopolitical and economic reasons, the South Caucasus area, located strategically on the southern flank of Russia, on the northern flank of Turkey and Iran, and astride transit routes from Europe to Southwest Asia, has assumed increasing importance in recent years. In the course of history, empires have met often and clashed in the region. It seems that policymakers from all countries should seek, at a minimum, to avoid a repeat of that result. The security, stability and development of this turbulent area are important considerations for many major powers, including the United States. Whether the pattern of international and regional relations in the South Caucasus emerges as equilibrium, confrontation or even domination by a single major power is significant to U.S. interests. It is commonly understood that the actions of the major powers are and will be the primary determinants of regional dynamics. But they will not be the only determinants. It is not, after all, a replay of the “Great Game.” Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are independent states, each with its own motivations and aspirations. Understanding the sources of their behavior is a prerequisite to developing sound policy for the region. In that sense, the following conclusion would seem appropriate:
Far from being an esoteric subject of study, the history of the Caucasus and Russian involvement in the area have become part of an essential body of knowledge, without which we cannot make sense out of contemporary political events.\footnote{Firouzeh Mostashari, \textit{On the Religious Frontier: Tsarist Russia and Islam in the Caucasus}. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2006), p.147.}

The empirical work conducted in this study will be useful to policy-makers and others trying to understand the foreign policy orientations and alignment preferences of the South Caucasus states. Policies that take into account the basis of each country’s threat perceptions will be more likely to succeed. For example, in the wake of the August 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict in South Ossetia, Turkey proposed forming a Caucasus Stability and Security Platform that would include the three South Caucasus states, Turkey and Russia.\footnote{“Turkey Revives “Caucasus Initiative” but Faces Obstacles,” \textit{Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty}, September 5, 2008, http://www.rferl.org/content/Turkey_Caucasus_Initiative_Obstacles/1196703.html (accessed March 29, 2009).} Beyond the general desire for stability, there seems to be among the five proposed members no shared objective or, more importantly, no common perception of threats, to bind such an organization together. As such, it is unlikely to succeed in addressing security issues. Given the depth of Georgia’s western orientation, as ascertained in Chapter Five, it is unlikely it will agree to its most sensitive security issues being resolved in a forum that doesn’t include some representation from the European Union and/or the United States.

To date, no uniformly agreed security arrangements bind the region’s three countries or the major external powers. The region seems to drift farther from any sense of common purpose towards deeper polarization. Fundamentally, this is explained by the different threat perceptions and alignment preferences of the South Caucasus states. This study explains the basis for these threat perceptions, and could assist in informing new
initiatives designed to address the material, structural and perceptual elements that contribute to threat perceptions. Important in this regard currently are moves towards normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations. Both sides understand the central importance of history in the process. Forward progress on current political and economic issues will depend on the ability to at least begin a process of historical reconciliation. Addressing, within this process, the historical basis of threat perceptions, particularly perceptions of ‘aggressive intentions,’ would be a useful first step towards movement away from the antagonisms that have characterized the relationship. Additional steps would include recognizing that the antagonisms between Armenia and Azerbaijan and between Georgia and Russia also have a significant historical component that must eventually be addressed if relations are ever to be normalized.

A current challenge for U.S. policy is to define more specifically U.S. interests in the South Caucasus region, and then situate these within the larger context of U.S. interests in the wider Eurasian region, to include Russia, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia. In doing so, the U.S. should realize that while our preference is to pursue policies based on the premise that non-zero sum outcomes are possible, the premise is not necessarily shared by the South Caucasus states, nor, it would seem, by most of the larger neighboring states. Understanding the reasons why Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia have chosen to align themselves as they have, can and should contribute to a deeper appreciation of the possible consequences of U.S. policies.

Reflecting on the record of Soviet studies, Ronald Suny said, “A chasm, seldom crossed, existed between those who dealt with Russian studies proper and those who
studied non-Russian peoples.” This fact contributed to the general failure to anticipate
the demise of the Soviet Union. Currently, there exists among policymakers and analysts
a similar chasm. Many focus their efforts first and foremost on Russia. Others see
important interests in the South Caucasus and other areas of the former Soviet Union,
Central Asia, for instance. A general failure to look at the region in broader terms has led
to disjointed and less-than-effective policies overall. An integrative approach that takes
into account interests, challenges and opportunities in the entire Eurasian region is
advisable. This study demonstrates the central importance of Russia in the security
calculations of each of the South Caucasus states. At the same time, Russia attaches
great importance to the South Caucasus region. A proper understanding of regional
dynamics must take into account the perspectives of all the different actors. Addressing
this point, one scholar/practitioner said,

To understand the complex relationships between and among the United States,
Russia and the new states, it is useful to think of a post-Soviet triangle. The
United States, Russia and the group of new states each occupies one of the three
points on the conceptual triangle. In this configuration, we cannot and should not
think of any one of the three sides of the triangle in isolation from the other two.  

This study represents a step in the direction of thinking about all three sides of the “post-
Soviet triangle.”

A final note with regards to alignment and alliance behavior was highlighted
vividly by the August 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict and bears importantly on policy
considerations in the South Caucasus region. Definitions of the terms alliance and
alignment reviewed in Chapter Two (pages 52-55), show a wide range of understanding

29 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past*, p.3.
30 Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, “Memorandum for the President,” in Robert B. Zoellick and Philip D.
among scholars. Among nations there are also differences in understanding these terms. Yet, in the international arena the cost of misunderstanding looms larger. Indeed, in the aftermath of the Georgia-Russia conflict, it was clear that how Georgia understood its alignment with the West, was quite different than how the West, particularly the U.S., understood its alignment with Georgia. As a new administration begins to craft policies for the region, a few cautionary words on strategic alignment preferences and behavior are offered.

In reviewing the options open to small states with much larger neighbors, Walt says that, “Small states bordering a great power may be so vulnerable that they choose to bandwagon rather than balance, especially if a powerful neighbor has demonstrated its ability to compel obedience.”31 Russia’s forceful actions in Georgia have demonstrated its ability to compel obedience in the South Caucasus. In the face of increased strategic vulnerability and unable to marshal domestic resources on a scale to balance the perceived threat from Russia, Georgia continues feverishly to seek support from the U.S. and the West. Azerbaijan quietly continues its efforts to forge deeper economic ties with the West, and Armenia, threatened economically by poor Georgian-Russian relations, reaches out to Turkey, while hoping for a peaceful resolution of tensions. States reliant on outside powers to balance threats, must carefully calibrate the level of support they expect to receive. In an astute observation, Robert Legvold says, “But, because a thoroughgoing alliance with the United States is unavailable and such an alliance with Russia is unwanted (even by Armenia), each country in the South Caucasus must protect its options with both of the major powers. Again, realities are harsh, requiring a delicate

balancing act.” Currently, a major unknown variable in the regional calculus is the level of continuing interest and support countries can expect from the United States. In what may prove a prophetic observation, Walt says, “If weak states see no possibility of outside assistance, however, they may be forced to accommodate the most imminent threat.” As has been seen throughout this study, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia have learned from history whence the threats to their independent existence. What puzzles them, and on this point history’s lessons are less definitive, is what to do in response.

# LIST OF INTERVIEWS

## Azerbaijan

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<td>Safar Abiyev</td>
<td>General, Minister of Defense</td>
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<td>Elmar Mammadaryov</td>
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<td>Elin Suleymanov</td>
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<td>Vafa Guluzade</td>
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<td>Hafez Pashayev</td>
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<td>Vagif Sadikhov</td>
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<td>Araz Azimov</td>
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<td>Samed Seyidov</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rasim Musabeyov</td>
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<td>Tahir Taghi-Zade</td>
<td>Political Counselor</td>
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<td>Dashdamir Mammadov</td>
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## Georgia

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<td>Gia Baramidze</td>
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<td>Batu Kutelia</td>
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<td>Levon Nikolaishvili</td>
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<td>Irakli Menagarashvili</td>
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<td>Davit Tevdzade</td>
<td>former Minister of Defense</td>
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<tr>
<td>Archil Gigeishidze</td>
<td>former Advisor to the President for Foreign Affairs</td>
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1 Countries listed in the order they were visited.

2 Titles reflect those held at the time of the interview, or the highest position formerly held.
Rezo Adamia  former Georgian Ambassador to the United Nations
David Soumbadze  former Ministry of Foreign Affairs official
Archil Tsintsadze  former Defense Attache
Daniel Kunin  Advisor to the President
Alex Rondeli  Analyst, former Ambassador
David Kirkitadze  Secretary General, United National Movement
Ghia Nodia  Academic analyst
Temuri Yakobashvili  Academic analyst

Roundtable participants:

Nino Nakashidze  Foreign Relations Committee, Parliament
Nick Rurua  Deputy Chairman, Defense and Security Committee, Parliament
Irakli Kavtaradze  National Movement faction, Parliament
Archil Gegeishidze  former Advisor to the President for Foreign Affairs
Irakli Menagarashvili  former Minister of Foreign Affairs

Armenia

Person  Title/Position

Serzh Sargsyan  Prime Minister
Vartan Oskanyan  Minister of Foreign Affairs
Hayk Kotandjian  Major General, Director, Institute for Strategic Studies
Davit Shahnazaryan  former National Security Advisor
Hayk Demoyan  Director of the Museum, Genocide Institute
Armen Kirakossian  Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
Artur Agabekyan  Defense Committee, Parliament
Raffi Hovannissian  Member of Parliament, former Minister of Foreign Affairs
Vahan Papazian  former Minister of Foreign Affairs
Vazgen Manukian  former Prime Minister, former Minister of Defense
Gerard Libaridian  former Advisor to President for Foreign Policy

Roundtable participants:

Gagik Harutyunian  Director, Noravank Foundation
Tevan Pogosyan  Armenian Atlantic Association
Laura Bagdasarian  Director of “The Region” NGO
Ruben Safrastian  Director of Institute for Oriental Studies
Hayk Demoyan  Director of the Museum, Genocide Institute
Levon Barhudarian  Chief of Board, AMIMPEX Bank, former Ambassador to Canada
Hayk Kotandjian  Major General, Director, Institute for Strategic Studies
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<td>Analyst, Spectrum Center for Strategic Analysis</td>
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<td>Sergey Sargsyan</td>
<td>LTC (ret.), analyst, Spectrum Center for Strategic Analysis</td>
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<td>Gayane Novikova</td>
<td>Director, Spectrum Center of Strategic Analysis</td>
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